

MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS: SEARCHES FOR WHOLENESS IN THE
LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAS

By

VANESSA KIMBERLY VALDÉS

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In

Spanish and Portuguese

May, 2007

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Professor Benigno Trigo

Professor Cathy L. Jrade

Professor Earl E. Fitz

Professor Marshall C. Eakin

Copyright © 2007 by Vanessa K. Valdes
All Rights Reserved

To Iris Delia and Robert Valdes
Con todo mi cariño

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I would like to exclaim the following: Thank You GOD, thank You Jesus!! Thank you, my angels and spirits, my ancestors, my Daddy, all of you who have guided me through this journey. Thank you for bringing me here, to this point, for seeing me through this.

Next, there are many people who have contributed in some way to the completion of this dissertation. First and foremost I would like to thank my director, Dr. Benigno Trigo, without whose guidance and discipline I would not have finished. I cannot express enough thanks for your encouragement of my ideas. I humbly thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Cathy L. Jrade, Dr. Earl E. Fitz, and Dr. Marshall Eakin. A special word to Earl: thank you for introducing me to the world of the comparatist, for telling me years ago that there was room in the academy for my voice. I offer infinite thanks to Dr. Elena Olazagasti-Segovia, for being a wise presence in my life, for persuading me to follow my own path. Thank you for knowing that the young twenty-year-old girl you first met had the capacity to reach this point.

Thank you, Dr. William Luis, for advising me to come to Vanderbilt, all those many years ago.

Thank you, Kirstin Marie Johnson Fritz, for insisting that we be friends that Fall of 2000, my life has been immeasurably changed because of your persistence, faith, and love. Thank you for no judgment. Thank you, Gina Bonilla, for your guidance these last few years; I have grown exponentially just by knowing you. Thank you for constantly challenging me, for helping me to be the best version of myself.

Thank you to the Vanderbilt University Posse Scholars Class of 2009: Lesley Colón, Gustavo De Peña, Anna Hus, Lillian Lam, Jeanette Lugo, Leslyn Moore, Tremaine Price, Abigail Richards, Steve Soloway, Margaret Terrero. You will never know how much I have gained from being one of your mentors. Thank you for your trust and your love; I have learned more from each one of you than you will ever know.

Thank you to Linda Manning and Jennifer Hackett, for providing fertile ground for the kernel of an idea that was the Women in Academe Series, at the Margaret Cuningim Women's Center. Thank you to everyone who has facilitated and/or attended even one session of that discussion series – all of you helped me in the restoration of my sanity.

Thank you, Jennifer, for bringing me on to work with our Posse. Thank you, Sandy Stahl, for hiring me for that position, and for your consistent optimism regarding my completion of this degree. And thank you, Elisa Espiritu, and the Posse Foundation in New York, for the opportunity to work with you.

Thank you to the women of Project Safe, Vicky Basra and Kacy Silverstein, for allowing me a chance to be a part of meaningful work while finishing this dissertation. Thank you also to the rest of the staff of the Women's Center: Jeana Carlock, Barbara Clarke, Misa Culley, Stacy Nunnally, Dawnn Brumfield. I have truly enjoyed working with all of you. A special thank you to Harjun Singh: thank you for being the sweet child of Light that you are.

Thank you to my Nena and my Luka, for showing me how to accept and give love, in the simplest way.

Thank you to those who over these last several years have offered friendship, encouragement, faith, love, laughter, and support: Charles Bowie, Rhonda Collier, Aisha Francis, Meredith Hammons, Tyler Jones, Michelle Kwan, Leila Lehnen, Bérénice Le Marchand, Robert Nasatir, Yusuf Öz, Denise Sánchez, Lori Smith, Ellen Weirich, David Wheat, Janella Williams. You all have left an indelible mark, thank you.

My greatest thanks of all goes to my own mother, Iris Delia Valdes, who is the inspiration for this dissertation. You have put us, your children, at the center of your life, and you have asked for very little in return. You toiled quietly for years, cooking, cleaning, making a home for us, while your husband, my father, received the attention. After his death, you continued to love us and guide us, as we stumbled through our grief, all the while trying to cope with his unexpected departure. My words cannot express my gratitude, my appreciation for who you are. I love you, thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
INTRODUCTION.....	1
Collective Unconscious and the Archetypes.....	2
Conscious Femininity.....	6
Select Differences in Jungian and Freudian Psychology.....	7
The Maternal in Psychoanalytic Theory.....	11
Jung and Kristeva.....	13
Mother Archetype.....	15
Critical Texts that Address the Legacy of the Mother.....	18
The Selection of These Texts.....	21
Outline of Chapters.....	25
Chapter	
I. UNFULFILLED LONGINGS AND “MONSTOUS” MOTHERS OF <i>SULA</i> (1973).....	29
Plot Summary.....	30
Interaction with the Mother Archetype.....	31
The Mothers.....	32
Their Daughters.....	49
Nel and Sula as Children.....	53
Dissolution of Friendship.....	55
Resulting Years: Abandoned Nurture.....	60
Conclusion.....	64
II. SACRIFICE AND RENEWAL IN <i>MULHER NO ESPELHO</i> (1983).....	66
A Fragmented Self.....	67
Marianismo and the Role of Submission in the Novel.....	72
Reflections of the Self.....	76
The Varied Images of the Mother Archetype.....	77
The Retrieval of the Silenced Mothers.....	78
Woman’s Sexuality.....	82
The <i>Orixás</i>	90
The Necessary Sacrifice.....	98

Conclusion.....	103
III. COMPOSING ONE’S SELF IN <i>VECINDARIOS EXCÉNTRICOS</i> (1999).....	107
The Narrator’s Voice.....	108
The Significance of Writing.....	110
The Multiple Rivers.....	113
Clarissa.....	115
Elvira.....	124
Mother’s Illness.....	129
The Stain of Sacrifice.....	132
Conclusion.....	133
IV. MATERNAL “FILTH” IN <i>SINGING SOFTLY / CANTANDO BAJITO</i> (1989).....	135
Plot Summary.....	136
The “Discourse of Dirt”.....	138
Manifestations of the “Discourse of Dirt”.....	140
The Role of Silence.....	150
The Actualization of Discourse: The Attempted Destruction of Alba.....	153
She Speaks: Contesting the Discourse.....	158
Conclusion.....	161
CONCLUSION.....	163
Out of the Silence.....	166
Engaging the Maternal Archetype.....	170
Art and Its Relationship to the Mother Archetype.....	174
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	176

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I examine Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973), Helena Parente Cunha's *Mulher no Espelho* (1983), Rosario Ferré's *Vecindarios excéntricos* (1999), and Carmen de Monteflores's *Singing Softly / Cantando bajito* (1989) to study the representation of the mother-daughter relationship in works by women from the United States, Brazil and Puerto Rico. I aim to demonstrate that the protagonists of these novels are each interacting with archetypal images of mother. The novels give narrative form to interaction with what Jung calls the collective unconscious, and, more specifically, with the maternal archetype. They serve as accounts of each protagonist's journey toward a sense of balance and wholeness. The accomplishment of this quest can be determined by how each central character interacts, first, with her mother, as well as other maternal figures, and then, with other entities that I argue carry the resonances of the maternal archetype. Successful individuation, in the Jungian sense, leads to a realization of completeness, whereas the refutation of this process amounts to the metaphorical and literal death of the character. With these texts, the writers dramatize the lack of a conscious femininity in the patriarchal maternal imaginary. And they attempt to change this imaginary through their writing.

Collective Unconscious and the Archetype

Carl Jung first defined his ideas about the collective unconscious and the archetype in the early part of the twentieth century.¹ He devotes the first part of the ninth volume of his collected writings exclusively to these two ideas. Jung distinguishes between what he calls a *personal* unconscious and a *collective* unconscious: “The personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the *collective unconscious* [...] this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal” (3).² In her commentary, *Jung: A Feminist Revision* (2000), Susan Rowland finds that “the Jungian unconscious [...] is the *source* of meaning, feeling and the possibility of finding value in human life” (29, italics in the original). She continues: “Jungian ideas differ significantly from Freudian psychoanalysis in seeking to honor the unconscious rather than to fear it” (29). For Rowland, implicit in the very definition of the Jungian unconscious is the idea that this unconscious “is immediate and crucial to everyday experience” (29). In *From Freud to Jung: A Comparative Study of the Psychology of the Unconscious* (1974), Liliane Frey-Rohn writes: “The collective unconscious, accordingly, was an objective fact, always existent and forming the constantly vital background of psychic events. It embodied the maternal soil of consciousness, the old

¹ For a biographical sketch of Jung’s life that includes the development of his ideas, see Rowland 1-22. She identifies the origin of his work with archetypes as occurring in 1919 (10). Claire Douglas explores Jung’s intellectual forefathers, citing Kant, Goethe, Schelling, Carus, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as having made contributions to his archetypal theory (17-34).

² This distinction leads to the schism between Jung and his mentor, Freud. I highlight some of their differences in the next section.

pathways which always endeavored to lead conscious processes back to the source” (122). The collective unconscious has, therefore, always been present in the course of humankind.

Jung describes his notion of the unconscious as “contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals” (4). These contents he names as the *archetypes* (4). For Jung, the archetypes are “only those psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration and are therefore an immediate datum of psychic experience” (5). In Jung’s consideration, the psyche of an infant can never be considered a *tabula rasa*: “In so far as the child is born with a differentiated brain that is predetermined by heredity and therefore individualized, it meets sensory stimuli coming from outside not with *any* aptitudes but with *specific* ones” (66, italics in the original). He identifies these “aptitudes” as the archetypes. He concludes with the following: “It is not, therefore, a question of inherited *ideas* but of inherited *possibilities* of ideas. Nor are they individual acquisitions but, in the main, common to all” (66-67, italics in the original).

Rowland points out that in his writings, Jung sometimes conflates “archetype” with “archetypal images” (30) which has led to much debate within feminist criticism.³ Another source of critique has been Jung’s contention that archetypes are inherited. He calls archetypal images “eternal,” (*Archetypes* 8), noting:

they are meant to attract, to convince, to fascinate, and to overpower. They are created out of the primal stuff of revelation and reflect the every-unique experience of divinity.... Thanks to the labors of the human spirit over the centuries, these images have become embedded in a comprehensive system of thought that ascribes an order to the world. (8)

³ See Goldenberg; Lauter and Rupprecht; and Wehr.

Rowland corrects the misconception that Jung's archetypes are images that are inherited: "An archetype is an inborn *potential* for a certain sort of image. What the actual mental image will look like will not only depend upon the collective unconscious. Archetypal images also reflect the conscious experiences of the person as a subject in history, culture and time" (29, emphasis in the original). Indeed, Jung writes: "When the archetype becomes conscious, it is necessarily altered: "it [thereafter] takes its color from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear" (5).

In a discussion about rebirth, Jung develops his notion of individuation. In the Jungian sense, individuation is a process, a way in which "consciousness, our most recent acquisition, which has bounded ahead, [is] linked up again with the oldest, the unconscious, which has lagged behind" (350). The goal of this process is, in his words, "becoming whole" (350). Rowland writes: "The process by which archetypes intervene in and educate the ego is known as individuation" (30). She points out that the process is teleological: "Knowledge of the self, in its peculiar Jungian sense, is the purpose of individuation... The self is paradoxically defined as the totality of a person's psychic processes, and is simultaneously the archetype of wholeness and meaning, necessarily religious in nature" (33). Rowland emphasizes, "the Jungian self is the *not known*. It is the numinous, potential, unconscious nature of every person" (33, italics in the original). Individuation is a method, therefore, of nothing less than complete transformation of a person, the goal being wholeness.

In *Archetype Revisited: An Updated Natural History of the Self* (2003), Andrew Stevens cautions: "no ego can ever incorporate the wholeness of the Self" (173). And Frey-Rohm reveals that a person can, to a certain extent, manage this process, in the

sense that each person can choose whether or not to take on this journey: “The psychic destiny of the individual depended largely on the exact relationship of the ego to the self. It was quite as possible to come to a standstill and be overwhelmed as to change and transform the individual” (115). Still, Rowland posits that Jung has offered a means by which to attain well-being: “The unconscious has a compensatory relationship to the ego,⁴ which gives Jung’s psyche⁵ its intrinsically self-healing nature. [...] To Jung, psychic health means forming ever-closer bonds with the unconscious as the superior and better guide” (30).

Individuation is a dynamic process, in that there is a constant back and forth between the ego and the unconscious. In her article, “The Creative Psyche: Jung’s Major Contributions” (1997), Sherry Salman writes: “Since all individual experience has an archetypal core, issues from personal history and archetypal patterns are always interwoven, often needing first to be separated, and then linked back together” (57). Jung himself envisions this process as something resembling a dialogue: “As the archetypes, like all numinous contents, are relatively autonomous, they cannot be integrated simply by rational means, but require a dialectical procedure, a real coming to terms with them” (*Archetypes* 40-41). Growth, transformation, well-being, can therefore be accomplished through interaction with the archetypes. In his text *Freud and Jung: Conflicts of Interpretation* (1982), Robert Steele notes:

⁴ The ego is the center of consciousness concerned with the sense of personal identity, the maintenance of personality and the sense of continuity over time. However, Jung considered the ego as something less than the whole personality, as it was constantly interacting with more significant archetypal forces in the unconscious (Rowland 175).

⁵ Rowland defines “psyche” as “all mental contents and operations; it includes both conscious and unconscious effects upon the perceiving mind”(29). She notes, “To Jung, all reality, all that the human being experiences, feels, learns, encounters, both inside and outside the mind, is psychic” (29).

The process of making the unconscious known is dialectical. The unconscious must be encouraged to express itself, ego-consciousness must take heed of what is being said, and from this dialogue, which is filled with conflict, there will arise a synthesis – a point of mediation, the transcendent function, the symbol. This sets the stage for further interpretation, further development of unconscious fantasies, ego-confrontation, and another synthesis. The process of self-discovery is never-ending; it is a dialectical hermeneutic task which takes a lifetime. (298-299)

For Jung, a person's psychic development lasts throughout his / her life. This person therefore always has the opportunity to better him / herself, to reach a state of complete balance.

Conscious Femininity

For Jung, all life is a balance between the masculine and the feminine, what he calls the archetype of the syzygy, the divine pair. He notes: "a masculine element is always paired with a feminine one" (*Archetypes* 65).⁶ From this he posits the notion of contrasexuality, namely that every man has an anima, the feminine element, and every woman an animus, the masculine element.⁷ In her text *Addiction to Perfection: The Still Unravished Bride* (1982), Marion Woodman describes the masculine as "goal-oriented, rational, [and] perfectionist" (13), while the feminine is "a vast ocean of eternal Being. It was, is and shall be.... It lives in the eternal Now" (15). The process of individuation allows each person to learn how to balance these complementary principles. In an interview, Woodman explains her notion of feminine consciousness, as symbolized by

⁶ I do not use these terms to connote gender.

⁷ Earl E. Fitz cites awareness of this difference on the part of Brazilian writers to be the distinguishing factor in the "new novels" of Brazil and Spanish America. See *Ambiguity and Gender in the New Novel of Brazil and Spanish America* (1993).

the Black Madonna: “She is nature impregnated by spirit, accepting her own body as the chalice of the spirit. She has to do with the sacredness of matter; the intersection of sexuality and spirituality” (*Conscious Femininity* 81). Woodman puts forward the notion of conscious femininity as a state of “awareness of the harmony of all things, an awareness of living in the world soul. The intuition, the attunement of the body is concentrated, alive. The capacity to be open and to receive is an alert state” (83). Living in a consciously feminine state, for both men and women, is therefore to live in balance. Woodman posits that in patriarchy, there is a split: “it is an either/or, black and white world. There is no both/and” (57). My claim is that these novels aptly demonstrate the extent to which conscious femininity is lacking in the patriarchal imaginary. The characters of these texts feel a lack of emotional support from their personal mothers that leads them to look for other sources of support in their cultures.

Select Differences in Jungian and Freudian Psychology

Jung’s final break with Freud came in 1913, after seven years of collaboration, when the latter ended correspondence with Jung. While there is much to be made about the personal lives of these men,⁸ I focus my attention on their conceptual differences about the unconscious and the Oedipal complex.⁹

⁸ See their personal correspondence, as edited by William McGuire.

⁹ The distinction may be gleaned from the following: Freudian thought is known as psychoanalysis, whereas Jungian thought is analytical psychology.

*The Unconscious*¹⁰

For Freud, the unconscious consists of “wishful impulses,” “instinctual representatives which seek to discharge their cathexis” (Freud, qtd. in 582).¹¹ These impulses are timeless. They are guided by the pleasure principle, that is to say, “their fate depends only on how strong they are and on whether they fulfill the demands of the pleasure-unpleasure regulation” (582). These processes only become apparent in dreams and through neurosis (582). In *The Language of Psycho-analysis* (1974), Laplanche and Pontalis define the Freudian unconscious as a “topographical and dynamic” system, one whose “‘contents’ are ‘representatives’ of the instincts” (474).

For Jung, Freud’s unconscious was a personal one, in that it solely focused on the individual’s experiences. In his writings, Jung distinguishes the personal unconscious from the collective unconscious, that is, an unconscious that everyone shares. Stevens calls attention to how Jung associates Freud’s notion of the unconscious with his own archetype of the Shadow (173). Jung writes: “if we are able to see our own shadow and can bear knowing about it, then a small part of our problem has already been solved: we have at least brought up the personal unconscious” (*Archetypes* 20). Rowland defines the Shadow as “the archetypal forces of blackness, reversal, or undoing. Intrinsic to the idea of a compensatory relation between ego and the unconscious, the shadow is that which is denied in conscious personality” (180). She makes note that Jung argued that this archetype needed especially to be brought into relationship with the ego, “lest repression caused it to swell in power and break out in neurosis or violence” (180).

¹⁰ The sketch I provide about the Freudian unconscious is deliberately simple. I fully recognize that hundreds of texts have been devoted to the subject; I only wish to provide a barebones version of the differences between Freud and Jung.

¹¹ For quote about Freudian psychoanalysis, I use *The Freud Reader*, edited by Peter Gay.

The Oedipal Complex

The notion of the Oedipal complex is a central feature of Freudian psychoanalysis. According to Freud, as a child, a boy spends a great amount of time with his mother, viewing her as an object, while identifying with his father. He develops an incestuous desire for the mother, as well as a need to destroy his father, who impedes the little boy's wish to sexually possess his mother. He soon recognizes on some level that his father could, in fact, destroy him, and so the male child develops a castration anxiety, that is, a fear that his father will remove the offending sexual organs. With the emergence of this fear, the boy child learns to repress his desire for his mother and his hostility for his father. By increasing his identification with father, the child establishes his sense of self. Laplanche and Pontalis note that for Freud, this complex occurs when a child is between three and five years old, and it re-emerges during puberty, when it is "then surmounted with a varying degree of success by means of a particular sort of object choice" (283). They make clear that the Oedipus complex "plays a fundamental part in the structuring of the personality, and in the orientation of human desire" (283).

Jung differs from this view because he does not believe that the complex is significant in everyone, only in some (Rowland 36). In that sense, this complex is less influential in comparison with the effect of the archetypes of the collective unconscious, which, to his thinking, affects everyone universally (Rowland 36). Rowland goes on to argue that Jung, unlike Freud, placed a degree of importance in the role of the pre-oedipal mother, and the bond that she has with the child in her womb:

The mother is the bearer of the child's first images of the unconscious. Just as the bodily mother has given birth to the body of the child who is not yet psychically a separate person, so the active unconscious starts the process of giving birth to the child as an individual human subject. In order to accomplish this major task, the

child's nascent unconscious will use the child's psychic bonding to the mother. For Jung, the Oedipus complex will assist in the development of the child by working as a *partner* with the proactive unconscious (38).

In Rowland's reading of Jung's work, she finds that he does not believe the body to be a barrier to the unconscious: "For Jung, the body is both a phenomenon with its own needs and indissolubly bonded to the psyche. Archetypes are psychosomatic, meaning that they are also of the body. Having deep roots in the body in the form of instincts, archetypes extend also 'up' into spirit in another bipolar dimension" (35).

Here I would like to pay particular attention to her use of *psychosomatic*. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, the word means both "relating to a disorder having physical symptoms but originating from mental or emotional causes," and "Relating to or concerned with the influence of the mind on the body, and the body on the mind, especially with respect to disease." Rowland is therefore saying that archetypes are dynamic, in that they may come from the body to the mind and the mind to the body. I would like to repeat, however, that the manifestations of the archetypes are the archetypal images. The culture of the individual informs the specific images with which an individual interacts.

In a review essay comparing Freud to Jung, Slavoj Žižek writes: "In contrast to Freud, Jung [...] was aware of the key fundamental role of the maternal principle later repressed by the paternal one; he clearly identified the need to penetrate beneath the 'superficial' hysterical-individual-Oedipal unconscious to the *collective pre-Oedipal one*"

(661, my emphasis). Žižek's identification of the collective unconscious as primarily pre-oedipal is interesting because of the similarities between these two spaces.¹²

The Maternal in Psychoanalytic Theory

There has been considerable work about the notion of the maternal in the last few decades. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of these are reconsiderations of Freud's thoughts about this role. Deploying the Freud's notion of the Oedipus complex, Dorothy Dinnerstein places much of the blame for the ills of patriarchal society on the mother being the sole provider of child-care in her study *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* (1976). As an alternative, she calls for primary care to be shared by both men and women. In the same year, Adrienne Rich publishes her decisive text, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976), in which she offers her criticism of motherhood as defined by patriarchy, revealing how this kind of mothering affects not only women but also men. Her text is both an invective against motherhood as it now stands in the patriarchal imaginary as well as a call to arms to change this definition.

Like Rich, Julia Kristeva incorporates her first hand experience of being a mother with her meditation on maternity as embodied by the Virgin Mary in "Stabat Mater" (1977). The double-voicedness of the text provides a clear demonstration of the multiplicity of the maternity. In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva defines the "abject"

¹² I develop my thoughts about their similarities in the section below entitled "Jung and Kristeva."

as the figure that exists in the gap between the child, who is not yet a subject, and the mother who is both subject and not yet object.

In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), Kristeva looks at the difference the mother plays in the development of boys and girls. Whereas boys can stop identifying their mothers as primary objects of love by focusing on her sexual difference, thereby securing an autonomous identity, girls are unable to do so. Because of their sexual similarity, girls will always associate with the mother, and thus, have greater difficulty establishing an autonomy that involves symbolically killing this figure. The complexity involved for women establishing themselves as subjects free of their mothers results, Kristeva argues, in melancholy and depression. With *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gendering* (1978), Nancy Chodorow argues for the relational continuity for the mother-daughter pair that the mother does not share with her son. Chodorow goes on to attribute fluid ego boundaries to girls on the basis of this developmental difference.

In her text *Jocasta's Children: The Imprint of the Mother* (1989), Christiane Olivier focuses on the desire of the silent mother in Freud's account of the Oedipus complex. In the tradition of Dinnerstein, she blames the mother for difficulties men and women face in terms of their self esteem, their sexual relationships, as well as how they relate to their children. Marianne Hirsch also looks to Jocasta in her influential study, *The Mother / Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989). Examining novels written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Hirsch reveals how Toni Morrison and Alice Walker give voice to the silenced mother, thereby suggesting a way in which feminist theory can situate itself in the mother rather than the daughter.

In her work *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (1994), Teresa de Lauretis criticizes the formation of what she calls the maternal imaginary as heterosexist.¹³ However, citing Kristeva, Chodorow and Luce Irigaray, who call for the female-marked language (*écriture féminine*), de Lauretis sees an overemphasis on the role of the pre-Oedipal mother. While I agree with de Lauretis's criticism of the heterosexist maternal imaginary, following some of the other feminist critics listed above, I also believe that the pre-Oedipal mother remains important in the development of female subjectivity. I further believe that this figure is also close to Jung's description of the archetype in the collective unconscious.

Jung and Kristeva

Julia Kristeva is the critic most responsible perhaps for the redefining of the pre-Oedipal space. In her introduction to Kristeva's works, Kelly Oliver writes: "[Kristeva] maintains that before the infant passes through what Freud calls the oedipal phase, or what Lacan calls the mirror phase, the patterns and logic of language are already operating on a pre-oedipal level" (xxi). Oliver's claim resembles Jung's statement that an infant is not a blank slate; on the contrary, according to Jung, the child has already interacted to a certain extent with the collective unconscious. Kristeva differentiates between what she calls "two modalities [:] the *semiotic* and the *symbolic*. These two

¹³ De Lauretis defines the maternal imaginary as "an ... idealized if composite construct or, in Domna Stanton's phrase, a maternal metaphor, in which the mother stands for what women have in common as women—for better or for worse. This mother does not necessarily have an erotic or fantasmic role in female sexuality, although in many instances it does, but it always stands as the figure of individual and collective female empowerment" (165-166).

modalities are inseparable within the *signifying process* that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse (narrative, metalanguage, theory, poetry, etc.) involved” (*The Portable Kristeva* 34). Kristeva points out the “necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process, which is constitutive of the subject. Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic... [s/he] is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both” (34). Again, this dialectic within signification of the semiotic and the symbolic is reminiscent of Jung’s thoughts about individuation, in which an individual is in a continual give and take situation with the archetypal images one faces.

Rowland writes: “For Jungians, the symbolic is archetypal as well as paternal; indeed, the phallus becomes a wholly *cultural* signifier, not a uniquely privileged one. Archetypes are androgynous, as in the pre-oedipal mother, yet archetypes take a more active role in birthing the ego than Kristeva’s pre-oedipal semiotic” (120). She goes to note that Jung’s maternal is not non-figurable, as is Kristeva’s: “his maternal is only non-figurable in so far as it is pre-oedipal” (120). Rowland demonstrates, and repeats, that for Jung, the “Oedipal splitting is far less determining for subjectivity” (120). She reminds the reader: “symbolic images of the mother need not refer *back* at all. They may be in touch with unconscious/semiotic energies driving subjectivity *forwards* into individuation. Instead of pointing backward to the pre-Oedipal mother, psychic archetypal images also point to future intimations of the numinous self” (120-121). Interaction with the maternal is not, therefore, something reminiscent of loss and melancholy, as it is for Kristeva, but something that may lead a more complete sense of self.

In her text *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), Kristeva argues that a symbolic matricide is necessary to establish identity: “Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation” (27-28). When this impulse is hindered, it inverts on the self. The effects of this are particularly devastating for women, given that they identify with their mothers:

Indeed, how can She be that bloodthirsty Fury, since I am She (sexually and narcissistically), She is I? Consequently the hatred I bear her is not oriented toward the outside but is locked up within myself. There is no hatred, only an implosive mood that walls itself in and kills me secretly, very slowly, through permanent bitterness, bouts of sadness, or even lethal sleeping pills that I take in smaller or greater quantities in the dark hope of meeting . . . no one, unless it be my imaginary wholeness, increased with my death that accomplishes me. (29)

I agree with Kristeva that symbolic matricide is a social injunction; indeed, we see all of the daughters follow this sanction by identifying their mothers as “abject,” that which “simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject” (*Powers of Horror* 12). I propose that there is an alternative source of particularly maternal love and care, one that could lead to a sense of wholeness, namely, interaction with the maternal archetype.

Mother Archetype¹⁴

In general, Jungian archetypes are androgynous. That is to say, they in and of themselves are neither masculine nor feminine. Rowland writes, “[they] are equally capable of manifesting themselves as either gender or non-human forms” (173). Also, archetypes are multiple and plural in nature. Archetypal images are not, therefore, fixed. Similar to the signifier in deconstruction, the archetypal image is “without... knowable signifieds” (Rowland 106). She goes on: “A single image can never account for the multifarious potential of the archetype. Consequently, archetypal images have a metaphorical connection to the archetype” (Rowland 174). The two are not, therefore, to be conflated: while the archetype itself cannot be represented, the images that arise from the archetype can take on myriad forms.

The archetype of the Mother is but one of four that make up the archetypal Feminine, according to Jung.¹⁵ It is, however, the central aspect of the Feminine. Jung writes that the mother archetype appears in an infinite number of ways. A person’s first interaction with this archetype is the woman, or women, who serve in the maternal role: “first in importance are the personal mother and grandmother, stepmother and mother-in-law” (81). One’s biological mother, therefore, necessarily shapes and informs the notion

¹⁴ I would like to offer a brief word about the father archetype. Andrew Stevens writes that is archetype “personifies as the Elder, the King, the Father in Heaven. As Lawgiver he speaks with the voice of collective authority and is the living embodiment of the Logos principle: his word is law. As Defender of the Faith and of the Realm he is the guardian of the status quo and bastion against all enemies. His attributes are activity and penetration, differentiation and judgment, fecundity and destruction” (129-130). Stevens notes that, like the Mother, the Father is both good and terrible: “he possesses the dual aspect of Jehovah and of the fecundating and destructive Hindu god, Shiva” (130).

¹⁵ The others are the Hetaira, or Love Goddess; the Amazon; and the Medium (Stevens 211).

of “mother.” He then includes “any woman with whom a relationship exists – for example, a nurse or governess or perhaps a remote ancestress” (81). All women, hence, have the ability to represent this idea of “mother.”

Jung then speaks to what he calls “mothers in the figurative sense” (81): the Goddess in all of her manifestations, including the Virgin Mary, Demeter, etc. (81). The positive qualities associated with the archetype are the following: “maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magical transformation and rebirth... are presided over by the mother” (82). He also speaks of the negative manifestations of the mother archetype: “anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate” (82). Jung identifies these characteristics as ambivalent, identifying the figure as the “loving and terrible mother” (82).¹⁶ He goes on to warn against the expectation that any one person can embody the mother archetype in its entirety: “a sensitive person cannot in all fairness load that enormous burden of meaning, responsibility, duty, heaven and hell, on to the shoulders of one frail and fallible human being” (92). In fact, Jung labels such identification with the archetype as pathological (351). He later recognizes that the desire to do so has always existed and may continue into the future (92). Still, he writes: “we should not hesitate for one moment to relieve the human mother of this appalling burden, for our own sakes as well as hers” (92).

¹⁶ Note that he does not write “loving *or* terrible” (italics mine): for Jung, the archetype is neither wholly positive or negative but both.

One could argue that the social construction of motherhood, what Adrienne Rich calls the institution of motherhood, dictates that mortal women attempt to take on the archetypal resonances of the mother. Rich writes: “Institutionalized motherhood demands of women maternal ‘instinct’ rather than intelligence, selflessness rather than self-realization, relation to others rather than the creation of self” (*Of Woman Born* 42). In this dissertation, I argue that with their novels, these writers defy the demands of institutionalized motherhood, thereby going against the patriarchal maternal imaginary and providing their reading audiences instead with other sources of nurture.

Critical Texts that Address the Legacy of Mother

There is a constant dynamic interaction between the daughters in the novels that I examine and the mother archetype. The ultimate goal is one of transformational healing. Jo Malin, Vanessa Vilches Norat, Miglena Nikolchina, and Benigno Trigo have also analyzed the relationship between women writers and the characterization of their mothers in their studies reaching a similar conclusion. In her text *The Voice of the Mother: Embedded Maternal Narratives in Twentieth-Century Women’s Autobiographies* (2000), Jo Malin finds that autobiographies are conversations, dialogues between the writer-daughter and her mother. She opens her study with the following: “every woman autobiographer is a daughter who writes and establishes her identity through her autobiographical narrative” (1). She argues that one cannot take apart the daughter’s autobiography from the biography she writes about her mother: “The two life stories overlap, and the mother, the object of the biographical narrative, becomes a

subject, or rather an ‘intersubject,’ in her daughter’s autobiography” (1-2). Malin goes on to suggest that because the two are engaged in a dialogue, the text necessarily takes on that mode of writing: “These writers do not use a single authoritative or monologic voice and, thus, create an alternate literary form” (2). I propose that this dialogue is not limited to the genre of autobiography, but is also part of a larger and broader process of subject formation where women are in dialogue with the maternal archetype.

In her study about autobiography, *De(s)madres o el rastro materno en las escrituras del yo* (2003), Vanessa Vilches Norat makes clear the relationship between the figure of the mother and autobiography as a discourse that most concerns itself with the construction of subjectivity (14). Naming autobiography as a “matergraphy” (15), she finds that the mother figure (the *mater*)¹⁷ is always the Other in the texts she studies: “analizo la *mater* como una cantera de significaciones culturales, siempre irreducible, contradictoria, ambigua, excesiva, que provoca en nosotros la confusión de los límites y las fronteras de identidad” (17). Vilches Norat notes the following: “la *mater* ha sido discursivamente esa potencia generativa amenazante y perturbadora que resiste toda conceptualización definitiva” (17). She concludes that the maternal position in fact produces autobiographical discourse (17-18). I find Vilches Norat’s explanation of the *mater* to be quite similar to my own description of the maternal archetype, in that both resist precise definition. I argue that successful interaction with this particular archetype can contribute to a sense of balance and wholeness.

¹⁷ Vilches Norat explains: “Llamaré *mater* a la madre como figura discursiva para darle concreción al signo como tropo retórico. Hablo de la madre como *mater*, un imago cultural y discursivo, un signo que cobija una multiplicidad de significaciones contradictorias” (46).

Miglena Nikolchina examines the notion of female exceptionality in her text *Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf* (2004). She states that her goal is “to address the enigma of the persistent depletion of women’s contributions to culture” (1). She argues that, while there is a continual search on the part of female writers for examples of success by older writers, there is also a need to be first of her kind. For her, the source of this need is a continuous symbolic matricide that silences the work of generations of women artists, thereby allowing for, in her words, a “perennial optimism” (2) that the future will bring much-deserved recognition. I find that the continuous search for models on the part of women writers is one that underscores what I find to be true in the narratives that I study, namely, that women across cultures search for a nurturing force that has yet to be found because the extant patriarchal maternal imaginary does not allow for this kind of care.

In *Remembering Maternal Bodies: Melancholy in Latina and Latin American Women’s Writing* (2006), Benigno Trigo examines the effort of women writers in Latin America and of Latin American descent in the United States to confront both the power of the figure of the mother as well as the effort to suppress that power in patriarchal culture. He argues that they do so first, by “writing in the space between language and the body, which [he calls] maternal writing” (2). These writers also accomplish this by “reinscribing and thereby rescuing the maternal speaking body buried under the patriarchal maternal imaginary” (2). Trigo states that the goal of the writers’ venture, one that he calls “an ethical project of compassion and connection” (2), is “to rethink female subjectivity in terms of the maternal imaginary” (2). Similar to Trigo, I also understand the patriarchal maternal imaginary to be the “constellation of fantasies, myths, theories

and discourses that constitute the core of our beliefs, which together are the linguistic and organic origins of our perceptions and experience of our bodies” (163). Following the lead of many of these theorists, I also argue that the writers showcased in this study attempt to change the collective body of stories, myths, discourses that continue to support institutionalized motherhood.

The Selection of These Novels

These texts are a cultural manifestation of the maternal archetype. Interaction with the archetypes in general leads to self-realization, wholeness and balance. In this study I argue that the interaction with the maternal archetype specifically on the part of the female characters is critical in that it provides a source of nurturing. I do not argue that this is the only archetype with which they interact; however, it is the one upon which I focus. Using the term “maternal,” I mean not only that which is directly related to the biological mother, or even to those who serve in this capacity. I use this term in its broadest sense, to mean all that nurtures emotional and psychological development. I believe the texts themselves to serve in this capacity.

I have chosen novels in this study from a variety of geographic areas, the United States, the Spanish Caribbean, and Brazil, because I wanted to examine the extent to which the yearning for nurture by women is generalized throughout the region known as the Americas. It is for this reason also that I deliberately chose the works of women writers. The writers upon whom I have decided are but a select few who have chosen to represent this longing in their fictional creations. I was intrigued by the varied options

that these authors present for women who seek a sense of wholeness as well as a nurturing force. These choices can be found within each of the cultures themselves, whether it be in marginalized religious systems such as *candomblé*, *santería*, and *espiritismo*, or in the act of writing.

In his text *Rediscovering the New World: Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context* (1991), Earl E. Fitz puts forth the argument that the “nations of the New World share enough of a common history that they can legitimately studied as a unit” (xi). Selecting representative texts from English Canada, French Canada, the United States, Spanish America, and Brazil, Fitz sets out to demonstrate that certain issues are endemic to New World literatures. In his chapter on miscegenation in New World literatures, he points out the following:

A little recognized corollary of the slavery issue, and one that is crucially related to the theme of miscegenation, is the question of female/male relationships, a special kind of sexual politics in that sex roles and issues of gender identity are as profoundly involved as are the questions of sociopolitical power, social mores, and “race.” (71)

While the relationship between slavery and its impact on gender construction has certainly been discussed within African American criticism,¹⁸ it is rarely examined within Latin America.¹⁹ Rare in literary analyses, and firmly outside the scope of this study, is a discussion about the ramifications of gender on the emancipation process itself. In their introduction to the collection *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the*

¹⁸ See bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) and Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Super Woman* (1979) as but two examples of this field of inquiry.

¹⁹ Central to this hypothetical conversation would be an official one acknowledging the fundamental role of African slavery in the construction of these societies. To be fair, Great Britain and the United States, two that funded the slave trade, thereby benefiting from it economically, are only now seriously examining their own role in this endeavor, in commemoration of the abolition of the slave trade in England in 1807.

Atlantic World (2005), Pamela Scully and Diana Patton examine the liberal ideology that fueled the abolitionist enterprise. Accordingly, “[liberalism] always countered the image of slave society with the ideal of a society in which each person was an autonomous individual able to make contracts” (16).²⁰ They go on to show that the “model of liberal individualism implicitly assumed that the individual making contracts was a man whose right and ability to do so arose from his status as head of a family of dependents” (17). It was the marriage contract that gave man the status of being head of a family: “it defined him as having the independent status required of a contract-making individual. In contrast, marriage rendered a woman permanently the subordinate of her husband” (17). The entire African slavery enterprise therefore had profound implications for the societies of the Americas, many of which have gone relatively unexamined until recently. Numerous studies have focused on the African contribution to musical forms, religious expressions, and linguistic influences in the Americas; little has been written about its influence in the societal construct of womanhood.²¹

Keeping in mind the link between African slavery and its influence on the construction of womanhood, I begin this dissertation by examining Toni Morrison’s second novel, *Sula* (1973). The text features African-American life in the Bottom, a community in Ohio, in the hundred years following the end of the Civil War until Reconstruction. With few exceptions, male characters exist on the periphery of this neighborhood: Morrison’s focuses on the lives of her female characters, who struggle to find meaningful connection with each other. The author poignantly portrays the

²⁰ The editors clearly point out that this is true across the Atlantic world, “in its French, Anglophone, Hispanic, and Lusophone iterations” (16).

²¹ Toni Morrison examines this theme, to a certain extent, in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination* (1992).

devastating effect of slavery on the emotional lives of these women, mothers who care about the physical survival of their daughters without demonstrating warmth and affection, and daughters who make a great effort not to repeat that behavior with their own children.

Maureen Murdock writes of the mother/daughter split, defining it as the “split from one’s feminine nature” (130) in her study *The Heroine’s Journey* (1990). She notes: “this wound goes beyond a woman’s relationship with her personal mother. It goes to the heart of the imbalance in values within [Western patriarchal] culture. [...] [Women] are lonely for deep connection. We yearn for affiliation and community, for the positive, strong nurturing qualities of the feminine that have been missing from this culture” (131). In this dissertation I argue that a sense of nurture can often be found within the cultures themselves: the act of writing, because it is an act of creation, is a critical source of nurture for the woman writer,²² despite the formidable challenges that come in the form of language itself.²³ More specific to the Americas itself, the novels suggest that alternate religious systems such as *candomblé*, *santería*, and *espiritismo* provide another source of nurture. In his introduction to *Mixed Race Literature* (2002), Jonathan Brennan states that the “literary text, poem or prose, the site for metaphor, is the act of language of language

²² For a consideration of the role of the woman writer in Latin American society, see the introductions of Sara Castro-Klarén, Sylvia Molloy, and Beatriz Sarlo, in the anthology *Women’s Writing in Latin America* (1991).

²³ There are numerous studies on women and language. The triumvirate of Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray are but three women who are famous for their contributions to this debate. For a sample of the debate, see Hendricks and Oliver, *Language and Liberation* (1999); as well as the first section of González and Ortega, *La sartén por el mango* (1985).

that encodes social meanings of race and challenges them as well” (9).²⁴ In much the same way, I believe that literature also defines social meanings of gender. These writers are only an example of those who are committed to confronting and contesting the images of women in the patriarchal maternal imaginary.

Outline of Chapters

In Chapter One, “Unfulfilled Longings and ‘Monstrous’ Mothers of *Sula* (1973),” I examine the multiple portraits of mothers in Toni Morrison’s second novel. Analyzing the matrilineal line of the protagonists, Nel and Sula, I find that there is a multi-generational yearning for a love and support that is thought to come specifically from mothers. There is very little meaningful interaction between mothers and daughters in this text. Turning my attention to the protagonists, I argue that their friendship with each other is the way in which they interact with the maternal archetype. After the dissolution of that relationship, the life of each woman comes to an end. For Sula, that death is a literal one, while for Nel, who recovers the memory of her friendship with Sula, it is only metaphorical. To a certain degree, both women kill themselves: after the conclusion of

²⁴ Brennan uses the term “mixed race” to “serve as a metaphor for cultural hybridity, the merging of more than one stream of cultural/literary tradition” (9). He lists some of the traits that characterize this group of texts: “the process of literary hybridization, the merging of multiple streams of literary traditions, the call and response between multiple oral traditions, and the representation of multiple identities are some of the processes that define mixed race literatures” (10). In the collection of essays, writers examine African-European, Native-European, Eurasian, African-Asian, and Native-African American literature. Conspicuously absent are representative works that make up the corpus of Latin American literature. For a more inclusive reading of similar subject matter, see Fitz, *Rediscovering the New World*.

their friendship, neither woman finds another way to relate to the archetype. They both reject Jungian individuation, resigning themselves to quiet acquiescence and death.

In Chapter Two, “Sacrifice and Renewal in *Mulher no Espelho* (1983),” I analyze the symbolic re-integration of the unnamed protagonist. Helena Parente Cunha’s novel is a dialogue between the protagonist and her alter ego, “a mulher que me escreve,” who appears in her mirror. The woman’s true self (“eu”) rejects all that the “woman who writes me” has become: an upper middle class housewife whose husband and sons have no interest in her personhood. After her husband and children leave her, the protagonist begins to attend to the discomfort with which she has lived her life since childhood. She begins to recognize how, in living in accordance with her society’s dictates about womanhood, she has become removed from her own desires. I study how the protagonist slowly reclaims the memory of her mother, a figure who is marked by her silence, and who remains on the edges of her daughter’s remembrances. Her journey from fragmentation to wholeness is further aided by the recovery of the African elements of her culture that she was urged to leave behind. She increasingly interacts with images of the archetypal mother in the form of the *orixás* of the waters, Iansã (Oya), Oxum and Iemanjá. I argue that it is both of the recuperation of her mother as well as the development of a relationship with the images of the archetypal mother that lead a more whole self. By the end of the novel the protagonist speaks in a single, rather than multiple, voice.

In Chapter Three, “Composing One’s Self in *Vecindarios excêntricos* (1999),” I look at how the process of writing assists in the establishment of one’s identity, and argue that writing is yet another means by which one can relate to the maternal archetype. In an

effort to firmly establish her own identity, the protagonist, Elvira, records the life stories of all of the women in her family. Her most contentious relationship is the one that she has with her mother, Clarissa, whom she portrays throughout the text as irrational and self-sacrificing. I argue that she does so because her mother is a part of a symbolic matricide that needs to occur before Elvira has her own sense of self. In the act of detailing the lives of her female relatives, the protagonist reveals her willingness to understand her mother and her relatives not within their subscribed roles as wife, mother, aunt, etc., but as women in their own right. In accepting her mother with all her strengths and weaknesses, the protagonist is finally able to accept herself.

In Chapter Four, “Maternal ‘Filth’ in *Singing Softly / Cantando bajito* (1989),” I explore what I call the “discourse of dirt” that Carmen de Monteflores uses throughout the novel. The narrator recounts the personal histories of the women in her life, including not only those of her mother and grandmother, but also of the local *curandera*. Alternately known as a healer and a witch, this character, Alba, guides three generations of women in this family to reconciling with each other. With only one exception, each mother is identified with “filth” or “dirt.” Only when Alba responds to this characterization does reconciliation between mothers and daughters occur.

In my Conclusion, I consider how women-authored texts of the last few decades offer various strategies in an attempt at what one critic calls “self-figuration” (Reisner 218). In my study, I have focused on the protagonists’ relationships with the maternal archetype. I see this interaction as a productive one that leads to a more complete sense of self. I also offer a meditation on the role of maternal silences in these texts, and how those moments replicate that which exists in patriarchal culture. These novels are efforts

to modify that culture, and thereby contribute to the creation of one in which women are fully whole subjects, standing on their own.

CHAPTER I

UNFULFILLED LONGINGS AND THE “MONSTROUS” MOTHERS OF

SULA

(1973)

In this chapter, I argue that Toni Morrison constructs in her second novel, *Sula*, a series of portraits of women who all long for nurture and who all fail to attain that care. These women, mothers themselves, look primarily to their own mothers as the source of this kind of emotional support, only to find them incapable of providing it. Morrison therefore creates a series of “monstrous” mothers, “monstrous” because they are women who reveal the fallacy that is the “Good Mother” as constructed in popular discourse. Indeed, supposedly inherent in the definition of “mother” is someone who is capable of meeting all of the needs of her children, whether they be physical and emotional. This ideal is expected of all women who care for children in both the black and white communities in the United States. Morrison offers two protagonists in this work, Nel and Sula, neither of whom have positive relationships with their mothers.

After demonstrating that the daughters of the novel often have very little meaningful interaction with their mothers, I next turn my attention specifically to the two protagonists. After being estranged from their mothers, Nel and Sula depend on their friendship with each other as a source of nurture. It is through this relationship, therefore,

that each girl interacts with the maternal archetype. In each other, they find “maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility” (*Archetypes* 82). They encourage and inspire each other until they are adults, when Nel ends the friendship. The termination of this relationship has more dire consequences for Sula than for Nel. While Nel undergoes a metaphorical death, Sula suffers a literal demise. After rejecting not only her mother but also her grandmother, who symbolizes a more extended maternal line, Sula depends solely on Nel for warmth, compassion, and care. When that friendship ends, she is left with nothing. I argue that Sula therefore symbolically commits suicide. Neither of these women receives the nurture they long for from their mothers. For a time Nel and Sula find this care in their friendship; when that relationship ends, they are unable to find the same kind of support elsewhere, and so they die.

Plot Summary

Sula is the story of a pair of best friends, Nel Wright and Sula Peace, who live in the Bottom, a black¹ community that exists in the “hills above the valley town of Medallion” (3) in Ohio. Encompassing the years 1919 until 1965, with allusions to the Civil War and Reconstruction, the novel portrays roughly a century of African American life in the United States. Both Nel and Sula live in households in which their respective

¹ A word about terminology: I use the terms “African American” and “black” in this chapter to refer to the population descended from African slaves in the United States. The majority of this population historically lived in the U.S. South. I utilize the terms interchangeably.

mothers are dominant. Neither girl interacts with her father: Nel's father serves as a cook on a ship that travels on the Great Lakes (17) and is consequently away from the house, and Sula's father dies when she is three years old (41). Their friendship, in fact, serves as a means by which they escape the forceful women in their families, in Nel's case her mother Helene, and in Sula's case her grandmother Eva and her mother Hannah. When they are seventeen, Nel decides to marry whereas Sula leaves Ohio to attend college. She returns to Medallion ten years later, when she defies the norms of her community by placing her grandmother in a home for the elderly and by causing the dissolution of Nel's marriage when she sleeps with Nel's husband. Sula dies soon after. For her part, Nel quietly goes on, raising her three children without the assistance of her ex-husband, until they reach adulthood. A woman who prides herself on being a moral and upstanding citizen of the community, Nel discovers she has made her own mistakes in a conversation with Eva at the end of the novel.

Interaction with the Mother Archetype

The mother archetype can appear in numerous ways. A person's first interaction with this archetype is the woman, or women, who serve in the maternal role: "first in importance are the personal mother and grandmother, stepmother and mother-in-law" (*Archetypes* 81). One's biological mother, "personal mother" in Jung's writings, necessarily shapes and informs the notion of "mother." He then includes "any woman with whom a relationship exists – for example, a nurse or governess or perhaps a remote ancestress" (81). All women, hence, have the ability to represent this idea of "mother."

Jung then speaks to what he calls “mothers in the figurative sense” (81): the Goddess in all of her manifestations, including the Virgin Mary, Demeter, etc. (81). In this chapter, I examine how the female protagonists of this novel interact with this archetype, whether in its positive or negative manifestation, first with their own personal mothers and then with the women who serve in that capacity.

The Mothers

In telling the story of Nel and Sula, we learn the stories of the lives of the women in each of these girl’s families. That is, the narrator presents the matrilineal line of both the Wrights and the Peaces.

Cecile, Nel’s great-grandmother

Cecile is the first mother to whom we are introduced in the novel. She is Nel’s great-grandmother, the grandmother of Helene (Nel’s mother) and the mother of Rochelle (Nel’s grandmother). We know very little about her, other than she raises Helene when Rochelle leaves the house, apparently to be a prostitute. Cecile removes Helene from that environment, raising her instead “under the dolesome eyes of a multicolored Virgin Mary, counseling her to be constantly on guard for any sign of her mother’s wild blood” (17). The narrator mentions in passing that within Cecile’s house, “the Virgin Mary clasped her hands in front of her neck three times in the front room and once in the bedroom where Cecile’s body lay” (25), an indication that she may have been a religious

woman, one who aspired to follow the example of the mother of God.² With the inclusion of this small detail, Morrison suggests that Cecile is a woman who pursued an ideal of perfect womanhood, one that remains impossible to attain. In praying to the Virgin, Cecile interacts with the positive manifestation of the maternal archetype.

Rochelle, Nel's grandmother

While Cecile seeks to emulate the Virgin Mary, her daughter Rochelle, mother of Helene and grandmother to Nel, does the direct opposite, living her life as a prostitute. Again, the narrator says very little about Rochelle and the circumstances under which she chooses that occupation. Certainly she and her mother are the two sides of a virgin-whore dichotomy. There is no mention of the situation into which her daughter Helene is born, such as the identity of her father and the age when Cecile removes Helene from Rochelle's care. Instead, the narrator features Rochelle in one scene, where she makes an appearance at her mother's funeral: "when Helene bent to loosen the ribbons of Nel's hat, a woman in a yellow dress came out of the garden and onto the back porch that opened into the bedroom... It was she who carried the gardenia smell" (25). Gardenias are

² Mary is often solely identified as the mother of God and therefore as the nurturer of His followers. Julia Kristeva finds that with the Virgin Mary, western Christianity "produced one of the most powerful imaginary constructs known in the history of civilizations" (Oliver 313). In *Changing of the Gods* (1979), Naomi L. Goldenberg writes of the myths upon which the Church constructed the mythography of the mother of God: "Like Persephone, goddess of the underworld, Mary intercedes on behalf of the dead. Like the earth goddesses Cybele, Gaia and Demeter, Mary is prior to God and forms the ground of His being. Like the virgins – Athena and Artemis – Mary is free from bonds of marriage to mortal men" (75). In these various myths, as in the story of the Virgin Mary herself, lies the archetypal Mother, in this instance the positive aspect, one that is nurturing and loving.

flowers that in the U.S. South convey the grace of southern living.³ Morrison therefore includes this detail to underscore the irony of the situation: prostitution is not thought of in popular discourse as a graceful occupation. Morrison appears to challenge the moral values of the “good” and “bad” with this description of Rochelle: although a prostitute, and therefore presumed to be immoral and lacking a certain refinement, this woman carries herself with elegance.

Though a minor character, Rochelle serves as an apt introduction to the negative manifestation of the maternal archetype: she is the character who is “secret, hidden” (*Archetypes* 82). Her mother Cecile deliberately removes her daughter Helene from Rochelle’s influence precisely because Cecile fears that Rochelle is the one who “devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate” (*Archetypes* 82). Indeed, though they exchange only a few words at Cecile’s funeral, the narrator reveals Rochelle’s seductive effect on both her daughter Helene and her granddaughter Nel. The narrative voice notes that Helene is enraged at having missed the opportunity to speak to Cecile, “seeing instead that painted canary who never said a word of greeting or affection or...” (26, ellipses in the original). In spite of her annoyance, then, Helene continues to yearn for something positive from her mother Rochelle, a gesture of love perhaps. After Rochelle leaves, Nel comments, “She smelled so nice. And her skin was so soft” (27). Nel therefore also falls under Rochelle’s spell.

³ See Scoble and Field.

Helene, Nel's mother

Rochelle's daughter, Helene, does her best to be a "good woman." As an outstanding figure of womanhood in the world of the Bottom, the community in which this novel takes place, she believes womanhood is best portrayed as one of seriousness and moral righteousness. Nine years into a union in which her husband is rarely present, she gives birth to her daughter Nel. The narrator begins her portrait of Helene only after she becomes a mother, as if to imply that her life does not gain importance until she successfully reproduces. We get a portrait of a controlling woman who has no place in her life for children, who "enjoyed manipulating her daughter and her husband" (18). In popular mythology, a mother is a woman who loves her children without effort, and sacrifices herself willingly. Exploitation has no place in this idealized vision, and gaining pleasure from mistreating her child seemingly would place her in the group of "bad" mothers. And yet, among the people of the Bottom, Helene is the personification of the cult of true womanhood.⁴ Within her own home, however, she regards her family as a nuisance.

Again, Morrison appears to use the contradiction of external appearance and the realities of Helene's behavior at home in order to interrogate the binaries into which women, serving as mothers, are classified in popular culture. The narrator describes the

⁴ The cult of true womanhood is a discourse born of white middle class society in the United States in the 1820s and embraced by bourgeois African-Americans at the turn of the century. It called for all women to "embrace values such as piety, chastity, domesticity and submissiveness" (Guy-Sheftall 24). Bell hooks notes that many black women accepted this ideology so as to combat the stereotype of the black woman as an over-sexualized being whose only purpose was to bring pleasure to a man, specifically a white man (*Ain't I*, 70). She goes on to say that by altering the focal point from sexuality to motherhood, "[black women] endeavored to prove their value and worth by demonstrating that they were women whose lives were firmly rooted in the family" (*Ain't I*, 70).

effects of the Helene's behavior on the daughter: "Under Helene's hand the girl became obedient and polite. Any enthusiasms that little Nel showed were calmed by the mother until she drove her daughter's imagination underground" (18).

The narrator does not specify the manner in which Helene achieves this obedience. The phrase "under Helene's hand" does imply, however, that she disciplines her daughter through physical punishment.⁵ While she is a righteous woman in the eyes of the community, Helene is a woman who has relatively little power in the United States of the early 1920s. She therefore exerts her "negative" power on her daughter. Importantly, there is no mention of an emotional connection between Helene and Nel, only that Helene has the ability to control her child.

Eva, Sula's grandmother

Among the other women Helene judges is Eva, the head of the Peace family, another leading figure in the neighborhood. At first glance, Eva Peace is a striking example of the unconventional mother. She is, according to Michele Pessoni, both the Terrible Mother and the "archetypal embodiment of the Great Goddess who offers nourishment and regeneration" (443). In the course of the novel she mutilates herself, kills her son, and according to at least one critic, tries to murder a second child (Demetrakopoulos 57). Upon closer examination, however, it becomes clear that for all

⁵ The resemblance of this discipline to the process by which one tames an animal until one achieves total subservience on the part of that animal is disconcerting. Bell hooks comments on this behavior when she writes "the parent-child relationship in a culture of domination such as [the United States] is based on the assumption that the adult has the right to rule the child. It is the model of parenting that models the master-slave relationship" (*Sisters* 36). She attributes this "parental strategy" (*Sisters* 37) to a desire by the powerless to "exercise negative power... in a hierarchical settings" (*Sisters* 36).

of her eccentricities, Eva is very traditional in some ways. This becomes exceedingly apparent in her exchanges with her granddaughter, Sula.

Eva is a character that embodies both the customary ideas of motherhood as well as especially unusual ones. Like Jung's mother archetype, who is "loving and terrible" (*Archetypes* 82), Eva is neither wholly good nor bad. The narrator introduces Eva Peace as a woman who defiantly lives her own life, taking her destiny into her own hands. Described as a "sovereign" (30), she is someone who "direct[ed] the lives of her children, friends, strays, and a constant stream of borders" (30). Rather than treating her as a meddling woman who has no business opining about their affairs, the community accords her a great deal of respect. Although she sits in a wheelchair-like contraption that forces her interlocutors to look down at her, everyone is under the impression that they in fact are looking up at her (31), so great is their deference to her. Eva is incapacitated because she has only one leg, and the "fate of her lost leg" (31) is unknown to the town. There are stories told in the neighborhood about how she sold it so as to feed her three children, ensuring their survival after her husband leaves her (32). One story is that she placed herself on train tracks and then made the train company pay for the accident, another that she sold it to a hospital (31). Both stories, true or not, reveal Eva as a mother who is willing to literally sacrifice some part of herself for the survival of her children, even if it calls for self-mutilation. She recalls both that which "fosters growth" (*Archetypes* 82) as well as that which is "secret, hidden, dark" (*Archetypes* 82).

Eva's missing leg is an indication of the lengths to which she will go to support her children. From Eva's point of view, her readiness to make certain the continued existence of her offspring is enough to demonstrate her love for them. She does all that

she can to make sure that her children live. Abandoned by her husband, Eva has to find the means by which her family can survive. The narrator reveals her thinking at the time: “The children needed her; she needed money, and needed to get on with her life. But the demands of feeding her three children were so acute she had to postpone her anger for two years until she had both the time and energy for it” (32). The most significant feature of this passage is how Eva prioritizes her needs. She does not have the chance to focus her rage on her failing marriage. Doing so would have been a luxury in the face of the desperate times in which she and her family live. When her youngest is unable to have bowel movements, Eva “shove[s] the last bit of food she had in the world” (34) into his anus, then, putting lard around the sides of it, she loosens his bowels.

The juxtaposition of nutrition and waste is critical to this scene. In order to ensure the well being of her newborn son, the mother must take the last of her own provisions and use it to extract a blockage that causes him great pain. She takes food from her own mouth to give to him. She succeeds and then Eva questions why “she had come all the way out there to free his stools, and what was she doing down on her haunches with her beloved baby boy warmed by her body in the almost total darkness” (34). Suddenly it seems as if an appalling thought enters her brain: “She shook her head as though to juggle her brains around, then said aloud, ‘Uh uh. Nooo.’ Thereupon she returned to the house and her bed” (34). The implication of the end of this passage is that, for a brief moment, Eva contemplates killing her child. At this point, she is barely able to provide for her offspring, it is the dead of winter, and she has little to offer them. In her desperation, this option seems appealing, if only for a moment. Quickly she resolves not to do so. She

instead leaves the two girls and a boy with a neighbor, vowing to return the next day.⁶ She does so after eighteen months missing a leg but in possession of ten thousand dollars.

Although they did in fact reach adulthood living past the age of eighteen, only one of Eva Peace's three children live into full maturity. Pearl, whose given name is Eva (32), marries at fourteen and lives in Michigan (41). However, Pearl plays no part in this narrative. She is the only one to leave her mother's home and successfully establish a separate identity away from the Bottom. Hannah returns to Eva's house after her brief marriage Hannah, and her brother Plum comes back after serving in the armed forces. When her mother defiantly answers her accusations of not having loved them, Hannah goes on to ask: "But what about Plum? What'd you kill Plum for, Mamma?" (70) Ironically, the child she refused to kill as a baby is the same one that Eva kills as an adult.

Ralph Peace, referred to as Plum throughout the text, goes off to serve in the First World War in 1917. Until that time, he was the apple of his mother's eye, who "floated in

⁶ Although she receives little critical attention, this neighbor, Mrs. Suggs, is an example of what Patricia Hill Collins calls "othermothers," (178). These are "women who assist bloodmothers [biological mothers] by sharing mothering responsibilities" (178). Collins goes on to say that the development of this type of woman-centered extended family "reflects both a continuation of African-derived cultural sensibilities and functional adaptations to intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, and nation" (178). Reliance on another woman to care for her children does not mean that Eva does not love her offspring. On the contrary, it proves to be the only way in which she can ensure their survival. Abandoned by her philandering and physically abusive husband, unable to care for her three children, Eva does what she has to do in order to guarantee the continued existence of her family. Significantly, the narrator does not reveal whether Eva reflects on the fact that Mrs. Suggs has her own family to raise. At this point in her life, then, Eva depends on the people of her neighborhood. Higgins continues, "No fuss, no exclamations, no extraordinary attention is paid to Mrs. Suggs; she has merely done what any good neighbor would do for a 'sister' in need" (90). She assists Eva in her quest to provide for her family without question. In going to Mrs. Suggs, Eva acknowledges that she needs help. This acknowledgment brings attention to the myth of the Good Mother, who has a perpetual ability to provide for her children. In the material world, where there are obstacles to face such as economic deprivation as well as racism, there are limits to what one woman can do.

a constant swaddle of love and affection” (45).⁷ He returns to the United States in 1919 but does not reach Medallion until the following year. When he does, he is only a shadowy resemblance of his former self: “his hair had been neither cut nor combed in months, his clothes were pointless and he had no socks” (45). While his family waited for him to tell tales of war, he remained in his room. Only after he begins to steal from them does it become obvious that he has returned a heroin addict: “It was Hannah who found the bent spoon black from steady cooking” (45).

A year after his return Eva decides to end her son’s dependence on drugs. She rarely leaves the third floor of the house, but one day she labors to see her son in his room on the first floor. Gathering him in her arms, she rocks him back and forth, allowing herself that final moment to reminisce about all that he had been and all that he would never be. Eva treats her son as if he were a baby, an acknowledgement of the debilitating effects of his addiction. She then douses his body with kerosene, and lights him on fire. She returns to her bedroom afterwards. When Hannah finally asks her mother to explain the murder of her brother two years later, Eva replies:

... look like when he came back from that war he wanted to git back in. After all that carryin’ on, just getting’ him out and keepin’ him alive, he wanted to crawl back in my womb and well ... I ain’t got the room no more if he could do it. There wasn’t space for him in my womb. And he was crawlin’ back. Being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time. I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb, not no more. I birthed him once. I couldn’t do it again. (71-72)

Eva sees Plum’s drug habit as a return to infancy. She is not interested in finding the cause of his drug abuse, nor does she see any other way for it to end. In the same way that she saved this child when he suffered a blockage of the bowels as a three-year-old, Eva

⁷ Andrea O’Reilly notes that this phrase “signifies a mother-child bond and the word ‘floated’ suggests the amniotic waters of the womb” (150).

takes it upon herself to “save” him as an adult. She recognizes Plum’s dependence on her as unacceptable in that it goes against her notions of manhood. She implies that as a man, he should be able to support himself rather than live in his mother’s house doing nothing more than injecting heroin and listening to music.

More importantly, however, is her struggle to ensure his survival.⁸ I concur with Andrea O’Reilly that the narrative itself leads the readers to interpret these two moments in Plum’s life as “acts of preservative love” (148). O’Reilly goes on to write that Eva’s pain cannot be rendered in words, reflecting “a maternal anguish so deep that it is ultimately unrepresentable in language. Eva’s pain can only be glimpsed and signified by the prediscursive language of her maternal body” (148). Indeed, the ellipses in the passage above indicate silences in Eva’s conversation with her daughter. Hirsch points out that “maternal speech is sparse in this novel: mothers and daughters never quite succeed in addressing each other directly” (264). She continues, “The mother’s discourse, *when it can be voiced at all*, is always repetitive, literal, hopelessly representational. It is rooted in the body which shivers, hurts, bleeds, suffers, burns, rather than in the eyes, or

⁸ Dayle B. DeLancey is one critic who emphasizes the similarities between this scene and the moment in the outhouse when Eva uses her last bits of food to loosen his bowels. According to her, in both instances Eva saves her son from death, first literally and later metaphorically. She offers as another reason for this murder, the idea that Eva is trying to save Plum “from the indignity of upsetting natural law, the order which dictates a gradual separation of the child from its mother as the child grows to adulthood” (16). DeLancey concludes that “killing Plum seems to be both her natural right and the only proper thing to do” (16). I do not agree with this assessment on either count. There is little that is “natural” about a parent ending the life of a child, nor do I believe this act to be the sole solution to this problem. Gurleen Grewal writes that Eva’s willingness to kill her son is a “measure of what she has done to herself to survive. Because Eva’s survival has come at the price of bodily and psychic violence, because she suppresses her own great vulnerability by the sheer force of will to survive, she cannot bear to see the vulnerability in her son” (51). This perspective reveals Eva’s unwillingness to see her son as distinct from herself, an opinion that goes completely against the belief of Nicole Senecal, who writes that Eva’s act is a means by which she attempts individuation from her son (141).

in the voice which can utter its cries of pain” (269, italics in the original). Eva’s rocking of Plum before she kills him is one clear instance of a maternal mode of communication; her later attempt to save Hannah is another.

Overlooked in critical discussion about this incident is Eva’s presumption that she has complete control over Plum’s life. She asserts, “I done everything I could to make him leave me and go on and live and be a man but he wouldn’t and I had to keep him out so I just thought of a way he could die like a man not all scrunched up inside my womb, but like a man” (72). While Eva does succeed in raising Plum until he reaches adulthood, she has no power over the war that rages in Europe at the time. She says that her son would not live like a man (72), but in fact he does: he serves in an army that reproduces the racial segregation that he knows to exist in the United States. Indeed, I would argue that Eva cannot countenance the fact that combat has broken the spirit of her son. Similar to a newborn, Plum is now powerless and depends fully on his mother for his life. He lives to adulthood, only to become helpless again as a result of the war. The heroin addiction more clearly signifies this lack of control over his own life. If one reads the house as a metaphor for a woman’s womb, then Eva’s account of the fate of her son is correct. Plum has returned to her body. He will never emerge as an individual again.

Although he says very little in the scene, Plum’s utterances reveal that he speaks with the voice of a child. When his mother holds him and rocks him, he chuckles, saying ““Mamma you so purty. You so purty, Mamma”” (46-47). Hearing this, “Eva lifted her tongue to the edge of her lip to stop the tears from running into her mouth” (47), an indication that she understands the ramifications of her actions, and that they bring her pain. Any doubts she may have had in going forth with her intended murder are put to

rest when, feeling thirsty, she sips what she believes is a strawberry drink, only to find out that it is water stained with blood (47).⁹ After Eva leaves his room, we see the scene from Plum's perspective. Feeling the kerosene on his body, he feels it as a "wet lightness" (47), his mother's arm is the "great wing of an eagle" (47) pouring this on him. He thinks to himself, "some kind of baptism, some kind of blessing" (47), and then falls back into a deep sleep, knowing "everything is going to be alright" (47). We are led to believe that, from Plum's point of view, death is the best option for him.¹⁰

Eva sees her son as damaged beyond repair. The action of the novel takes place during the twenties; at this time there are no drug rehabilitation centers, no place where Plum could have overcome his habit. Eva knows that she protected her son to the best of her abilities until he reached adulthood, when she had to release him to the world. He returns with a broken body, and a defeated spirit, and she does what she believes to be the best for him. Her conviction that he would have tried to crawl back into her womb underscores the physical attachment of mothers and their children.¹¹

⁹ Water being the traditional symbol of purity and new life, here it has been tainted by Plum's addiction.

¹⁰ Trudier Harris vehemently disagrees with this, reading his "murder" as a "blood sacrifice" (75). She goes on to suggest that perhaps Plum reminds his mother of the inadequacy of the husband who abandoned her (75), thereby giving Eva motivation to end his "seemingly useless life" (75). I disagree with the implication that this homicide is one that stems from a callous disregard of her son.

¹¹ As Marianne Hirsch observes, "the mutual penetration of bodies signals, perhaps, the limits of what any relationship can sustain, and demonstrates the ambiguous status of the mother, whose body has already been penetrated so that this child might be produced" (265). She goes on to emphasize how Eva strictly delineates both her own boundaries as well as those of her son. Unfortunately, Eva feels the need to violate the limits of his personhood, behaving, in the words of Spillers, "as though she were herself the sole instrument of divine inscrutable will" (314). Eva would rather he die than continue as an adult infant.

I believe this act, the murder of Plum, best demonstrates how Eva is the most full representation of the mother archetype. She is both the “loving and terrible mother” (*Archetypes* 82). Pessoni clarifies the definition of this phrase when she writes: “Eva is no passive receptacle... [nor is she an] indifferent destroyer swallowing up life, but a maternal force who desperately loves her son and who wants to preserve rather than destroy his manhood” (444-445). In her effort to preserve Plum’s manhood, she destroys his body.¹²

In his *Symbols of Transformation*, Jung briefly examines the incest taboo as it appears in myth. Contrary to Freud, he believes that the “basis of the ‘incestuous’ desire is not cohabitation but... the idea of becoming a child again, of returning to the parental shelter, and of entering into the mother in order to be reborn through her” (223-224). While the narrator does not reveal a wish on the part of Plum to lie with his mother, Eva does cite such a desire when she answers Hannah’s inquiry as to why she murdered him. According to Jung, the expression of incestuous desire would be first, from the child, and second, solely figurative of a longing for rebirth. He does not address, however, how this desire functions from the perspective of the mother. Eva cannot envision Plum’s spiritual renewal without the death of his body, which has been marked by the effects of war and drugs. Therefore, she takes it upon herself to end his suffering.

The day after their conversation, Eva gives an indication of the scope of her love for another of her children. When Hannah’s dress catches on fire in the yard, Eva leaps out of a window in an attempt to put out the flames that have engulfed her daughter.

¹² O’Reilly makes the compelling argument that the murder distresses readers “precisely because Eva claims a maternal power that upsets comfortable notions of maternal powerlessness, particularly as pertains to black women, who are expected to be powerless in a racist and sexist culture” (119).

Intending to “cover her daughter’s body with her own” (75), she unfortunately lands twelve feet away from Hannah, who dies en route to the hospital. In her discussion of this text, Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos believes that Morrison in fact implies that Eva kills her while they are both in the ambulance on the way to the hospital because Hannah has been so disfigured by the fire (57).¹³ The narrator says: “Mother and daughter were placed on stretchers and carried to the ambulance. Eva was wide awake. The blood from her face cuts filled her eyes to she could not see, could only smell the familiar odor of cooked flesh. Hannah died on the way to the hospital. *Or so they said*” (77, emphasis mine). The last phrase is ambiguous because there is no definitive identification of who “they” are. This vagueness draws attention to the heightened reality of this family, so that even one’s death takes on a mythic quality. All of their actions are therefore subject to speculation. Eva had killed Plum only two years earlier, in 1921. If she had murdered her child in order to save him from the ravages of drug addiction, it is not impossible to believe that Eva would also end the suffering of her daughter. Paradoxically, Hannah’s death suggests that there are no limits to a mother’s love.

Hannah, Sula’s mother

Similar to her own mother Eva, whose love is complex and multifaceted, Hannah has an intricate relationship with her daughter Sula. Both women, however, have no trouble demonstrating their love of men. According to the narrator, “the Peace women simply loved maleness, for its own sake” (41). The community attributes this focus on

¹³ She is the lone critic to suggest this interpretation of Hannah’s death. Most believe that while Eva kills her son, she tries to save her daughter, thereby demonstrating that she both gives and takes life. When examining the passage closely, I agree with Demetrakopoulos.

men to the fact that no man ran the Peace household (41), revealing an inherent distrust of a family unit led by women. In spite of her infirmity, Eva has a steady stream of men paying attention to her. Although she may disagree with them in conversation, she does so with “such an absence of bile, such a concentration of manlove, that they felt their convictions solidified by her disagreement” (42). While Eva makes them feel as if they have met a worthy combatant (43), “Hannah rubbed no edges, made no demands, made the man feel as though he were complete and wonderful just as he was – he didn’t need fixing – and so he relaxed and swooned in the Hannah-light that shone on him simply because he was” (43). Trudier Harris writes of Sula’s mother, “in any world but the one Morrison has created, Hannah Peace would be considered a slut” (75). She continues by saying that the author does not impose such a judgment on her, instead Morrison turns Hannah into “an acceptable embodiment of a pleasure principle” (75). I agree with this reading; indeed, it is clear to me that in constructing Hannah, Morrison is deliberately confronting the stereotype of black women as Jezebel.¹⁴ She presents Hannah as someone who clearly revels in her sexuality. With this character, Morrison also challenges the idealized mother, who, according to conventional wisdom, no longer has sexual relations, instead devoting all of her energy to her children. Similar to Eva, Hannah refuses to go on without male attention after the death of her husband, which occurs when Sula is three years old (41), seeking the husbands of friends and neighbors as lovers (42).

¹⁴ The jezebel is but one of what Patricia Hill Collins names “controlling images,” that is, “negative stereotypes applied to African-American women [that] have been fundamental to Black women’s oppression” (*Black Feminist Thought* 5). Alongside the jezebel is the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother, the welfare queen, and the Black lady. See *Black Feminist Thought* 69-96.

In fact, it is from the men of the neighborhood that Hannah receives care and affection, and she responds in kind.¹⁵ Hannah recalls “all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility” (*Archetypes* 82). For her lovers, she is “the place of magical transformation and rebirth” (*Archetypes* 82). In this respect, therefore, she does recall the maternal archetype, except that she does so for her lovers rather than for her daughter. Given the distance that exists between Eva and Hannah, it is no surprise that Hannah recreates that aloofness in her relationship with Sula. A critical moment in Sula’s maturity is a conversation she overhears between Hannah and two friends, in which they discuss the problems of childrearing. When one says that she is unsure that she loves her child, Hannah responds, “‘Sure you do. You love her, like I love Sula. I just don’t like her. That’s the difference’” (57). Hannah ascribes this feeling to the fact that children are “‘different people’” (57).¹⁶ The narrator provides no justification for the comment, she merely presents it as a statement of fact. Once again, this is a challenge to the notion of mother as defined in popular discourse.

Hannah recognizes children as beings entirely separate from their mothers, rather than extensions of their biological parents. Her feeling of love has no bearing on whether she actually enjoys the company of her child. To some extent, Hannah is someone who behaves maternally out of obligation. As a mother, she should love her child, and so she does. There is nothing that states that she must like her, however. After her husband’s

¹⁵ Below I will discuss in greater detail her relationship with Eva, and how her mother does not (some would say cannot) provide Hannah with the love she craves.

¹⁶ Hannah has been a figure of derision within *Sula* criticism because of this admission. One example is Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, who comments that “[Sula’s] insecurity and consequent neurosis... stem from her unstable relationship with her mother” (130). Andrea O’Reilly points out that the reader’s almost visceral reaction to Hannah’s disclosure reveals an immediate identification with Sula.

death, Hannah returns to Eva's house "prepared to take care of it and her mother forever" (41). As her mother's oldest child, perhaps Hannah feels a sense of responsibility. Nothing in the text suggests that there was any extensive consideration about this decision, only that she did so after she found herself to be a widow. Her only question to her mother is whether Eva loved them.

Hannah's later exchange with her mother about Eva's love, which I discuss at length in the next section, implicitly reveals that Hannah has some conception of what mother love is, or, at the very least, what it should be. The narrator does not specify anywhere in the novel the characteristics of ideal mother love. Still, there exists in popular culture the idea that "our mothers both love and like us unconditionally" (O'Reilly 59). Unfortunately, neither Eva nor Hannah is capable of providing that type of love for her own daughter. Nor are they able to verbally communicate the love they do feel for their daughters. As an alternative, Nel and Sula turn to each other for the emotional support their mothers cannot provide.

Their Daughters¹⁷

Helene, Rochelle's daughter

Raised by her grandmother Cecile, Helene grows to be a proper young woman, encouraged to live a morally upstanding life. While Helene matures in the presence of various statues of the mother of the Christ, she is also the daughter of a whore, whose “wild blood” (according to her grandmother Cecile) genetically predisposes her to an unbridled sexuality considered unseemly in women. Morrison therefore places Helene directly within a virgin-whore dichotomy that continues to affect the view of women in Western culture. In the scene in which Helene interacts with her mother at her grandmother’s house, there is some evidence of her longing for a better relationship with Rochelle, the mother who disappeared from her life. Rochelle offers no words of affection for either her child, whom she presumably has not seen for years, or her grandchild, whom she has just met for the first time. As Helene watches her mother Rochelle ready herself for her departure, Helene reflects on all she has had to endure in order to travel from the Bottom to New Orleans: “the folded leaves [...], the wooden benches she has slept on, all to miss seeing her grandmother and instead that painted canary who never said a word of greeting or affection or...” (26). The ellipses hint at the frustration that Helene feels, perhaps due to the lack of emotional connection with her

¹⁷ The categories into which I place these women, that is “The Mothers” and “Their Daughters” may be a false, or at least a hollow one, given that the majority of the women in the work are both mothers and daughters at the same time. Nevertheless, I have made this distinction depending on the emphasis that the narrative places at any given moment. For example, I place Hannah’s admission about her dislike of Sula because she offers that commentary in her role as mother. However, in her exchange with her own mother, she clearly speaks in the voice of a daughter.

mother. Like the relationships between Eva and Hannah, as well as between Hannah and Sula, Helene also suffers from the absence of intimacy in her relationship with her mother, which may be why she continues this pattern with her daughter, Nel.

Hannah, Eva's daughter

While Hannah does not have share a particularly intimate relationship with Eva, she does have the opportunity to question Eva about her mother's love for her. The exchange that she has with Eva about love is widely cited as an example of the distance between mothers and daughters in the criticism about this novel. Hannah asks, "Mamma, did you ever love us? [...] I mean, did you? You know. When we was little'" (67). Eva responds, "No. I don't reckon I did. Not the way you thinkin'" (67). In Eva's opinion, her struggle to achieve the survival of her three children is evidence of her love for them. While Eva goes on to see her children reach adulthood, Hannah remains dissatisfied with the lack of emotional intimacy in her relationship with her mother. At one point, she chooses to question her mother's love. Eva responds with great indignation: "You settin' here with your healthy-ass self and ax me did I love you? Them big ole eyes in your head a been two holes full of maggots if I hadn't" (68). For Eva, loving her child means that she secured adulthood for Hannah. When her daughter wonders aloud if Eva ever had the chance to play with her children, Eva retorts "Wasn't nobody playin' in 1895. Just 'cause you got it good now you think it was always this good? 1895 was a killer, girl. Things was bad. Niggers was dying like flies" (68). With this comment, Eva reminds her daughter of the realities of the historical moment in which she was raising her children. In

fact, 1895 saw the highest number of blacks lynched in the United States.¹⁸ When Hannah continues to insist that surely there was a time when her mother had the opportunity to be playful with them, Eva bursts out: "...what you talkin' 'bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you can't you get that through your thick head or what is that between your ears, heifer?" (69) This is the clearest indication that Eva does indeed conform to some extent to the idealized notion of motherhood, in that she offers her children as the sole reason for her continued existence.

From Eva's perspective, she has accomplished all that she can as a mother: her three children reached adulthood during a historical moment in this country in which African-Americans were being killed solely because of their race. With this defense, Eva alludes to a concept that Patricia Hill Collins has named "motherwork." Collins uses the term to "soften the dichotomies in feminist theorizing about motherhood that posit rigid distinctions between private and public, family and work, the individual and the collective, identity as individual autonomy and identity growing from the collective self-determination of one's group" ("Shifting" 59).¹⁹ Positing these as binary oppositions

¹⁸ See Lerone Bennett, Jr.'s "Landmarks and Milestones" (443-644) in *Before the Mayflower*.

¹⁹ The conversation between mother and daughter calls attention to Patricia Hill Collins's argument about the portraits of motherhood by white feminists and by women of color. From her point of view, in representations of maternity as written by white feminists, "physical survival is assumed for children who are white and middle class. Thus examining their psychic and emotional well-being and that of their mothers appears rational" ("Shifting" 60). Of course no one is assured life, but in her research, Collins finds that there are few discussions about the conditions under which white women have to provide for their children. This assumes that all white feminists who write belong to a class background that affords them certain latitude regarding the financial conditions in which they live. In contrast, the "struggles to foster the survival of Native American, Latino, Asian-American and African-American families and communities by ensuring the survival of children are a fundamental dimension of racial ethnic women's motherwork" ("Shifting" 61).

suggests that these worlds of public and private, of family and work, etc. are not complimentary. For Collins, the mothering done by women of color necessarily involves all of these elements, and the primary concern binding these seemingly disparate points is survival. Helen Washington's words about motherhood come immediately to mind: "motherhood, complicated and threatened by racism, is a special kind of motherhood" (6-7). Certainly, the social reality of the times force Eva to make certain decisions that she probably would not have had to face without those influences present. In her study, Laurie Vickroy compares Eva Peace to Sethe, of *Beloved* (1987). She writes that these mothers "are compelled to make unilateral decisions concerning their children's lives in circumstances so adverse any choice they would make would have tragic consequences" (298). Eva provided for Hannah's physical survival, and therefore, has complied with her responsibilities as a mother. From Hannah's viewpoint, however, love is not only viewed through grandiose gestures but also in moments of intimacy in which mothers play with their children and show them physical affection. In her essay about black women and anger, Audre Lorde writes: "survival is the greatest gift of love. Sometimes, for Black mothers, it is the only gift possible, and tenderness gets lost" (150).

Bell hooks attributes this repression of emotion in the African American community as one stemming from slavery. She writes: "The social world of slavery encouraged black people to develop notions of intimacy connected to expedient practical reality. A slave who could not repress and contain emotion might not survive" (*Sisters* 133). She writes that this trait, which continued beyond slavery, became a positive characteristic: "Over time, the ability to mask, hide, and contain feelings came to be viewed by many black people as a sign of strong character. To show one's emotions was

seen as foolish” (*Sisters* 133). The narrator acknowledges Eva’s reserve with her children when noting: “under Eva’s distant eye, and prey to her idiosyncrasies, her own children grew up stealthily” (41). The characterization of Eva, therefore, includes details that are specific to the conditions under which African American women have mothered since slavery. As Schramm says: “To Eva, the real proof of her maternal love was her willingness to stay alive for her children when to die would have been a relief” (171).

The dialogue between the daughter and mother is evidence that Hannah holds some notion of idealized motherhood, even though she does not exhibit any desire to be an ideal mother herself. According to Margaret Schramm, throughout this text “the desire of self-sacrificing, unconditional mother love persists and causes alienation of mothers from daughters and the estrangement of women friends” (167). Eva is content knowing that she has ensured that her children live, whereas Hannah longs for emotional nurture in addition to mere physical survival.

Nel and Sula as Children

In a 1976 interview with Robert Stepto, Morrison describes the root of the friendship between Nel and Sula as “there [being] a little bit of both in each of those two women, and [] if they had been one person, I suppose they would have been a rather marvelous person. But each one lacked something that the other had” (13)²⁰. The narrator of the novel notes “their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on”

²⁰ The narrator makes this abundantly clear when she describes Sula’s thoughts after she dies: “Sula felt her face smiling. ‘Well, I’ll be damned,’ she thought, ‘it didn’t even hurt. Wait’ll I tell Nel’” (149).

(52). In her text, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978), Nancy Chodorow explores how girls differentiate themselves from their mothers during adolescence in order to develop their own sense of self. She states that the “central issue” during this period is a “psychological liberation from her mother” (136). Before this release from her mother, “a daughter acts as if she is and feels herself unconsciously one with her mother (relations to men, menstruation and feminine reproductive functions and so forth)” (136). In a relationship with a best friend, however, a girl begins to think of herself as an independent being. In the cases of Sula and Nel, their friendship is one that provides them not only with a sense of liberation but also with an emotional closeness that neither receives from her respective mother. In this way, then, they are interacting with the maternal archetype.

The narrator observes that both girls find their childhood homes to be lacking. Neither girl has a sibling, and so they are often left by themselves. While Nel grows up “surrounded by the high silence of her mother’s incredibly orderly house” (51), Sula lives in a “household of throbbing disorder constantly awry with things, people, voices and the slamming of doors” (52). More importantly, they do not have close relationships with either of their parents, an important reason for their friendship: “Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers (Sula’s because he was dead; Nel’s because he wasn’t), they found in each other’s eyes the intimacy they were looking for” (52). The narrator later comments: “Their friendship was as intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other’s personality” (53). Implicit in this comment about relief is the idea that each girl may have thought there was something wrong with her: each estranged from her mother, and in Sula’s case, her grandmother, Nel and Sula are both outcasts in

their own homes. However, “in the safe harbor of each other’s company they could afford to abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perceptions of things” (55). The relationship continues in this way until their teenage years, when Nel decides to marry and Sula leaves the community to attend college. As adults, they are unable to regain the intimacy they had shared as girls.

Dissolution of Friendship

Nel chooses to follow the conventional route to womanhood, marrying at an early age and having children, thereby becoming the woman similar to her mother in terms of her standing in the community that is the Bottom. Her best friend Sula, on the other hand, turns away from it all. Morrison describes them both in this way: “Nel knows and believes in all the laws of the community. She *is* the community. She believes in its values. Sula does not. She does not believe in any of those laws and breaks them all. Or ignores them” (quoted in Stepto 14). Her mother’s remoteness leads Sula to find solace in the friendship she shares with Nel. Significantly, Sula remains in the Bottom only until Nel weds, and then she goes off to college and to travel the country. In losing Nel to marriage, Sula loses her source of emotional intimacy, and therefore, a critical interaction with the maternal archetype. She thereafter removes herself from her immediate environs, thereby committing her first violation against the black community: only men leave their families in so flagrant a manner.²¹ Ten years after Sula leaves the Bottom, she returns

²¹Toward the conclusion of the novel, Nel says as much she says “ ‘ You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can’t act like a man. You can’t be walking around all

with the presumption that the love she shares with Nel continues, despite the interim years in which there was no communication.

In fact, Sula's return to the Bottom is marked by the chaos she causes by betraying the communal values people there held in esteem. Her first violation in the eyes of the community is that she places her grandmother in a home. She does so only after a conversation with Eva in which the latter encourages Sula to get married and have children. From Eva's point of view, both of these processes would "settle" Sula (92). To this proposition, Sula responds: "I don't want to make somebody else. I want to make myself" (92). Here, she challenges those positions within patriarchal societies (including the black community) to which women are supposed to aspire, namely, being a wife and a mother. Sula inherently understands the power of both of these positions; for her, being a wife and mother means to be a creator, someone with the responsibility of molding not only the man to whom she is married but also the children created in their parents' image. Instead, she would rather take that energy and apply it to herself. Given her upbringing, it is not surprising that Sula would blatantly flout society's conventions for women.

Eva, Sula's grandmother, changes her behavior as she grows older. She even comes to accuse Sula of an attitude that betrays a flagrant disregard for the values she comes to hold dear in her old age. She calls her granddaughter "selfish" (92), going on to say that a woman has no business without a man (92). Lucille P. Fultz finds that "implicit in Eva's argument is the assumption that women must be economically dependent on men and that a 'good' mother stays home, where she creates a nurturing environment for her husband and children" (232). Of course, Eva herself did not subscribe to this in her

independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don't" (142).

own youth, nor did her daughter Hannah. Both women demonstrate that women do not necessarily need men in order to survive, or to thrive, for that matter. It is curious, then, to find that ten years without either her children or her grandchildren has led Eva to assume the values of a community to which she once paid no attention. Citing Collins's research, Fultz continues on to say that what appear to be hypocritical statements encouraging daughters to be fully independent all the while urging them to be settled through marriage and children "emerges from these mothers' attempts to create buffers for their daughters against a hostile world and at the same time pass along a legacy of love and service" (237). Eva recognizes at this point in her life that "to be shut out of a community is to be ignored and regarded with suspicion at the least, and to be hunted down and destroyed at the worst" (Estés 173). She sees how the black community has already shunned Sula and is trying to prevent the inevitable.

Despite her distant relationship with her mother, Sula maintains a relationship with Eva until she returns from her travels. In their first conversation after her arrival, she addresses her grandmother as "Big Mamma" (92), perhaps an indication of their connection. The exchange quickly deteriorates, as Sula challenges her grandmother, and rejects Eva's advice that she settle down. She concludes their dialogue with the following statement: "I ain't never going to need you. And you know what? Maybe one night when you're dozing in that wagon flicking flies and swallowing spit, maybe I'll just tip on up here with some kerosene and – who knows – you may make the brightest flame of them all" (94). Here she directly alludes to Eva's role in the death of her mother and her uncle. In threatening her, Sula effectively renounces all familiar ties with Eva, thereby symbolically rejecting her entire maternal line. She also ends her relationship with the

character who, as I have already argued, is the most full representation of the mother archetype. By rejecting Eva, Sula, for all practical purposes, severely limits her chances of finding the emotional nurture she craves.

Sula feels no responsibility to her community; claiming herself and her independence, Sula is a threat to both Eva and Nel. By sacrificing her leg, Eva bought the house where Sula lives, and so her granddaughter does not have to work to provide shelter for herself. Nor does Sula have to worry about bills because, again, Eva has provided for her. Sula has no husband or children. Morrison writes, “she was completely free of ambition, with no affection for money, property or things, no greed, no desire to command attention or compliments – no ego” (119). Because she does not channel her energies into anything other than herself, the narrator labels Sula “dangerous” (121), which is exactly how the community sees her. The narrative voice says:

In a way, her strangeness, her naïveté, her craving for the other half of her equation was the consequence of an idle imagination. Had she paints, or clay, or knew the discipline of dance, or strings; had she anything to engage her tremendous curiosity and her gift for metaphor, she might have exchanged the restlessness and preoccupation with whim for an activity that provided her with all she yearned for. And like any artist with no art form, she became dangerous. (121)

The narrator’s comment about imagination is critical to my reading of this novel because it suggests that Sula has limited interaction with the archetypal mother outside of her relationships with Eva and Nel. Creation in any capacity is one of the positive aspects of this archetype, as I previously mentioned in this chapter. But Sula only has relationships with her grandmother and her best friend, and she effectively destroys both of those interactions.

Sula becomes a threat to the women of the Bottom, primarily because of her penchant for sleeping with their husbands. Like her mother before her, Sula loves men and the attention they pay to her. Observing her mother's frequent liaisons with different partners provides Sula with her first lessons about sex. "Seeing [her mother] step into the pantry [with a man] and emerge looking precisely as she did when she entered, only happier, taught Sula that sex was pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable" (44). The narrator goes on to say that Sula was aware that the community taught something different regarding sexual interactions, but witnessing her mother's actions allows Sula to judge for herself (44). Whereas Hannah seeks simply pleasure, Sula wants something more intimate from a lover: "She had been looking all along for a friend, and it took her a while to discover that a lover was not a comrade and could never be – for a woman. And that no one would ever be that version of herself which she sought to reach out to and touch with an ungloved hand" (121). Later, the narrator tells us that after sex, "she waited impatiently for him to turn away... leaving her to the postcoital privateness in which she met herself, welcomed herself, and joined herself in matchless harmony" (123). Unlike Hannah, for whom sex is merely an enjoyable experience, sex for Sula is the only way she can pursue a sense of wholeness, of a complete self that she does not feel otherwise. Missing her friendship with Nel, who is preoccupied with tending to her family, Sula seeks a similar intimacy. Still, although Sula was not emotionally close to her mother, she does witness Hannah with various lovers. Unconsciously, she may be attempting to interact once again with the archetypal mother by replicating her own mother's behavior.

Unfortunately, Sula's penchant for sleeping with men, irrespective of their relationship status, ends her friendship with Nel, who finds her husband Jude having sex with Sula. For the first time in the entirety of the work, the narration changes from third person to first person, an alteration that emphasizes Nel's shock. Nel says: "I just stood there seeing it and *smiling, because maybe there was some explanation, something important that I did not know about that would have made it alright*" (105, emphasis mine). The scene in front of her is so incongruous to what she knows about these two people that Nel unintentionally smiles. Nel does not know what to do in the situation because the circumstances are not ones in which she has found herself before. Here, both Nel and Sula reveal the extent to which in adulthood, they have become, to some extent, replicas of their mothers. Sula, like Hannah, is a sexual being who craves emotional closeness. Nel, like Helene, is a proper young wife and mother who is unprepared for this transgression. She immediately ends their friendship, inadvertently causing each woman's end.

Resulting Years: Abandoned Nurture

Sula

After returning from college, Sula almost immediately names herself Eva's guardian and places her in a home for the aged and infirm. This act announces to the community of the Bottom that Sula has abandoned her family responsibilities, betraying everything that the townspeople know to be true about the correct treatment of family connections. Soon after, she sleeps with Jude, thereby wounding her best friend, causing

the end of their marriage. Sula, therefore, rejects everyone who has ever cared for her, leaving herself alone in Eva's house, without visitors, friends, or relatives. Without relationships, she has nothing but death awaiting her. In blatantly discarding all of her relationships with women and men, and because she has no source of creativity, Sula, in effect, ends her interaction with the archetypal Mother, therefore committing a metaphorical suicide and resulting in her death.

Nel

After Jude leaves Nel, she turns to her children to find comfort: "For a long time she could not stop getting in the bed with her children and told herself each time that they might dream a dream about dragons and would need her to comfort them" (109). She feels as if she is of no use after her husband's abandonment. Thinking about her "empty thighs" (110) for instance, Nel says: "And what am I supposed to do with these old thighs now, just walk up and down these rooms? What good are they, Jesus?" (111). She continues by bemoaning what she sees as her fate, that she will never make love again: "are you trying to tell me that I am going to have to go all the way through these days all the way... with never nobody settling down between my legs[?]" (111). She ends her wail by asking "O my sweet Jesus what kind of cross is that?" (111). There is nothing to prevent Nel from seeking comfort from another man, given that it is common knowledge that her husband has left her. Instead, she chooses to find consolation in her relationship with her children. I concur with Jan Furman, who writes that at this point, "Nel wraps herself in the conventional mantle of sacrifice and martyrdom and takes her place with

the rest of the women in the community” (25). The children serve as a reassurance that she continues to have some purpose in the world.

A few years later, Nel realizes that she has used her children as a crutch. Finding her husband with her best friend “had twisted [Nel’s] love for her own children into something so thick and monstrous she was afraid to show it lest it break loose and smother them with its heavy paw. A cumbersome bear-love that, given any rein, would suck their breath away in its crying need for honey” (138). While the cultural ideal of motherhood dictates that the love of a mother should be all encompassing, that a woman can never love her children too much, the comments about Nel here suggest otherwise. There is something unhealthy about this kind of love, one that would envelop not only those who would receive that love but also the provider of it. In their article “Who Cares? Women-Centered Psychology in *Sula*,” Diane Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek go so far as to say that this love is in fact destructive and dishonest in that it “enables Nel to evade her responsibilities toward understanding her own experience...” (32). From the point of view of the community, Nel appears to be an ideal mother. From her own vantage point, however, she comes to recognize that her children have provided her with a socially-sanctioned protection that she comes to abuse.

At the end of the novel, in the chapter entitled “1965,” when Nel is fifty-five years old, we find out that soon after Jude left, Nel recognized that the only love she would know would be that of her children. But, we learn, “it was a love that, like a pan of syrup kept too long on the stove, had cooked out, leaving only its odor and a hard, sweet sludge, impossible to scrape off. For the mouths of her children quickly forgot the taste of her nipples, and years ago they had begun to look past her face into the nearest stretch of

the sky” (165). If she had continued to feel the burdensome love she felt for her children in the wake of her husband’s indiscretion, Nel would not have been able to let go of them once they had reached adulthood. She would have been incapable of allowing them their own selfhood. Instead, she knows that this sort of love does no good either for herself or for her children. Although she used them as a crutch while they were children, she allows them to grow up and mature. Unlike her own mother, she allows them to grow and thrive away from her. Nel, like all the mothers here, is simply trying to do what is best for her family.

Having found her best friend and her husband in a compromising position, Nel ends her friendship with Sula. In doing so, she brings about her own metaphorical demise. Neither woman was close to her mother; instead they looked to each other as a nurturing source. In discarding her relationship with Sula, then, Nel prematurely ends the only source of care she has known. In effect, she puts a stop to her interaction with the maternal archetype, the positive characteristics of which are “maternal solicitude and sympathy... all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth” (*Archetypes* 82). She does not come to this realization until the final scene of the novel, when, twenty-five years after Sula’s death, she goes to visit Eva, Sula’s grandmother and the mother of Plum and Hannah, who has outlived all of her children. During their conversation, Eva confuses her with Sula, saying “‘You. Sula. What’s the difference?’” (168). Having taken pride in herself for not being like her childhood girlfriend, Nel suddenly re-evaluates their friendship. She comes to the unexpected realization that her longing has been misplaced: “‘All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude.’ And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. ‘We was girls together,’ she said as though

explaining something” (174). Here, then, Nel finally feels the full impact of the loss of her friendship with Sula. She understands that her best friend was her only source of emotional closeness; after she ends their relationship, she denies herself any other opportunities for intimacy.

Conclusion

Sula is a novel of lost daughters searching for greater emotional intimacy with their mothers. Each mother provides glimpses of the maternal archetype, none more so than Eva. However, not one mother can satisfy her daughter’s yearning for nurture. The protagonists, Nel and Sula, therefore turn to each other to gratify these longings. Instead, they betray each other, Sula by sleeping with Nel’s husband, and Nel by ending her friendship as a result of the affair. Importantly, neither finds an alternative source of love and affection. Sula looks to lovers, only to reach the conclusion that men are a poor substitute for the kind of caring she craves. She is unable to look to other sources of love within the community because the people of the Bottom have ostracized her. Also, as the narrator notes, Sula is an artist without an art form (121): she does not find an outlet for her creativity, itself a form of the maternal archetype. Because she rejects the love available to her, and because she exists without an instrument for her imagination, Sula literally dies.

Nel looks to her husband, her children, and serving the community, belatedly discovering that none offer her the affection that Sula once did. Following her mother’s example, she lives what she perceives to be an exemplary life, only to eventually find it

lacking. Nel allows her conception of motherhood to overwhelm her identity as woman. She nurtures everyone surrounding her, including her children and her community, without being able to, at the same time, care for herself. Both of these women, to a certain extent, live in the binaries of female sexuality as established in the patriarchal imaginary: Sula could be classified as the whore, Nel the devoted and asexual mother. Neither character knows how to integrate the multiple parts of her personality. The ability to do so would result in successful individuation. Instead, both characters die.

In the next chapter, I look at a protagonist who suffers from a similar yearning for emotional intimacy. In her search, this woman turns to the Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé*, which offers her an alternative formula for wholeness.

CHAPTER II

SACRIFICE AND RENEWAL IN *MULHER NO ESPELHO*

(1983)

In this chapter, I study Helena Parente Cunha's novel *Mulher no Espelho* (1983) and find in it the description of a process of integration of the female psyche. The novel is an inner dialogue between the protagonist, "eu", and her alter ego, "*a mulher que me escreve*," who appears in her mirror.¹ "*A mulher*" rejects all that the woman's first person voice ("eu") has become: an upper middle class housewife whose life is dedicated to her husband and sons. Instead, "*a mulher*" urges "eu" to become more interested in herself. This split protagonist, however, slowly reclaims the memory of her mother, a woman characterized by her silence, and who remains on the edges of her daughter's remembrances. The protagonist also recovers recollections of her nanny, who introduces her to *candomblé*. These memories, together with the African elements of her culture that she was urged to leave behind in her childhood, take the split protagonist on a journey from fragmentation to wholeness. She increasingly interacts with images of the archetypal mother in the form of the *orixás* Iansã, Oxum and Iemanjá.² Through

¹ In writing "*a mulher*" in italics, I am following how Parente Cunha distinguishes the two voices in the novel.

² The *orixás* are the gods and goddesses of creation, according to practitioners of the Brazilian form of the Yoruba religion known as *candomblé*. Iansã is the goddess of the windstorms, the gatekeeper of cemeteries who symbolizes transformation. Oxum is the goddess of sweet waters such as rivers and lakes, who symbolizes love, harmony, and beauty. Iemanjá is the mother of all creation, the goddess of the oceans.

interaction with these entities (all of them being forms of the archetypal mother), the protagonist comes to speak in a single, rather than a multiple, voice, repeating for several instances “sou eu” (175).

A Fragmented Self

Helena Parente Cunha presents the life of an unnamed upper middle class woman from Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, in her novel *Mulher no Espelho*. Like her protagonist, Parente Cunha was raised in Salvador in what she calls a “very strong structure within the traditional pattern for Bahia” (*Fourteen Female Voices from Brazil* 47). She began publishing in the late 1970s, after the collapse of the military dictatorship in Brazil, and after making her life in the academy as a professor of literary theory at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. Though she had written, and garnered praise for, her poetry and short stories, *Mulher no Espelho* is Parente Cunha’s first novel, and the only one in which she utilizes Afro-Brazilian motifs.

At the opening of the story, the protagonist finds herself, at the age of forty-three, dissatisfied with her life.³ She has spent her time gratifying the whims of others, primarily those of the men who have surrounded her: first those of her father, for whose love she competes with her brother, then of her husband and three sons. While as a child she vied for the attention of her father, as an adult she battles with her sons for the interest of her husband. Separated from her husband, and emotionally detached from her three sons, the woman reviews both her past and present in order to gain an

³ While there may be certainly autobiographical elements in this narrative, Parente Cunha explicitly labels the work a novel. See Szoka 42, 48.

understanding of her place in the patriarchal society that is Brazil. She embarks on a search for an identity as a woman of African descent of the upper class in Brazil. In choosing to reclaim an African-based consciousness, she effectively navigates herself out of the series of male-dominated relationships in which she finds herself.

As the narrative begins, we learn that the text we are holding is intended to be a type of recording of the protagonist's life, but she is not writing it: "Não, não vou escrever minhas memórias, nem meu retrato, nem minha biografia. Sou uma personagem de ficção. Só existo na minha imaginação e na imaginação de quem me lê. E, naturalmente, para a mulher que me escreve" (17). Standing in front of mirrors, she makes the distinction between the speaking voice, the "eu", and the image in front of her, "*a mulher que me escreve.*"⁴ "Eu" knows "*a mulher*" because she invents her, but it is not an equal relationship: "...ela não me sabe. Ela pensa que me tem nas mãos para me escrever como quiser.... Ela me escreverá na medida da minha própria determinação" (18).⁵ The protagonist insists on the distinction between the two voices: "Ela é ela. Eu sou eu. Ela tem seus problemas. Eu tenho os meus. Se existo na imaginação dela, não foi ela que me criou. Fui eu mesma que me fez. Depois a inventei" (18).

At least two voices, then, will narrate the story of this one woman's life. They will compete for control of the text throughout, many times offering contradictory versions of the same story. At one point, a third voice, that of "a autora" is introduced. The "I" understands that although they may have different perspectives on her life, "I", "*the*

⁴ I will refer to the "eu" or "I" voice from this point forward as "the protagonist." While I understand that both voices are, in fact, those of the protagonist, for the sake of clarity I identify only the "I" or "eu" voice with that role.

⁵ One critic points out that the usage of the verb "saber" rather than "conhecer" within this passage is significant, given that it is an indication that the protagonist is referring to a deeper knowledge (Beard 118).

woman who writes me” and the “author” are the same: “Se eu dependo da mulher que me escreve, a autora depende de mim. Sem mim, não haverá este livro. Sem a mulher que me escreve, eu não me incorporo. E a autora não será, sem uma sem outra. A interdependência dos planos. Tudo depende de tudo” (79). This interdependence underscores the idea that there is no singular truth. Rather, veracity is something that is achieved only rarely, including when discussing one’s life, the interpretation of which changes through time. This passage also challenges the notion of self-knowledge, the idea that one could ever truly know oneself fully, let alone that other people may get to know you. The protagonist says, “Em casa ou na rua, não me sabem. Por acaso, alguém sabe alguém, carne e grito sob a capa do rosto, ordenado e composto em carapaça?[...] A verdade é que, do lado de fora, nada tenho a ver comigo mesma. Nem sequer falo, ao falar. Eu sou eu, somente na imaginação. Como todo mundo” (17-18). While she posits the idea that each individual is him/herself only in his/her own imagination, still, “eu” proceeds with her attempt to relate her life story, thereby undercutting her own assertion.

Immediately after distinguishing between the dominant speaker, “eu”, and “*a mulher*,” we receive a few biographical sketches, though again, “eu” provides a disclaimer. She begins with the story of her childhood: the protagonist was the only child of her parents, until the birth of her younger brother. She writes that the attention of everyone in her nuclear family, her parents and her nanny, shifts to him when he is born. While “eu” asserts that she was quite happy when her brother was born, “*a mulher*” defies her, saying “Você não podia ficar contente. Ele tomou o colo que até então era somente seu” (20). Before giving “*a mulher*” a chance to say anything to the contrary, “eu” makes sure to dispel any authority that this voice might pretend to have by asserting:

“Ela fez psicanálise, para apaziguar seus remorsos, os fantasmas de seus perigos. Não se libertou dos cacoetes adquiridos ao longo do tratamento e pensa que pode interpretar minhas reações infantis por meio de formulas mal digeridas das posturas freudianas que ela nunca estudou de fato” (19). Again, there is a warning that nothing is as it seems. Also, in mentioning Freud and psychoanalysis, the protagonist makes explicit a self-awareness about the manner in which she relates the story of her life. She is moreover cautioning against simplistic interpretations of her life, and she warns “*a mulher*” not to give a simple account of it.

Indeed, “eu” describes a nuclear family composed of an authoritarian father, a passive mother, a submissive daughter and a brother who exists on the periphery of her life. From the beginning, it is clear that the protagonist’s father was the central figure in her life as a child. She writes, “Querida dizer que, para viver bem com meu pai que eu amava, aprendi a viver para amá-lo...Nunca via meu pai completamente. Não levantava a cabeça para falar com ele. Se ele não se abaixasse até o meu temor, eu não veria a ruga que se afundava no meio de sua testa” (25). Striking about this passage is the physical disparity between her father and herself. One would think that her father dies when she was still a child, given her statement that she never saw him fully because of the positioning of her head when she spoke to him. However, he does not die until she is well into adulthood, the implication of which is that from childhood, she submits to him. She describes her relationship to him as follows: “Insignificantes éramos todos nós, em volta dele, todo-poderoso, mandando e antimandando, e nós, aos seus pés, submissos, submetidos, subjugados, submergidos, subtraídos” (33). With her portrayal of her father, the protagonist makes clear that he was similar to a god to her. The image she conveys is

similar to that of the deity of the Old Testament, in that he is someone who remains distant from those who surround him and who demands that everyone succumbs to his will.⁶ In the passage above, “eu” reveals that she recognizes the damage her authoritarian father inflicted on everyone in his midst, going so far as to suggest that he destroyed her mother’s, her brother’s, and her own spirit. She discloses that her father was “um homem do interior, filho de coronel, dono de terras, acostumbrado a mandar, chicote na mão, esporas nos pés, ele também por criação e temperamento sabia fazer-se obedecer” (59-60). The protagonist’s family life reflects the hierarchical mold of life in most Latin American countries. Women of all classes and races throughout the region are taught to obey the men in their lives and to be silent, accessories to their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. As the child of a landowner, she belongs to the Brazilian upper class. As the child, and more importantly, as the daughter, of this man, she is expected to obey without question until she marries a man of the same class who will then replace her father in her life.

In marrying her husband, the protagonist finds a man who is very similar to her father. She acknowledges this (66), and she reveals the similarity in her behavior toward both men: “Aceitei meu pai com a boca em linha reta. Com a boca esvaziada de porquês, aceito meu marido e meus filhos. Aprendi a agir como ajo com minha mãe” (34). There are moments in the narrative in which she conflates the two. She writes:

Eu dependo de meu marido. Meu marido depende de mim, por mais que se tenha na conta de homem forte poderoso. Eu dependo de dependência dele. Eu dependia

⁶ In her interview with Szoka, Parente Cunha says “My father was the ‘master of truth.’ He gave orders and made decisions, and my mother thought that was best” (47). Later, she says, “I find it odd that, even though I loved my father so much, there are various passages in my stories and novels where I attack the authoritarianism of the patriarchal system in which I was brought up” (48).

de meu pai. E meu pai dependia de mim. Ele, senhor de minha vida e do meu dia, dependia de mim. Eu, pobre criatura aos seus pés. (80)

She therefore understands herself to be a woman upon whom these men depend, to the extent that not only does she take pride in being relied upon, but also this compliancy is the chief characteristic of her identity. Her sense of self is determined by her ability to be reliable for these specific men. Yet in the last line of the passage, she communicates a quiet discontent with her position, an awareness perhaps that she deserved better treatment both from her father and her husband.

Marianismo and the Role of Submission in the Novel

Among the repeated themes in this novel are those of obedience, submission, and sacrifice. In discussing her childhood, the protagonist remembers that there was a time when she ruled her household: “eu reinava sozinha na minha casa. A minha casa. O meu pai. A minha mãe. A minha ama. [...] É verdade que o meu pai havia querido um menino quando eu nasci, em vez de menina” (67). Here she reveals that there was a moment when she reveled in being the only child, the sole recipient of the attention given to her by adults. “*A mulher*” immediately points out, however, the sense that she was unwanted, or rather, that her father’s preference for a son led to the protagonist’s submissive behavior: “*Esta foi a sua primeira sensação de culpa. Por causa desta decepção primordial que você deu a seu pai, você procurou sempre, inútil tentativa, compensá-lo pela perda. A partir daí, você começou a traçar o seu caminho de obediência e submissão*” (67). Her commitment to obedience, therefore, is rooted in her inability to

repent for the unpardonable sin of being born a girl. Almost from the beginning of her life, therefore, she learns to bow to the wishes and desires of everyone surrounding her, rather than her own will. “Eu” writes: “Aceitei que meu pai gostasse mais de meu irmão. Aceitei que meu marido não permitisse que eu saísse sozinha. Aceitei viver disponível para meus três filhos. Aceitei, aceitei, risco e perda, solitário ganho” (24). This passage recalls the moment in the Catholic mass when, during the presentation of the Eucharist, the congregation repeats three times it is its fault that Christ was crucified. In accepting the blame for that act, there is a recognition that redemption and transcendence is achieved through suffering.

The protagonist’s willingness to place the needs of the men in her life before her own recalls the concept of *marianismo*, as introduced by Evelyn P. Stevens in 1973 in her essay entitled “*Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America.*” There she writes that in their aspiration to be like the Virgin Mary, Latin American women gain a great amount of spiritual strength that leads to a kind of superiority over men. This allows for “an infinite capacity for humility and sacrifice. No self-denial is too great for Latin American woman, no limit can be divined to her vast store of patience with the men of her world” (94-95). In fact, according to this line of thought, men must be humored, because “everyone knows that they are *como niños* (like little boys) whose intemperance, foolishness and obstinacy must be forgiven because ‘they can’t help the way they are’” (Stevens 95).

Stevens states that Latin American women have power in their relationships with men, and although those men might act disrespectfully, their wives and mothers understand that they do not have the spiritual fortitude to act correctly. Nowhere in her

study, however, is there any mention of happiness, fulfillment, or contentedness felt by the women she examines. There is no hint at the reality of their emotional lives. In contrast, the protagonist of this novel provides an intimate portrait of the fictionalized reality of one Latin American woman. In describing her family, she says, “Meu marido acha que devo viver exclusivamente, totalmente, exaustivamente para ele. Isso me faz muito feliz. Na opinião de meus filhos, toda mãe tem obrigação de se dedicar de modo absoluto a quem pôs no mundo. Esta é a razão da minha vida” (26). At this point in the text, she does not question whether her husband or her sons have the right to demand that she live for them. Accustomed to a lifetime of service to her father, the protagonist transfers that attention and devotion to her husband without questioning it first. Speaking of her father, she says, “Eu amava o meu pai com o mais profundo amor. Renunciei a tudo por amor a meu pai” (61). She does the same for her family.

Rather than question the pain she may be feeling, she welcomes it into her life: “entreguei mãos e pés aos laços e aos nós que me amarram. Entre os laços e os nós, meu limite de liberdade. Minha escolha, minha liberdade” (26). This reference to being bound recalls the suffering of Christ, to the extent that His followers are supposed to take up His cross. Again, the text presents the notion that there is redemption after suffering. In the same way that God so loved the world that He sacrificed His only Son, the protagonist does the same for her family. She says, “Há momentos em que eu tenho a impressão de que eles estão sugando o meu próprio sangue” (35). Similar to the figure of Christ, the protagonist sacrifices herself.

She expounds upon her idea of love when she says, “Só quem vive profundamente o amor, pode entender as ilimitadas compensações do sacrifício, a alegria

de doer de tanto amor. É por muito amar que eu me divido entre meu marido e meus três filhos. Cada qual me disputando um do outro. Amar é também fazer doer e sangrar” (35). Later she describes her love with images of physical pain: “Os meus cortes, os meus riscos, minhas ranhuras. Meus atos de amor. Meus fatos, minhas fallas. Tudo por amor” (61). The protagonist evokes a form of Catholicism that believes in the spiritual value of physical pain. It is the belief that in suffering like Christ, we will join Him in heaven. She makes clear the extent of her self-abnegation when she says, “Renunciando ao que eu quero, posso viver o que eu quero. Benigno descontar de esarpas. Paz com meu marido e meus filhos” (87). She therefore admits that there is nothing that she herself wants other than whatever the men in her life desire.

Despite her best efforts, however, and in spite of the acts of self-effacement that in her mind have kept her family together, she loses them. Her husband, who has cheated on her from the beginning of their marriage (72-73), leaves her for another woman (95). According to “*a mulher*,” her oldest son is a drug addict, the middle son is a homosexual⁷, and the youngest is an alcoholic (95-96). The protagonist finds herself at a loss; unable to accept that everything that she has done has been to no effect, she at first refuses to accept the situation: “Não gosto de admitir que todo o meu sacrifício tenha sido estéril” (95). Given that she has accustomed herself to look at life in terms of blame, she next tries to identify where she has failed:

Onde está a minha culpa? Sou culpada de ter sacrificado a minha vida para o bem deles? Despojei-me de todas as vontades, despi-me de todo e qualquer pedaço de sonho, abandonei minha pele, não querendo estorvar a passagem de ninguém, me desapossei da minha sombra, para não interceptar a luz de nenhum olhar ao meu

⁷ I personally do not find homosexuality to be a form of degeneracy, however, given the protagonist’s upper middle class background in Brazil, I understand that she would see it as such.

redor, me esbulhei do meu perfil, não interferindo nos rostos que me cercavam, amarrei as mãos sem confundir as coisas dos outros, coleí os dedos para não pegar nada e dizer é meu, dobrei as minhas palavras no fundo do garganta, porque ninguém ouviria de mim o que não desejasse, limitei o meu espaço às linhas que riscam o meu contorno magro, onde está a minha culpa? (97-98)

In this passage, we witness the extent to which she has sacrificed herself for the good of everyone around her. In this moment, she is lost, and cannot comprehend how she has lost the love of her husband and her sons. “*A mulher*” encourages her to leave them behind, to live alone and embrace the changes that are occurring to her (99). Not coincidentally, it is the Saturday before Carnaval; it is from this point in time that she begins to engage in an exploration of her Afro-Brazilian roots in her quest for completion.

Reflections of the Self

Critics often emphasize the mirror motif in this novel, using Lacan’s formulation of the mirror stage in ego formation as a means by which to explicate the text.⁸ According to Lacan, this stage allows a child to establish a relationship between himself and his reality (6). The child recognizes himself in the mirror as the image, and as something distinct from his surroundings. In identifying himself with that reflection, the child is transformed (4). As Safi-Eddine notes: “The mirror reflection, then, serves as the form that in-forms the subject and guides its development.... the ego takes its form from, and in the process is formed by, the organizing and constitutive qualities of this image” (49). Catherine Belsey writes: “The mirror-phase... necessitates a splitting between the *I*

⁸ See Safi-Eddine, Beard, Chaves Terror.

which is perceived and the *I* which does the perceiving. The entry into language necessitates a secondary division which reinforces the first, a split between the *I* of discourse, the subject of the utterance, and the *I* who speaks, the subject of the enunciation” (661). She concludes that implicitly, the subject is “perpetually in the process of construction, thrown into crisis by alterations in language and in the social formation, capable of change. And in the fact that the subject is a *process* lies the possibility of transformation” (661, italics in the original).

Taking their cue from Lacan, both critics agree that subjectivity is in constant modification. In much the same way, Jungian individuation is the process by which “the ego is brought into relationship with the archetypal dynamics of the unconscious. In individuation, the ego is constantly made, unmade and remade by the goal-directed forces of the unconscious” (Rowland 177). The purpose of this process, whereby one is constantly interacting with the archetypes and their images, is to achieve wholeness.

The Varied Images of the Mother Archetype

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, Jung writes that the mother archetype “appears under an almost infinite variety of aspects” (*Archetypes* 81). A person’s interaction with this archetype begins with the relationship with the biological mother, and extends to associations with other women. He then goes on to write that the archetype is also present in mythology in the form of the goddess, as well as in the Mother of God, the Virgin. He writes: “Other symbols of the mother in a figurative sense appear in things representing the goal of our longing for redemption... [as well as] many

things arousing devotion or feelings of awe” (81). One of the greatest misunderstandings of Jung’s writings is his concept of the collective unconscious, the site of all of the archetypes. Feminist and postcolonial critics often charge him with being misogynistic and Eurocentric. Frantz Fanon, for example, writes that the collective unconscious is the “sum of prejudices, myths, collective attitudes of a given group” (188). In her examination of Jung’s writings, Susan Rowland emphasizes that while Jung identifies many archetypes, such as the archetype of mother, he does not define the manifestations of those archetypes. The specific expression of the archetype in terms of imagery depends on the history and culture of each individual (174). It is with this as a foundation that I argue that the *orixás* of *candomblé* are images of the archetypal mother. They are the manifestation of the mother archetype that emerges in Brazilian culture. Beginning with the recovery of memories of her mother and nanny, and then with her relationship with Iansã, Iemanjá, and Oxum, I contend that the protagonist of this novel successfully interacts with the mother archetype, as evidenced by her use of a singular rather than multiple voice at the conclusion of the novel.

The Retrieval of the Silenced Mothers

The first step in this process of integration is the protagonist’s inclusion of the women who raised her in the text of her life. With this act, we see how she interacts with the mother archetype. It is clear that her father was the central figure of his daughter’s life, in that she learned, from her mother, to comply with his every wish and desire. A daughter’s model for femininity is often her mother. This figure, whom Jung calls the

“personal mother” (*Archetypes* 81), is the first representation of the maternal archetype. In this text, the protagonist learns the art of complete self-abnegation, to the extent that she is shocked when she is not as successful as her mother in keeping her family together. In her opinion, her mother always remained calm while managing the lives of her husband and children (32). The protagonist recalls her mother’s mantra: “Minha mãe repetia certas frases. Normas de vida. Em primeiro lugar, o marido, em segundo lugar, o marido, em terceiro, o marido. Depois, os filhos” (31). Later she says, “Aprendi a agir como ajo com minha mãe. Minha mãe viúva, que eu amo e admiro. A sua voz pouca e leve. O seu silêncio denso. O altíssimo silêncio seu” (34). She goes on to assert that her mother was happy, making her life her husband and her children: “Sim, ela era muito feliz. Toda cheirosa, à espera de que meu pai voltasse do trabalho. Ela o esperava” (31). Nowhere in the text is there any indication that she and her mother had an emotionally close relationship. There is no possible way, therefore, that she can know definitively that her mother enjoyed waiting for her father. Indeed, she characterizes her mother primarily by her silence: “Ali, minha mãe se inscrevia, em silêncios e sussurros” (30). Later she says that she remembers her mother mostly by her scent and the quiet noises she made: “Perfumes, silêncios, sussurros. Seu sorriso pequeno. Eu olhava. De longe” (31). The latter comment effectively communicates the distance between them: there is no suggestion that her mother looks back at her, only that the protagonist watches her from afar.

She notes that when her father is not home her mother allows herself the opportunity to sing: “eu a ouvia cantar, em voz baixa, suspiros e olhar perdido. Não eram as músicas do rádio, mas cantigas que só ela sabia e falavam de amor ou de dança, num

salão todo cheio de flores” (31). This is the first intimation that her mother is not simply content living in relative silence, but rather desires something more. Still, a woman speaking or singing about romance is somewhat stereotypical, and the image does not provide the reader any further knowledge of the interior life of the protagonist’s mother. To some extent, the notion that the “eu” voice can only provide such a cliché about her mother underscores the distance between them. The “*mulher*” voice points out that the protagonist in fact did not like her mother, accusing her of being jealous (33), to which she responds: “Na verdade, o relacionamento com minha mãe não se reduz a gostar ou não gostar. Meu pai, grande demais, anulava todos ao seu redor. Senhor e dono. Voz de minha mãe não se deixava ouvir” (33). To this point, and indeed, throughout the novel, the protagonist has already made very clear that her father is the central figure in her life. Here she acknowledges as an adult that her father may have prevented her from knowing her mother in a more intimate way, indeed that her mother did not have the opportunity or the ability to establish a stronger presence in her daughter’s life.

Although her mother says little, she greatly influences her daughter’s sense of womanhood, not only in terms of how to treat her husband and children but also in terms of her ideas of femininity. At eighteen years old, the protagonist is punished for wearing lipstick, and she reasons that her mother does not decorate her face in such a way, therefore she also should not (60). Interestingly, she does not question why her mother does not use “um mínimo de pintura no rosto” (60), that is, whether it was by her own choice or by her father’s dictate. Instead, she cites it as her mistake, her “transgressão” (60). In another instance in which she has infuriated her father, she looks to her mother for protection against her father’s discipline, but instead her mother faints (83) in the face

of her husband's rage. Even with that action, her mother inadvertently teaches her that there is no defense against a man whose will must be obeyed. Her daughter incorporates this lesson until it no longer has a purpose, that is, until the men in her life leave.

One possible reason for the distance between mother and daughter is that the protagonist's mother is not responsible for the primary care of her children. Instead, she depends on her children's nanny to raise them.⁹ It is this woman who provides the protagonist's primary source of mothering, defined by Nancy Chodorow as bearing, socializing and nurturing a child (11). She, then, is the next person who recalls the mother archetype for the protagonist. More than her own personal mother, the nanny represents "all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth..." (*Archetypes* 82). An Afro-Brazilian woman, she has served as caretaker not only for the protagonist but also for her father (6): "minha ama, que era ama de meu irmão e tinha sido ama de meu pai e era filha da ama de meu avô, ela também pertencia àquele universo de leis invioláveis" (28). It is to her nanny that the protagonist runs after her father punishes her. Along with her father, her nanny is a main character in the protagonist's recollections of her childhood. It is telling that amongst her favorite possessions the protagonist has nothing that belongs to her mother, but she has both her nanny's iron and her saints' medals, which she wears on occasion on a silver chain (76-77).

Her nanny introduces the protagonist's to the world of *candomblé*. As Sáenz de Tejada writes: "La actitud negativa del padre de la protagonista de Cunha a reconocer sus orígenes africanos contrasta con la presencia activa de su niñera negra a través de la cual

⁹ In her interview with Szoka, Parente Cunha says, "Another part of my childhood was the unbelievably special nursemaid I had. She was a granddaughter or great-granddaughter of slaves. She was the source of a character in my novel, *Mulher no Espelho*" (48).

tendrá acceso desde su infancia a las tradiciones africanas que más tarde en su madurez le permitirán reencontrar parte de su identidad” (46). The nanny warns against the little boy next door who proclaims himself the personification of Xangô, and speaks about Iemanjá. It is no surprise that the protagonist, feeling lost after her husband’s abandonment and her children’s rejection, returns to that which made her feel safe as a child, namely, memories of her beloved nursemaid.

Woman’s Sexuality

A critical part of the protagonist’s integration is the recognition of her sexuality and the role that her body has played in her life. As a woman from the upper middle class, she does not learn about sex from anyone. Silvana Paternostro writes of her experience with such ignorance: “Not being able to turn to our mothers or to teachers, we turned to no one. We were left alone with our ignorance” (212). The protagonist similarly writes of how as a child, she did not know the meaning of virginity: “Pensava que ser virgem era ser boa como a Virgem Maria. Na minha cabeça, virgindade representava bondade, humildade, delicadeza, altruísmo. Eu me considerava distante desses sentimentos, incompetente para a virtude” (81). “*A mulher*” takes pains to point out how “eu’s” ignorance of the sexual act continued until she was seventeen years old (81), and while she experienced stirrings of her desire, she had no acceptable outlet in that she was not married. Later the protagonist continues: “Eu era uma menina ingênua e sozinha, sem ninguém que me ajudasse a ter coragem de romper o cerco das proibições de meu pai, sem ninguém que me explicasse o que significavam palavras como virgindade, que nem

de longe eu suspeitava o que fosse” (82). Her genuine lack of knowledge regarding her own sexuality underscores the situation in which many young girls find themselves: without encouragement to explore their own bodies, they remain unaware of what brings them pleasure or discomfort until they are with male partners.

Key to this passage is her insistence in mentioning her father in the same breath in which she discusses her virginity. In her text, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (1988), Jessica Benjamin examines the role of the father in the development of his daughter’s sexuality. For Benjamin, a daughter’s turn to her father during the oedipal stage points toward a wish for independence as well as a longing for agency. Indeed, a father often represents the outside world, whereas the mother often corresponds to the private realm, the world of the home (96-100). She proposes that when a child feels his/her own desire, s/he would like it to be recognized by the parent identified as the exciting other, the one who also expresses desire, and this is more likely to be the father (105). The father, meanwhile, withdraws from his daughter because of his inability to identify with her, which leads her back to her mother, thereby sublimating her own desires for independence. This, then, is how Benjamin interprets Freud’s theory of penis envy: it is not a desire for the phallus per se, but rather for the independence the father exhibits.

Benjamin continues: “we know that many girls are left with a lifelong admiration for individuals who get away with their sense of omnipotence intact; and they express their admiration in relationships of overt or unconscious submission. They grow to idealize the man who has what they can never possess – power and desire” (109). Unfortunately for the daughter, her wish to be like her father is problematic. Benjamin

goes on to say: “As long as the mother is not articulated as a sexual agent, identification with the father’s agency and desire will appear fraudulent and stolen; furthermore, it conflicts with the cultural image of women as sexual object and with the girl’s maternal identification” (111). Already we know that the protagonist’s mother, while an object of her daughter’s admiration, is chiefly characterized by her silence. There is little mention of this woman’s emotional life, much less her identity as a sexual being. And while there is some hint that her mother desired romance, (and in fact bore her husband two children) we know nothing about her interior life. Also, there is absolutely nothing that leads the reader to believe that the protagonist’s nanny did anything but serve as caretaker for her father and then his children. She is asexual, the equivalent of the mammy stereotype that exists in the United States. Without the assistance of the two most important women in her life, and with few friends, the protagonist is therefore left to base her idea of sexuality on what her father displays. This in and of itself is problematic. Benjamin concludes: “And once the relationship between father and daughter is sexualized, attachment to him becomes a barrier, rather than an impetus, to the girl’s autonomy” (111-112). There is little she can do, then, but learn about herself, her body, her desires from her husband. The male perspective, therefore, is the dominant source that informs the protagonist’s sense of herself as a sexual being.

Laura J. Beard makes the astute observation that in this novel despite the presence of mirrors, the protagonist remains faceless: “There is no conventional nineteenth-century narrative description of her features, hair and clothing. That classical scene no longer yields signification. The body has lost representability of the self. Parente Cunha rejects the equation of a woman’s physical appearance with her self” (105). While the

protagonist's self is not defined by her body, her spiritual integration is furthered once she has an active relationship with her body, that is, once she no longer denies herself pleasure or feels embarrassment when she enjoys herself. Her involvement with *candomblé*, a religion that eschews the mind/body problem of Catholicism and much of Western thought, promotes this process.

The protagonist therefore believes her body to be something of which she should be ashamed. She admits that she did not separate girlhood from womanhood: “Entre menina e moça, não conseguia dobrar a linha divisória” (53). “*A mulher que me escreve*” reminds her of her views on sex, of how growing up, sex was always something vulgar:

Você põe malícia no que é simples e natural. Para você o sexo sempre foi tabu... você vê no ato sexual um despudor, uma devassidão.[..] Até hoje você baixa os olhos se alguém faz alguma referência, por pequena que seja, a uma simples lua-de-mel, que não precisa necessariamente ser a sua, pois esta você mesma sabe o que significou a nível de sacrifício e violentação dos seus mórbidos escrúpulos. (51)

In the same way, then, that she views herself as a sacrifice, sharing her body with her husband caused her a similar amount of pain. In fact, until the moment that her husband leaves her, the protagonist has not enjoyed her own body.¹⁰ Rather, it has been something that belongs to him. “Eu” provides a vivid portrait of her sexual relationship with her husband: “Quando ele me esmaga na cama, é ao peso do seu corpo obeso e suado que não me vence nem me dói... Ele me entra e me sai, como se não me entrasse nem me saísse” (48). While ideally their sexual life would be one in which husband and wife would get the opportunity to enjoy each other both physically and emotionally, here she focuses only on his physicality. In describing the physical act of penetration, she implies that

¹⁰ In her interview with Szoka, Parente Cunha says, “Sometimes, I’ve lived with an impression of being imprisoned within my body” (49).

there is no difference between when she is present in the moment and when she is not. Rather, their sexual life is solely about his pleasure. Describing her sex life with her husband, she says “Eu simplesmente me assisto, sem espelhos, neutra e vaga, cada vez mais consentida” (48). According to Evelyn P. Stevens, “the ideal [of *marianismo*] dictates not only premarital chastity for all women, but also postnuptial frigidity. ‘Good’ women do not enjoy coitus; they endure it when the duties of matrimony require it” (96). The protagonist articulates her unhappiness when she says: “Meus seios solitários, minhas nádegas vazias de carícias, meu sexo ermo. Em chamas” (48). Rather than accept that she, the “eu” voice, has admitted to something less than happiness, she quickly blames “*a mulher que me escreve,*” thereby denying responsibility for her feelings. She continues to do so until the conclusion of the novel, when the two voices become one.

Early in the text, the protagonist hints at the passionate woman that lies within the woman who tires from attempting to please all of the men in her life. She says that when she dances alone, she can enjoy herself: “No pulso do ritmo, deduzo a minha quota de liberdade, desfruto de uma sensualidade que desconheço, gozo de uma beleza física que me restaura” (47). Alone, she allows herself to experience pleasure, and achieves sexual release without depending on her husband: “entro no chuveiro e deixo a água correr pelo meu corpo satisfeito, após o orgasmo que me concedi” (47).¹¹ Later, she says, “Muitas vezes gosto de me ver nua, sozinha no quarto, nos mistérios do meu corpo que o infinito dos espelhos cruzados me estendem, me prometem, me acenam. Espreito pelas frestas do que me foi negado. Do que me neguei. A minha nudez me atrai, me excita, me assusta”

¹¹ In his *Brazilian Narrative Traditions in a Comparative Context*, Earl E. Fitz writes that Parente Cunha writes firmly in the tradition of Clarice Lispector by “allowing the act of masturbation to function subversively as a sign of female empowerment and self-realization” (146).

(47). At the same time, then, that she fascinates herself, she also scares herself, most probably because she has not yet integrated her sexual self with her conception of wife and mother. Those identities remain separate, her sexuality something that has been disconnected from her.

Yet her body makes its presence known by reminding her that it has its own needs. She says, “Somente pelos espelhos se pronuncia a avidez do meu sexo, relegado à mudez e à ausência” (47). In fact, it appears that her body only has the opportunity to express its demands when she is by herself. Ironically, the recognition that her body has needs can only be possible through the fragmentation she has experienced.¹² Her body, in some sense, becomes the principle of unity in that it brings about healing: it brings her fragmented self together again. It is not something that she has been able to completely repress during her years of marriage; rather it has been ignored, as she has suffered the emotional and psychological assaults of her father, her husband, and three sons. With the reappearance of her body, that is, when she begins to pay attention to her corporeal desires, she also frees herself from the prison of the discourse of Western patriarchal society.

After all of the men in her life leave, “eu” takes a moment to look at herself in her mirrors. Initially she only sees “uma imagem deprimida, o rosto contraído, os ombros encurvados, as mãos caídas, as pernas entreabertas, em busca de mais chão” (113). Once she ascertains that her body is all there, that there is nothing physically missing, she

¹² When I speak about her fragmentation, I am specifically referring to the breaking of her spirit. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Foucault writes that by the eighteenth century, state punishment focused no longer on the body but on the “heart, the thoughts, the will, the inclinations” (16). Later he writes, “the soul is the prison of the body” (30).

begins to laugh. She undresses, and standing there naked in front of her countless mirrors, she says, “Uma sensação boa de liberdade percorre as minhas imagens. Apalpo os meus seios, apalpo o meu sexo. Vivos. Ansiosos. Um sorriso lúbrico surpreende o meu rosto no espelho. Olho fixamente. Sorrio mais no meu sorriso lúbrico e me reconheço. Não, não é a mulher que me escreve... sou eu, eu mesma, sem susto, sem medo” (114). To this point, “*a mulher*” has been the narrative voice that has been bold, challenging the “eu” voice to be more forthright and self-assured. At this moment, however, there is a personality shift, and it is the “eu” voice that asserts itself in the world while “*a mulher*” advises her to be less so.

The protagonist thereafter begins to enjoy her body not only when she is alone but also with men other than her husband. She does so only after coming to the realization that she, in fact, is desirable, which is contrary to what her husband has told her during the course of their marriage. She appreciates that she has

Um belo corpo não jovem, à espera do prazer a que tem direito. As minhas mãos percorrem o meu corpo, de alto a baixo. Detêm-se na nuca e se misturam aos cabelos para soltá-los, livres, sobre os ombros. As minhas mãos descem, contornando os seios, levemente sobre as pontas endurecidas, que somente conheceram as mãos balofas e suadas de um homem. Sinto que haverá um prazer à espera dos meus seios solitários. As minhas mãos descem pela cintura, pelas nádegas, se afundam no sexo, polpa madura e úmida aconchegada ao abrigo de vãos e mergulhos. Agora, finalmente pronta para os vãos e os mergulhos? Sim, eu sou eu... (115)

In touching all the parts of her body previously only touched by her husband, the protagonist reclaims herself. She demonstrates that she is presently concerned primarily with her own pleasure rather than that of someone else. To this point, the protagonist of the text is what Polly Young-Eisendrath calls an “Object of Desire” in that she focuses her energy outward in an effort to satisfy the demands of everyone else. In this way, she

has “no clear self, no clear autonomy and self-determination that are under [her] command” (19). Now, having just discovered her desirability, the protagonist sets out to assess the effect she has on men.

She decides to engage in a sexual relationship with a colleague of her husband’s, whose wife has previously slept with her husband. She speaks of “alegria que nunca suspeitei pudesse existir, alegria plena de ser mulher e me sentir desejada, totalidade na entrega a um homem que não é balofo, nem sua, nem baba no orgasmo. Descoberta do prazer. O prazer natural. O prazer do prazer” (120). Perhaps not surprisingly, the affair ends disastrously. To a great extent, she uses sex as a weapon of vengeance: obviously she is competing with her husband when she has an affair with a friend of his. Her description of him reveals that she enjoys this man not for who he is but for who he is not, namely, he is not her husband. For her, then, at this moment sex is solely about power. While she believes she is demonstrating her strength when she begins this affair, it is apparent that the interaction is an attempt to adjust the power dynamic between herself and all men. She reveals her recognition of this when she says, “eu, a mãe de família exemplar, a filha obediente e abnegada, a esposa casta e cheia de virtudes, eu, a tímida e a pura, a inocente e a ingênua, eu, eu proclamo a legitimidade do prazer praticado por livre vontade e com a pessoa escolhida, independente de vínculos matrimônios” (122). This is, then, her rebellion against the bourgeois mentality with which she has been indoctrinated throughout her life. Still, at the conclusion of the relationship, after she is satisfied sexually, she demands that her lover leave his wife for her, an indication that she may not be as comfortable living outside the realms of “morality” as previously proclaimed. When he refuses, she taunts him about their

spouses' affair, a disclosure that leads the man to try to kill his wife and child. Immediately after, the protagonist shuts down emotionally: “*noto que não sinto absolutamente nada. Apenas sensações... Sinto cansaço. Sinto tédio. Mais nada*” (134). Her first attempt at asserting herself sexually fails because it is mired in her efforts to avenge the pain she has felt throughout her life. She tries to make someone else suffer as she has, only to be left devoid of feeling.

Only when she gets involved with a man who is the personification of Xangô do her sexual interactions with men stop being demonstrations of power. This man does not see her as an extension of anyone else, unlike her other lovers to that point. He instead appreciates her for the woman she is. Her encounter with him begins only after she gets involved with *candomblé*. The sense of fulfillment comes, then, after she becomes better acquainted with herself, as aided by the appearance of the archetypal mother in the form of the *orixás* Iemanjá, Oxum, and Iansã.

The *Orixás*

A critical element of the protagonist's quest for a true self is her reaffirmation and recovery of “*una identidad racial que le[] fue negada o criticada por su sociedad*” (Sáenz de Tejada 46). Parente Cunha situates her work in Salvador, Bahia, the region of Brazil that received the greatest number of African slaves during the four hundred years of the African slave trade. These slaves brought with them their culture: their music, the languages of various tribes, their religions which complemented Catholicism. The result of the inevitable mixture of the Europeans and Africans was that those in power founded

a system of values which allowed a division of peoples based on skin color. As Sáenz de Tejada explains in her article, there was great separation between *mulatos* y blacks until the 1980s (46). Using Richard Jackson's argument about the importance of phenotype, she continues: “[el] fenotipo blanco ... dio lugar a una política racial que consideraba al mulato como un grupo social superior, el cual mediante la asimilación de valores y comportamientos blancos tuvo la oportunidad de ascender en la escala social” (46). In one revealing passage, the protagonist discloses that she and her family fit in this category: “Naquele tempo, na casa de meu pai, era feio se falar, era feio se pensar em candomblé, coisa em que branco não se mete. Mas painho, eu não sou branca, eu sou morena. Cale esta boca, menina” (150). She is not able to recognize and recover her African heritage until the men in her life leave: after Carnaval, when her father has been dead for years and her husbands and sons have left her alone and she has the opportunity to reconsider her place in the world.

The most interesting aspect of this novel is the idea that the recognition of an African heritage allows the protagonist to re-integrate her fragmented self, so that by the end of the work there is no longer a distinction between the various voices but rather one unified voice. Parente Cunha suggests that the European values of patriarchy are destructive to women, who should instead look to the world of the Afro-Brazilian syncretic religion *candomblé*. There, one can find women not only as energies who are worshipped, such as Iansã and Oxum, but also women as priestesses who do not remain quiet and subservient to men. As Sáenz de Tejada points out: “es significativo señalar el papel primordial que ocupa la mujer en estas ceremonias a través de la figura de la ‘mãe-de-santo’ que controla y regula el ritual religioso. Asimismo actúa como la transmisora

de las tradiciones de su cultura” (47). In simply participating in the rituals of this religion, then, the protagonist finds a system of thought that places women in the forefront, in a position of power rather than of submission. Both the religious entities themselves, as well as their female worshippers, therefore recall the mother archetype. All *orixás* have both positive and negative aspects, similar to the archetypes. Jung’s description of the qualities of the mother archetype easily applies to the *orixás* Iemanjá, Iansã and Oxum. Regarding positive aspects, this archetype is associated with “maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; [...] all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magical transformation and rebirth... are presided over by the mother” (*Archetypes* 82). The negative manifestations are as follows: “anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate” (*Archetypes* 82). The protagonist of the novel encounters both aspects when she interacts with her *orixás*.

Throughout the text there are allusions to the *orixás* of *candomblé*. These are archetypal forces that “informa e fornece padrões de temperamento e comportamento” (Barros and Teixeira 112). According to Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, these beings are “neither gods nor deities in the Western sense, [but rather] personified natural forces that interact with human beings” (33). At the end of the first chapter, the protagonist recounts how as a child she would collect the seashells that she would find on the beach. She acknowledges that they belong to a “Mãe d’Água” (22), a reference to Iemanjá, who represents the ocean and of motherhood according to Yoruba religion. This *orixá* is a central figure in the Yoruban pantheon of divinities, not only

because she is the protector of Afro-Brazilian religions but also because she is the quintessence of motherhood (Boff 54). She is the mother of all the other *orixás* herself. For this reason, she is often identified by Brazilians with Nossa Senhora da Conceição, or rather the Virgin Mary. In addition to being the primary figure of motherhood, Iemanjá is also characterized as a protector and a seductress: “[ela] concede saúde física e mental àqueles que se banham nas suas águas lustrais... Iemanjá é fascinante, até sensual e caprichosa” (54). The protagonist writes, “A água me despe de muitos sustos, me limpa de muitas peles mortas, me alivia de muitas máscaras. Por uns momentos que prolongo tanto quanto posso, vivo a minha nudez que se desnuda mais no fluir da água, quanto mais a água me passa, mais me sinto nua” (47). It is the water, and by extrapolation, her interaction with Iemanjá, that awakens her sensuality, and that allows her to revel in her sexuality.

There are repeated mentions throughout the novel of wind, water, lightning and thunder, and mirrors, all of which suggest Iansã, the goddess of winds, storms, and lightning, Iemanjá, Xangô, the god of fire, thunder and lightning, and Oxum, the goddess of love and beauty. As a child the protagonist watches her nanny cover the mirrors during every thunderstorm because they would attract lightning (23). She grows up with the son of the cook in the next house standing outside in the rain and declaring during every storm that he is the king of thunder (23), an allusion to Xangô who, according to João Clodomiro de Carmo, represents all power. “[Ele é] aquele que cria, que está sempre em movimento, aquele que tem o maior senso de justiça, que é capaz de fazer julgamentos acertados, mesmos de causas complicadas” (52). He points out that according to Yoruban myth, while Xangô has many wives, his favorites are Oxum and Iansã (52). This

preference provides one reason for the coupling of the protagonist and her lover at the end of the novel.

It is with this man, a child of Xangô, that she feels whole for the first time. She also only alludes to their lovemaking, rather than describe each detail, as she does with her other lovers. She says, “Eu sei onde estou neste meu estar. Preenchimento e totalidade. Estou aqui. Inteira e múltipla. [...] Me transportou. Me consumou. [...] Inteira e múltipla. Completa” (166). With him, she accepts herself as a multiple being, and in being many, she feels complete. He does not hold any overarching expectations of her; rather, he accepts her as she is. This is, of course, a direct contrast to her attempts at fulfilling her society’s strict definitions of wife and mother. Trying to be perfect leaves her spirit broken; learning about herself, her strengths, her past, and accepting those qualities makes her whole.

de Carmo explains that *candomblé* allows for the discovery that the “eu”, the core of one’s self is the divine (11). He continues: “O caráter da divindade é o seu caráter básico. Falsificá-lo é falsificar a sua vida; não vivenciar a vida de acordo com ele só trará desconforto” (11). He goes on to say that this religion, “se contrapõe aos valores cristãos, massificantes, eliminando a questão da culpa e assumindo quaisquer ‘defeitos’ como meras características de personalidade, permitindo, assim, que as pessoas vivam mais livremente, sem o pesado fardo que o cristianismo tenta impor a elas” (28).

In their article “O Código do Corpo: Inscrições e Marcas dos Orixás,” José Flavio Pessoa de Barros and Maria Lina Leão Teixeira make the important point that in *candomblé*, there is no body/soul split. “...tudo que existe no *aiê*, mundo físico ou natural, também se encontra no *orum*, mundo sobrenatural, e vice-versa” (110). Later

they write that rather than be something of which to be ashamed, the body is as sacred as the soul, and therefore should be kept in balance: “o corpo pode representar no *candomblé* um pólo ou centro de forças opostas que devem estar e ser unidas numa relação de equilíbrio complementar” (115). In fact, a lack of balance is considered a serious malady in that it indicates a loss or lack of *axé*, the life force, a “biological, physical, and spiritual force of creativity and social and political enforcement” (Teresa Washington 13). “[Tem que fazer os ritos da religião para recuperar] o perfeito relacionamento entre o mundo físico ou natural – o corpo – e o mundo dos *orixás*, numa permanente troca ou intercâmbio de *axé*” (Barros and Teixeira 124). *Candomblé*, then, is a system of ideas that represents a radical departure from the rules that have guided the life of the protagonist to this point: this religious system encourages not sacrifice in hopes of attaining everlasting life in the afterlife but wholeness and completion in this life.

After the men in her life leave, she participates in a ritual where she learns the identity of her *orixá*. While in a trance, she discovers she is the daughter of Oxum and Iansã:

Ela pertence a Oxum. Iansã é dona dela. Ela tem de fazer a cabeça. Ela vai morrer, se não quiser ser cavalo de Oxum. Se não quiser ser cavalo de Iansã.¹³ A força das águas. O poder dos ventos e das tempestades. Oxum. Iansã. A graça do passo. O grito do guerra. Oxum. Iansã. Ela sabe a mansidão. Ela espalha os temporais. Os amarelos de ouro. Os vermelhos de sangue. Oxum. Iansã. Ela pertence a Oxum. Iansã é dona dela. Ela vai morrer, se não fizer a cabeça. (164)

With this discovery, the protagonist is able to reconcile those aspects of her personality that do not easily complement each other. Judith Gleason says that the “Orisha mirrors

¹³ “Ser cavalo” literally means “to be the horse of,” and in this religion, it refers to the fact that the *orixás* will mount the initiate during possession and ride them, as if on a horse.

the hidden self” (261). She goes on to say, “In the Jungian mode, various configurations of the unconscious become identified and ‘owned’ so that in becoming a centered whole, the analysand humbly finds herself to be a system of energies over which the willful ego’s control is illusory. It is a transpersonal Self that binds the whole” (261). The ruling Orisha matches this Self. As Cladomiro de Carmo writes, “O candomblé sanciona identidades completas, acabadas e com perfeição. Não é uma religião de pessoas mutiladas” (12). In this way, then, this religious system almost certainly provides greater comfort to the protagonist, who to this point has struggled with being “good” or “bad.” In her memoir, Marta Moreno Vega interviews a practitioner of *santería*¹⁴ who says, “When the *orisha* claims you, it is because you need her *aché* to guide you, protect you, and bring you health. The *orisha* wants you to become a sacred vessel for her powers... The *orishas* let you know what will save you and what will destroy you. Ultimately it is your faith in her guidance that determines your destiny” (152).

Being the child of these specific *orixás* means that the protagonist shares certain traits with them. In his *Handbook of Yoruba Religious Concepts* (1994), Baba Ifa Karade writes that Oxum is known for “unconditional love, receptivity, diplomacy, sensuality, fine artistic development and beauty... She symboli[zes] clarity and flowing motion” (26). About Iansã, he writes that she “is often seen as the deity of death, but upon deeper realization, she is the deity of rebirth as things must die so that new beginnings arise” (27). Vagner Gonçalves da Silva points out that in Brazil, Oxum is identified with Nossa Senhora da Conceição, a manifestation of the Virgin Mary (78). Iansã is the energy who

¹⁴ *Santería* and *candomblé* are both syncretic religious practices that are derived from the Yoruba religion as practiced in Western Africa. The first is the form of this religion initially found in Cuba and later Puerto Rico and the United States, the latter is found predominantly in Brazil.

manifests herself in the winds, lightning rays and storms; she is the second wife of Xangô, and so shares some of his responsibilities. She is also the only *orixá* that interacts with the dead, preparing their clothes so these spirits can speak with their loved ones on Earth (da Silva 79). According to Moreno Vega, Oxum is the “divinity of love, harmony, and community” (104). “Oyá [Iansã] is gracious when happy, but when angered she is as strong as Ogun and Shangó. She is a female warrior who manifests herself in the whirlwind” (107). Judith Gleason writes “Oya is the goddess of edges, of the dynamic interplay between surfaces, of transformation from one state to another” (1).

In his discussion of Iemanjá, Oxum and Iansã, Robert Farris Thompson writes that these three goddesses are “supreme in the arts of mystic retribution and protection against all evil” (74). Naming this power as “witchcraft,” he says that the goddesses use this force to “militate not only total male dominance but the threat of class formation and drastically unequal distribution of wealth” (74). In her memoir *When the Spirits Dance Mambo* (2004), Marta Moreno Vega documents an episode in which Ochun (as Oxum is known within *santería*) tells a woman who has been neglecting herself to pay attention to a promiscuous husband, that she will lose everything because she does not love herself more than her partner. The goddess says, “[She] must respect me, Ochun, the guardian spirit that she carries. I do not allow the abuse of children or women... No love can be greater than her love for me” (54). These *orixás*, therefore, have the capacity to change lives if their children do not respect themselves or worship them in the correct manner. As Joseph M. Murray and Mei-Mei Sanford write in their introduction to their collection of essays about Oxum, she is the “perpetually renewing source of life” who makes a “way out of no way” for her devotees (2). It is she who “controls the outer head and the

inner head, or destiny” (2). Among her symbols is the mirror, because her children are chiefly concerned with beauty and vanity. Finally, referring to the complexities of this *orixá*, they write:

Òsun can be old and young, rich and impoverished, loving and spiteful. At every turn she is something that the devotee does not expect. She cries when she is happy and laughs when she is sad [...] She heals with cool water and destroys life in raging flood. She is a loving mother and a leader of vengeful spirits who can take anyone’s child away. (7)

Once the *orixás* present themselves to the protagonist, it is her responsibility to recognize them and allow them to guide her in her life. Indeed, during the trance, the protagonist learns that she must crown, she must accept the *orixás* as a part of her life, otherwise she will die: “Ela tem de fazer a cabeça. Ela vai morrer, se não quiser ser cavalo de Oxum” (164). These energies do not allow their children to be mistreated by anyone, given that doing so is a sign of disrespect for them. By attempting to placate her youngest son toward the end of the novel, the protagonist of *Mulher no Espelho* ignores her own strengths, unknowingly allowing for tragedy to ensue.

The Necessary Sacrifice

While the protagonist is engaged on her quest for wholeness and fulfillment, her children, who are accustomed to her attention, languish. Her oldest son enters a rehabilitation clinic, her middle child is arrested for attempted murder, and her youngest spends his days drunk (109). While she asks herself if she is to blame for their actions, she accepts that there is very little she could have done to prevent them: “fiz o que pude. Sacrifiquei a minha vida e a minha morte” (109). After years in which she has tried to

make the lives of her husband and children easier, she adopts a tone of resignation. Like herself, her three sons have grown up in an environment of violence, in which their father punished them physically. Unlike the protagonist, however, they rebel; here she realizes that there is little she can do for herself, much less for her sons.

The next instance in which she mentions her sons is after she has regained a sense of herself and her bodily pleasures and after she has begun her love affairs. The protagonist speaks to a lover, demanding that he give her the biggest orgasm that she has ever experienced (140). Her youngest son interrupts, forcing himself into the house, drunk and demanding to know the identity of the man she is entertaining. This is her first confrontation with him; he puts his hands on her and calls her a whore. She tries to assert herself when she screams, “Sinto-me com toda a autoridade, ouviu bem? Sinto-me com toda a autoridade para lhe dizer a verdade. Para lhe dizer que você é um perdido. Cansei de lutar por você. Por você e seus irmãos. Me sacrifiquei. Me imolei. Virei cinza. Agora basta” (142). In attempting to give the impression of power, the protagonist in fact reveals that she does not have any to wield over her son. She seems to believe that there is power in her truth, and that her son will also accept her truth. This may be the first instance in his life in which his mother has not cowed to her husband or to himself, and so he ignores his mother. She continues: “Eu, sua mãe, faço o que quero e não admito que filho meu venha me dizer o que é certo, o que é errado” (142). Her son therefore believes that he has the authority to correct his mother’s behavior, much in the same way as her father or her husband would. She maintains, “E se estou andando com muitos homens, é problema só meu. Você não tem nada a ver com este caso” (142). While this is ideally true, the protagonist does not realize that with this assertion, she challenges everything

her son has learned about the role of men and women in his society. Indeed, it is only men and women of ill repute who avow their right to sexual pleasure.

His response to his mother's newfound confidence is to show her a gun that he has been carrying. The manner in which she deals with him changes completely; her tone moves from one of defiance to one of comfort and soothing: "Não faça bobagem, meu filho. Não. Me dê essa arma. Filhinho, a mamãe está pedindo. Venha cá, meu benzinho" (142). In order to remove the weapon, she finds it necessary to placate him by assuming her previous maternal identity. She humors him, saying that she will introduce him to her guest, thereby effectively removing the possibility that he is in fact her lover. No decent woman would introduce her son to her lover while still married to his father. By taking up a non-threatening presence, the protagonist temporarily mollifies her son.

In the climax of the novel, however, her son reappears, again demanding to enter the house when his mother is present. Though she is alone at the time, she has already begun her affair with the son of Xangô. The protagonist repeats numerous times the following: "O vento que vem do mar. Xangô prepara os seus raios. Oxum fugindo nas águas. Iansã armando a guerra. [...] Oxum. Iansã. [...] Xangô prepara os seus raios. Espero" (169). She therefore fully acknowledges the presence of the *orixás* surrounding her, as she awaits something to occur. She feels "O cansaço. O cansaço corrosivo. A lassidão. O tédio absoluto" (172). Seemingly, this fatigue paralyzes her. As her son demands to be let in, she does not move: "Não tenho forças. Silêncio pegajoso. Uma lassidão me desfibra, me gelatiniza. O tédio absoluto. Silêncio viscoso" (172). Although she recognizes the voice of her son, she also wonders whether he has a gun, whether he will use it against her rather than be dissuaded. In this instance, however, there is no

indication that she would even try to persuade him to give her his weapon. She continues, “Dois homens falando, gritando, brigando. Conheço estas vozes? Vozes cravadas na noite suspense. Tiros riscando a noite. Muitas vozes no silêncio escorregadio. Movimento na rua madrugante. Não me mexo” (173). Next, the protagonist says, “Ligo o radio. Não escuto o que escuto. Morte na madrugada. Jovem tresloucado. Reputação da mãe. Atirou. Fugiu. Encontrado o corpo” (173).

There is very little that makes clear the events of this scene. “*A mulher que me escreve*” provides additional information: “*Seu filho estava desesperado. Os amigos zombaram dele, dizendo que você andava com todos os homens da cidade, brancos e pretos*” (174). She accuses the protagonist, therefore, of putting her son’s reputation in jeopardy by behaving like a whore, indiscriminately having sex with men regardless of their race. “*A mulher*” continues:

Naquele noite ele ia entrar no edifício, quando viu na porta um preto alto, vestido de branco. O menino avançou, fora de si. O preto não conseguiu tomar o revólver e seu filho entrou armado no edifício. Você se recusou a abrir a porta. Ele desceu o elevador e atirou no preto alto vestido de branco. E fugiu. Depois foi encontrado morto. (174)

The tall black man dressed in white is, of course, the son of Xangô. The implication of this version of events is that this man avenges the dishonor that the protagonist suffers by killing her son. There is room for this interpretation; Robert Farris Thompson writes of Shangó that he “[is] an eternal moral presence, rumbling in the clouds, outraged by impure human acts, targeting the homes of adulterers, liars and thieves of destruction” (85). A child of Xangô, therefore, would defend a woman who is identified as being the child of his two favorite wives, Oxum and Iansã.

This last scene is often ignored in examinations of this text.¹⁵ Standing in front of the mirrors again, the protagonist says, “Meu rosto no espelho é o dela. Ela sou eu. Eu sou ela. Ombros envergados. Olhar arriado. O cruzamento eu-com-ela fechou-se no estreito eu-comigo. Somos apenas uma. Somos eu. *Eu*. *EU*. [...] Eu escrevo o que escrevo. *EU*” (175). She points out once again that her shoulders are sagging, as they were earlier in the text when she was beginning to recover from the failure of her marriage. While I would not go so far as to say that she has returned to the woman that she was then, it is obvious to me that once again she does feel like she has failed at something, perhaps in this instance it is in protecting her child. And yet her voices have come together.

In the final paragraph the motifs of the *orixás* reappear: “Lá fora os relâmpagos descarregam seus clarões. Os trovões repentinos reagem ensurdecedores. Os espelhos se devolvem. A tempestade” (175). This description suggests that the death of her son is

¹⁵ There is great disagreement among those critics who do engage in analysis of this scene. In her study *La (re)construcción de la identidad femenina en la narrativa autobiográfica latinoamericana, 1975-1985*, Cristina Sáenz de Tejada argues that the protagonist is punished at the end with the death of her youngest son, that it is some kind of retribution for the attainment of liberation (10). In her study about this work, Elizabeth Ann Stobner writes:

Without an already articulated language to accommodate this new experience of public movement, the protagonist stumbles through the exploration of externally imposed social boundaries. Parente Cunha describes a chilling end to this process of discovery: the death of the protagonist’s son. Such a conclusion graphically demonstrates the omnipresent judgment of society that “punishes” those who challenge a system which understands reality simply as a series of binary oppositions. Parente Cunha’s concluding scenario of violence then serves as a justification for women themselves to appropriate violence also as the only remaining means to challenge the boundaries society has imposed on their movement. (116-17)

I wholeheartedly disagree with both assertions, that the protagonist is punished due to her newfound liberation. Both critics ignore the last few paragraphs of the text, in which suddenly the voices that had previously jostled for the attention of the reader come together as one.

somehow necessary, that these energies have knowledge of this murder. I do not believe that the *orixás* caused it to happen, although there is room for that interpretation. However, it is clear that this death happens for a reason. I would suggest, in fact, that the murder of her youngest son is necessary for the complete reintegration of her psyche. She is not whole until her youngest son dies at the end. For me, it is significant that this is the son who threatens her with a gun earlier in the text, who shows her great disrespect and who tries to assume a stance of authority over her. He is the last remnant of her submissive self. Once he is gone, she asserts, without trepidation, “Sou EU” (175).

Conclusion

In this text, we find the journey of a woman who begins by defining herself in terms defined by her father, her husband, and her sons. After these men leave her, she finds herself in a position where she comprehends that she has the capacity to construct her identity for herself. From the beginning of the novel, she acknowledges that no one knows her true self, that, in fact, it is an impossibility for anyone to truly know anyone: “Por acaso, alguém sabe alguém, carne e grito sob a capa do rosto, ordenado e composto em carapaça?” (17). And while she asserts that she exists only in her imagination (18), she does not know herself at the beginning of the text. In fact, this feeling of unease prompts the writing of her life story. In doing so, the protagonist slowly comes to the realization that she is more than just someone who can be identified by the roles she plays in the lives of the men surrounding her: more than just “daughter of,” “wife of,” “mother of.” Linda Schierse Leonard writes: “Whenever there is a patriarchal authoritarian

attitude which devalues the feminine by reducing it to a number of roles or qualities which come, not from woman's own experience, but from an abstract view of her – there one finds the collective father overpowering the daughter, not allowing her to grow creatively from her own essence” (10). The protagonist has to confront not only the memory of her own biological father, but also the patriarchal society in which she lives. She does so by interacting with the archetypal mother, first by recovering the memories of the women who raised her and placing them in the text, then by engaging in the religious rituals of *candomblé*. There, she learns that she is the daughter of Oxum and Iansã is her mistress. These two energies lead her to begin integrating her disparate selves, those elements of herself that she believes to be objectionable, namely, her sexual desires.

This story is one in which the protagonist travels from being an Object of Desire to being a Subject of Desire, as so named by Polly Young Eisendrath, in that she moves from directing her energy toward satisfying the whims of others (namely the men in her family) to attempting to understand herself better. Young Eisendrath writes: “Being the Subjects of our desires means taking on the challenging, nuanced experience of learning who we are, charting the many layers of our subjective lives, and being accountable for them” (30). Her movement from object to subject of desire is most notable when examining two of her sexual relationships that occur after her husband's departure. In the first, in which she engages in a liaison with a friend of her husband, it is evident that in her experience, sex is an act that has more to do with power than it does emotion. With this encounter, the protagonist tries to reverse a dynamic with which she is thoroughly familiar. She tries to exert power over a man whose wife has engaged in an extramarital

affair with her husband. In the second, with the Afro-Brazilian man who is the personification of Xangô, she learns that it is possible to be fulfilled, whole, and complete within a sexual interaction.

It is her affair with this man that triggers the tragedy that occurs at the end of the novel, with the death of her youngest son. While it is not clear who murders her son, the protagonist's multiple selves accept the blame because they are at first under the impression that her lover kills him. In her past, guilt would have meant a return to submission and obedience because it is the emotion that defined her relationships with her father, her husband, and her sons. The last paragraph of the novel suggests that she will not revert to this behavior; on the contrary, she now has the capacity to move forward. By shattering the mirror Parente Cunha suggests her protagonist no longer needs it as a tool by which she can reassure herself that she exists. Instead the protagonist says, "Olho um rosto inteiro num pedaço de espelho. Um rosto só... Meu rosto. Inteiro. Sou EU. O vento vem da tempestade muita. O vento. E se faz mais brando" (175). Again, we see the repetition of the themes of the storms and the winds. In her darkest moment, then, Iansã is present. The divinity that guides change is at hand. She is no longer fragmented; instead, the archetypal mother will guide her. There exists, therefore, the opportunity to live as a whole woman, one not divided by loyalties to her father or her husband or her sons, but indeed, one who is true to herself, to her own needs and desires.

While the protagonist in this novel subtly interacts with the mother archetype by recovering memories of her biological mother and her nanny, the strongest influence of this archetype is due to her involvement with *candomblé*. In the next chapter, I study a novel in which the protagonist does not look to a religious system in order to gain a sense

of wholeness. Rather, she records the details of the lives of every woman in her family. In doing so, she resolves an estranged relationship with the primary example of the mother archetype, her own biological mother.

CHAPTER III

COMPOSING ONE'S SELF IN *VECINDARIOS EXCÉNTRICOS*

(1999)

In this chapter, I focus on the struggle for individuation that occurs in the mother-daughter relationship in Rosario Ferré's *Vecindarios excéntricos* (1999). The narrator of the novel, Elvira, reaches a sense of separateness from her mother, Clarissa, only after she writes the story of her mother's life. This occurs after Clarissa's death, after Elvira has married, has had children, and has divorced. Elvira records not only her mother's life, but also the personal histories of all of the women of her family, in both her maternal and paternal line. Throughout the text, Elvira represents her mother, Clarissa, as a self-sacrificing, irrational, and diseased woman. She does so because Clarissa is a part of the necessary symbolic matricide, necessary, Ferré suggests, because it is fundamental for Elvira's self-composition. I argue that Elvira interacts with the maternal archetype by transforming her experience with these women, her grandmothers, aunts, and Clarissa herself, into a coherent fictional account. A person's first interaction with this archetype is the woman, or women, who serve in the maternal role: "first in importance are the personal mother and grandmother, stepmother and mother-in-law" (*Archetypes* 81). It is only after she composes the text that Elvira better understands not only her mother but also herself, and thereby more firmly establishes her own identity.

The Narrator's Voice

Vecindarios excéntricos is an autobiographical novel that tells the family history of the narrator, Elvira Vernet. Although it is a sprawling multi-generational story, the protagonist immediately focuses on her relationship with her mother. In the first paragraph, she writes of a local river, el Río Loco, which is unpredictable in that the locals never know when it is going to flood. Within the next few lines she admits that the river always reminded her of her mother, a reminiscence that quickly becomes a thinly veiled critique of her mother's penchant for crying at the breakfast table without warning. She ends the introductory narrative with an account of the effects of the death of her mother. The narrator therefore frames her genealogical study with tales of her mother's seemingly fragile emotional state.¹

Throughout this part of the book, there is little attempt on the part of the narrator, Elvira, to try to portray the interior life of Clarissa. Instead there is only the daughter's view of her mother, and the feelings of anger, resentment, and jealousy that accompany that portrait. The narrator begins the novel remembering her mother's unexpected bouts of crying: "Como al Río Loco, a Clarissa también le daban accesos de llanto en los momentos más inesperados, cuando a su alrededor brillaba el sol y a la familia le iba mejor que nunca. Lloraba cuando llovía allá 'en la altura', en el interior de su cabeza, y

¹ Rosario Ferré writes versions of her books in both English and Spanish. For more about the significance of her translations, as well as of the history of the multiple incarnations of this text, see Trigo, *Remembering Maternal Bodies* 63-89. This novel is autobiographical in that Ferré uses it as a means to "comes to terms with the death of her mother in 1969" (ctd. in Trigo 63). For a discussion about this text as both biography and autobiography, see Hintz. For the purposes of this study, I examine this text as a work of fiction from which we can extrapolate certain conclusions about the mother-daughter relationship in general. I do not intend for this study to be one that seeks to gain further understanding of the personal life of this author.

yo sólo podía observarla en silencio y testimoniar su llanto” (3-4). With these words Elvira Vernet introduces not only her mother but also the contentious relationship they share.

It is critical to note that the protagonist writes this text, her memoir, as an adult. In recalling her college years toward the end of the novel, she mentions that she had recently taken her daughter to visit the school (416). I call attention to this because I find the tone of voice that marks the way she writes about her mother to be remarkable. It continually shifts throughout the text. Within the first lines of the text there is present an undercurrent of resentment that marks the voice of a child. There is no tone of understanding here, as one sometimes acquires upon reaching maturity. Instead, there is the aggrieved prepubescent voice of the daughter: not only does her mother cry for no reason, Elvira, her daughter, is impotent because she can do nothing more than watch.

By the conclusion of the novel, the narrative voice has changed considerably. Whereas it was one of pain and distress, by the end it is one of peace. Elvira writes of a dream in which the local river has once again flooded, only this time she and her mother stay in their car, perfectly still (448). In his analysis of the writings of Rosario Ferré, Benigno Trigo traces the tones of voice that she uses throughout her texts. He suggests that the voice in Ferré’s writings is double, in that there is the tone of both anger and wrath, as well as hopefulness and peace. Writing about the voice that appears in *Papeles de Pandora*, Trigo writes: “It implacably burrows within itself to find and to reveal the core of its wrath, the cause of its internal prohibitions, and the source of its self-inflicted wounds: an ancestral force of essential ambiguity and in-differentiation” (*Remembering* 68). I argue that with the words “ancestral force,” Trigo makes reference to the collective

unconscious, where the maternal archetype exists. Indeed, it is this specific archetype that is concerned with creation and destruction, with both life and death. As Jung writes, “all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility [...] is presided over by the mother” (*Archetypes* 82). He goes on to write that the same archetype resides in the “abyss, the world of the dead” (*Archetypes* 82).

The Significance of Writing

Using Kristeva, Trigo identifies the “force of essential ambiguity” as the abject (68). In *Powers of Horror* (1982), Kristeva writes that abjection is a “composite of judgment and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and drives” (10). She explicitly identifies the maternal with the abject, in that it is interaction with the maternal body that ensures one’s “clean and proper body” (72). She goes on to make the claim that writing emerges from the abject: “On close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to me rooted ... on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so – double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject” (207). In fact, she posits that the writer writes when “possessed by abjection” (208), and does so as an act of “indefinite catharsis” (208). In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), Kristeva writes of how “for man and for woman the loss of the mother is a biological and psychic necessity, the first step on the way to becoming autonomous. Matricide is our vital necessity, the sine-qua-non condition of our individuation...” (27). Elvira composes this text only after the death of her mother, when she has finally lost her.

Trigo identifies this novel as “on the one hand, an example of [Ferré’s] ongoing effort to face and work-through the matricidal impulse at the origin of the process of subject formation...On the other hand, it is also an example of the artifice at the center of her efforts to work through the abject” (84). The focus of this study however is not on Rosario Ferré per se, but on the narrator Elvira. For most of her relationship with her mother, Clarissa, Elvira maintains an emotional distance from her. She does so all the while insisting that she will not be like her mother, she will not follow her mother’s path. In *Of Woman Born* (1976), Adrienne Rich famously states that the relationship between mothers and daughters is the “great unwritten story” (225). Taking the term “matrophobia” from the poet Lynn Sukenick, Rich writes that this is not the “fear of one’s mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one’s mother*” (235, italics in the original). Indeed, she explores the reasons behind feeling both distant from, and close to one’s mother, an ambivalent experience that she finds to be commonplace within this particular relationship.

Rich further comments that it is “easier by far to hate and reject a mother outright than to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her. But where a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there may also be a deep underlying pull toward her, a dread that if one relaxes one’s guard one will identify with her completely” (235). She later continues: “Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers’ bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr” (236). In order to overcome that feeling of being conquered, then, the daughter feels the need to separate herself, to become the Other: “Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap

with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery" (236). Elvira begins this radical surgery by continuously proclaiming a greater fondness for her father than her mother.

In her discussion of the Oedipal complex of girls, Nancy Chodorow writes that a girl sometimes prefers her father to her mother. The preference is as much about the mother as it is about the father:

A girl does generally turn to her father as a primary love object, and does feel hostile and rivalrous to her mother... The turn to the father, however, is embedded in a girl's external relationship to her mother and in relation to her mother as an internal object. It expresses hostility toward her mother; it results from an attempt to win her mother's love; it is a reaction to powerlessness vis à vis maternal omnipotence and to primary identification. Every step of the way a girl develops her relationship with her father while looking back at her mother – to see if her mother is envious, to make sure she is in fact separate, to see if she can in this way win her mother, to see if she is really independent. Her turn to her father is both an attack on her mother and an expression of love for her. (*The Reproduction of Mothering* 126)

Again, we see the ambivalence of the mother-daughter relationship. There is a continual push and pull that defines the interaction. This dynamic may continue until the daughter within the woman successfully establishes her sense of self, has effectively reached individuation. I argue that for women, successful individuation, in the Jungian sense, necessarily means an interaction with the maternal archetype. For Elvira, it is the act of writing that facilitates this interaction.

In her article, "Mothers, Displacement, and Language," Bella Brodzki writes:

Emblematic of the way language itself obscures and reveals, withholds and endows, prohibits and sanctions, the mother in [the] text hovers from within and without. Still powerful and now inaccessible (literally and figuratively), she is the pre-text for the daughter's autobiographical project. Indeed, these autobiographical narratives are generated out of a compelling need to enter into discourse with the absent or distant mother [...] Classically, the autobiographical project symbolizes the search for origins, for women a search for maternal origins

and that elusive part of the self that is coextensive with the birth of language” (157).

In this text, Elvira represents Clarissa as abject, that is, Clarissa is someone that inspires both fear and longing. Writing this text allows Elvira to explore her own identity, her sense of herself. It is necessary that she engage with the memory of her mother in order to more firmly establish that sense of self. In writing, Elvira has the opportunity to create herself. She therefore engages directly with the mother archetype, in that for her, writing is that which “cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth...” (*Archetypes* 82). Within her own text, Elvira finds a place of “magical transformation and rebirth” (*Archetypes* 82).

The Multiple Rivers

Both Freud and Jung identify water as a signifier for the unconscious, and yet Jung goes on to associate both water and the unconscious with the maternal archetype. He writes: “The maternal aspect of water coincides with the nature of the unconscious, because the latter [...] can be regarded as the mother or matrix of consciousness. Hence the unconscious [...] has the same maternal significance of water” (*Symbols* 219). About water itself, Jung writes: “All living things rise, like the sun, from water, and sink into it again at evening. Born of springs, rivers, lakes, and seas, man at death comes to the waters of the Styx ... those black waters of death are the water of life, for death with its cold embrace is the maternal womb” (218).

There are multiple references to water in this text; I read several of these instances as signifying interaction with the maternal archetype. As I have noted, Ferré begins and ends the novel with references to a local river, the Río Loco. Toward the end of the novel,

Elvira recounts a story, “La huérfana del río,” that illuminates her feelings about her relationship with her mother:

... la madre de una niña se suicidaba tirándose al agua. La hija iba todos los días a la ribera y se quedaba mirando el agua, esperando por si a lo mejor su mamá regresaba. La niña solo veía su reflejo, pero según fue pasando el tiempo se parecía más y más a su madre. Un día se convenció de que su madre estaba de vuelta y la contemplaba desde el fondo del agua. Le extendió la mano para ayudarla a subir a la orilla, perdió el equilibrio, cayó al río y se ahogó. (431-432)

There are several notable features to this story. First, it is the story of a daughter, not of the mother. Unlike many tales of mother-daughter separation in which it is common that the daughter leaves the mother, here the mother leaves the daughter. There is no explanation as to why the mother would end her own life, no mention of the circumstances of her life that would lead her to commit this deed. Given that there is no idea as to the reason behind this action, the mother’s suicide appears as selfish. If she had a daughter as obviously devoted to her as this daughter is, then how could the mother possibly kill herself. The implication is that there is no justification for such an act. The result is that the daughter is left behind, constantly longing for the return of her mother, who is forever lost to her. It is significant that she loses her own life while trying to facilitate her mother’s return. In the end, then, they are both lost.

By including this story in the text, Elvira unambiguously reveals that she longs for her mother. She also shows an awareness that Clarissa exists not only as her mother but also as a woman in her own right. She says, “me dio terror aquel cuento, pensé que a mí me podía pasar lo mismo. Mamá necesitaba ayuda, y yo también” (432). While she does not speculate as to the type of help that her mother needs, or even what she can provide for her mother, it is important that this is the moment when Elvira begins to view her

mother as a woman, one with her own demons, and one that Elvira begins to portray more sympathetically.

Water is a signifier of the maternal; as Jung writes, “from water comes life” (218). Elvira explicitly links her mother with a local river to both begin and end this narrative. She also recalls the story of the river orphan at the moment when she is beginning to realize that her mother does have affection for her. Unfortunately, this awareness comes after years in which she has vilified her mother. Elvira notes: “nuestras discrepancias venían desde lejos, que mi corazón se había vuelto de piedra” (431). Once again Elvira vividly demonstrates the simultaneous fear of and longing for her mother. Jung writes: “the unconscious, when interpreted on the subjective level, has the same maternal significance of water” (219). In associating her mother with water, I argue that Elvira perhaps unknowingly reveals the extent to which she is attempting to understand herself, and to more firmly establish her self. Her effort to comprehend herself necessarily begins and ends with her portrait of her mother.

Clarissa

The Rebellious Daughter

Clarissa Rivas de Santillana is born the oldest of six children, five girls and one boy, in a traditional *hacendado* family. Born on the sixth of January 1901, her parents initially name their first child “Milagros,” in honor of Three Kings Day. The narrator writes, “Mi abuelo, Álvaro Rivas de Santillana, estaba convencido de que los Reyes Magos se la habían traído como obsequio, pero abuela Valeria decía que Clarissa había

nacido por culpa de las lluvias” (9). Clarissa’s mother looks for a straightforward reason for the birth of their daughter: the narrator reports that her grandfather got bored during the rainy season (10), hence their resulting six children. Her father, meanwhile, sees their oldest child as a gift from God, on par with the three gifts offered by the Wise Men to the infant Jesus. In so doing, he conveys an affection for this child that his wife does not share.

During her first year of life, Clarissa has an estranged relationship with her mother Valeria, who leaves the raising of her child to Miña.² It is this woman who nurses Clarissa and who tends to her in her first years of life (118). Valeria unwittingly initiates a bond between her daughter and the nanny that cannot be maintained. The narrator notes: “la niña estaba tan acostumbrada a andar pegada a Miña que nadie más podía acercársela sin que abriera la boca a lloriquear” (118). Knowing Miña as her only caregiver, the infant thrives under her care, resulting in a bond that excludes Valeria, who realizes that her daughter does not recognize her as her mother (118). After dismissing Miña, Valeria attempts to care for her daughter herself, only for Clarissa to refuse to eat or drink anything offered by her mother, who chooses to let her suffer. While Álvaro abhors allowing his firstborn to cry until exhaustion, Valeria explains, “Si se acostumbran al sacrificio de pequeños, sufrirán menos de grandes” (119). The theme of sacrifice pervades the novel: throughout the presentation of this family, it is normally the women of both the narrator’s maternal and paternal lines that must compromise, change, or

² Clarissa’s interaction with the maternal archetype occurs not only through her relationship with her mother, Valeria, but also through her relationship with her nursemaid, Miña.

forfeit their dreams in order to accommodate society's definition of proper womanhood. Clarissa and Elvira are no exceptions.

Though Álvaro rehires Miña to care for Clarissa, Valeria instructs her to ignore their daughter, perhaps in an additional effort to assist Clarissa in distinguishing mother from maid. The narrator writes that this action harms Clarissa in that it made it difficult for her to love people (122). In essence, rejected by her first mother figure, and alienated from her biological mother, it is little wonder that Clarissa struggles for intimacy with Valeria, her mother, as well as with Elvira, her daughter. However painful, this emotional estrangement from her mother allows Clarissa to develop her own personality, her own opinions. When Valeria encourages all of her daughters to go to university in the belief that they will have an easier time finding a husband, Clarissa responds, “Quiero ir a la universidad para estudiar, Mamá, no para encontrar marido. Cuando me gradúe quiero ser tan libre como el viento. No me gustaría tener a un hombre revoloteando a mi alrededor como un zángano” (146). Clarissa views marriage as an impediment, something that hinders a woman from becoming her truest self, at a historical moment when there are few options for women. Interestingly, Clarissa wants to become something ephemeral. It is her father who introduces her to this concept. Looking at the bay, holding his child in his arms, he asks her, “¿Viste qué lindos barcos? Parecen golondrinas, libres como el viento. Un día serás como ellos y podrás ir a donde te dé la gana” (120). For her, the image of the wind best captures her notion of independence and autonomy. Implicitly, marriage therefore takes on the characteristics of the converse, that is, obligation, duty, and responsibilities no longer to yourself but to another person. The narrator later writes that from Clarissa's point of view, “la educación de la mujer era necesaria porque era el

primer paso hacia su independencia económica” (148). If a woman was educated enough, in Clarissa’s opinion, she would be able to survive on her own (148), to live her life as she pleases.

Clarissa graduates from the University of Puerto Rico as valedictorian, having majored in agronomy in her desire to assist in the administration of the family’s holdings. While her sisters leave their university studies to marry, she is the only one, besides her brother, to successfully complete her studies. Unlike her sisters, Clarissa thrives on being surrounded by the island’s intelligentsia: “Su corazón palpitaba más rápido al pensar que ahora formaba parte de una élite intelectual y que a su alrededor se encontraban los futuros médicos, jueces, ingenieros, economistas e historiadores que dirigían el destino de la isla” (147). While she aspires to have a career, the narrator points out that “las mujeres educadas y de buena familia casi nunca encontraban trabajo. En realidad, el matrimonio era la única profesión que tenían abierta entonces” (148). She soon finds that her education is not enough to sustain her when, after her father’s death, her mother punishes Clarissa by ending her financial support: in making a critical business decision, Clarissa goes against her brother, who is by then in charge of the family’s holdings and who, not surprisingly, is her mother’s favorite child. She instead chooses to follow the advice of one of her brothers-in-law.

As a woman of the landed gentry, she has been raised to expect to have whatever she desires. Without her family’s finances, Clarissa becomes a public high school teacher, eking out a living. She soon learns that while education does assist in the ability to live independently, it does not provide the same financial reward for women as it does for men. Her teaching allows Clarissa to maintain a safe distance from her mother and her

brother, with whom she had been feuding: “Era la única manera de ganar algún dinero y de independizarme de Valeria y Alejandro, al menos parcialmente” (168). As a woman of the upper class, Clarissa should not have had to work. However, due to the combined effect of her father’s death and her mother’s decision to withhold financial assistance, employment becomes a necessity. Without the protection of her father, Clarissa is left to survive by herself. There were few options for a woman who decided to live completely unattached from a man in the traditional Puerto Rican society of the 1920s. Like many, she resolves to leave her father’s house for that of her husband. Within a week of her father’s death, Clarissa reconsiders her position on marriage. In an effort to break away from her mother, she decides to marry her suitor, Aurelio Vernet.

Sadly, Valeria’s decision to end Clarissa’s allowance comes soon after the moment that they have grown closer. Before his death, Álvaro’s mental state had degenerated to the extent that doctors had advised her to admit him into an asylum. Valeria decides to go against their counsel, choosing to care for him with Clarissa’s assistance. She later tells her daughter Elvira, “Ahí empecé a admirarla por primera vez en la vida. Mamá era una mujer increíblemente fuerte; hizo todo lo que pudo por mantener secreta su condición, para que los vecinos no enteraran. Álvaro era su marido en las buenas y en las malas, dijo, y jamás se separaría de él” (155). Striking about this passage is Clarissa’s admission that to this point, she had not thought highly of her mother. According to the chronology of the narrative, Clarissa is already in her late twenties at this moment. While the narrator (Elvira) focuses her story on the tense relationship she herself has with her mother, Clarissa, she chooses to include few moments in which it is evident that Clarissa had little rapport with her own mother,

Valeria. Elvira spends little time delving into the possibility that these women were doing the best they could, given their resources. Valeria herself grows up without a mother: this unnamed woman dies giving birth to her (12). The narrator writes, “por eso a menudo [su padre] era cruel con Valeria, como si quisiera hacerle pagar por aquella muerte. Si la niña no hubiese nacido, se repetía en las noches cuando no lograba conciliar el sueño, su mujer todavía estaría viva y él no estaría tan solo” (12). The narrator’s maternal line, therefore, is replete with women who do not feel nurtured by their mothers, the result of which is the repetition of that behavior in another generation.

The Sacrificed Mother

Emotionally and psychologically separate from her mother at the time of her wedding, Clarissa intuitively knows that she may not be able to sustain such independence within her marriage. She describes the emotions she felt the night before the wedding to the narrator: “me sentía como el soldado que vela sus armas la noche antes de la batalla” (177). Still, her misgivings about matrimony last until the very morning of her wedding. Importantly, she turns to Miña for comfort, rather than her own mother, an act that is indicative of the influence Miña continued to exert in her life. Clarissa chooses to have her wedding in the garden of her family home because she wants to spend her last moments of happiness in the paradise she was abandoning (176). This image recalls the flight out of the garden of Adam and Eve, with one significant difference: while they were exiled as punishment, Clarissa recognizes that she is leaving voluntarily. It is noteworthy that she labels her impending marriage as an act of abandonment. She recognizes that, like Adam and Eve, her life of innocence is at an end.

She comments that her wedding dress gives off a brilliance similar to that of a soul in pain (177). She compares the words of advice that she receives from her father and her sister: while her father assured her that as an adult she would be able to live as free as the wind, her sister promises her that love would solve all her problems (177). Though both assurances are grandiose in scope, neither takes into account the day-to-day life of this woman, and therefore do not apply to her situation. Having witnessed her own parents' marriage, and those of the parents of friends, Clarissa has some idea as to what marriage entails, whereas the text gives no sense that she could have lived a truly independent life at this moment in her life. With her marriage to Aurelio, Clarissa becomes a traditional wife, in that almost instantly her husband becomes the center of her life (178).

Still, at the beginning of their marriage, Clarissa believes that she will be able to maintain some sense of freedom as a married woman. When she expresses to her husband her desire to work, however, he rejects it completely. When he asks her why she would want to do so, Clarissa responds, "Porque quiero respetarme a mí misma, quiero sentirme orgullosa de lo que puedo hacer" (321). Aurelio ignores the way in which his wife articulates her sense of self, or better said, her lack of self. He is raised by a man who believes "un hombre sin una carrera no vale nada... Pero una mujer puede casarse con un profesional, y ayudarlo a tener éxito en la vida" (252). From his point of view, being his wife should bring enough pride to her life because she plays a role in his success. Aurelio says "el orgullo debería centrarse en el ser y no en el hacer" (321). Implicitly, he states that pride comes from being a whole self and not from doing. From her perspective, however, being his wife is the same as being an appendage. Clarissa desires to be proud of her identity not as an auxiliary – wife of, mother of, sister of, daughter of – but in her

own right. In articulating a desire to work, there is the implication that Clarissa is stepping away from her role as wife, instead aspiring to be more like a man, an idea unacceptable to her husband.

In working, Clarissa could potentially facilitate the perception that Aurelio was unable to provide for his family. Rather than displease him, she abides by his wishes: “vivió completamente dedicada a su familia y a su jardín, y eventualmente perdió el contacto con el mundo al otro lado de la muralla” (322). Clarissa’s decision to channel all of her energy into the creation of her garden recalls Alice Walker’s essay “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens,” in which she discusses how, with limited opportunities to express themselves, black women have had to channel their creative energies to the cultivation of beauty in other ways. She writes: “For these grandmothers and mother of ours were not Saints, but Artists; driven to a numb and bleeding madness by the springs of creativity in them for which there was no release” (233). About her own mother, Walker writes that when she is working in her flowers “she is radiant, almost to the point of being invisible – except as Creator: hand and eye. She is involved in work her soul must have. Ordering the universe in the image of her personal conception of Beauty” (241). For Clarissa, her garden is a similar recourse. She is able to be the designer of her own enterprise, and she has complete control over her own venture. It is there that she can escape the demands of her marriage.

More than anything, Clarissa loses her sense of self when seen not in her own right but as a relational being: “Yo ya no soy Clarissa Rivas de Santillana, la que por un corto tiempo supervisó la siembra de los terrenos de la Plata y estuvo a la cabeza de negocio de su familia. Me convertí en el apoyo de Aurelio, en su bálsamo, su refugio.

Vivo como la luna, del reflejo de los éxitos de mi marido” (295). Clarissa therefore feels that while she lived in her father’s house, she was confident in herself and her abilities. Upon becoming a wife, she loses that self-assurance because her husband no longer allows the development of those talents. Most threatening to her was Aurelio’s involvement in politics, something that takes him away from his family. Clarissa thereafter sees politics as her rival: “La política es tan acaparadora como una mujer hermosa, y yo vivo aterrada de que me quite a mi marido” (295). While she understands that her husband may have the best intentions regarding his involvement in public life, Clarissa confesses, “últimamente le he cogido resentimiento. Me sacrifiqué por él. Mis estudios de agronomía e historia al fin y al cabo se esfumaron, tal y como me anticipó Valeria” (295). She remembers her own mother’s view about education, that it served only as a means by which to secure a good husband. Clarissa believed her university studies to be an asset to her landowning family, only to discover that they would be of no use after the death of her father. Her admission that she surrenders her self for the sake of her husband is significant because the act of recognition conveys a certain amount of complicity. While she resents her husband, it is clear that she feels that self-abnegation is a requirement for a successful marriage.

Clarissa also recognizes that politics represents yet another threat to her selfhood. When he becomes a public figure, Aurelio brings his family into the spotlight. Clarissa knows that “ella ya no se pertenecería a sí misma. Perdería su anonimato y tendría que aguantar el metimiento de la gente en su vida privada. Su espíritu se quedaría atrapado dentro de la urna de votos... A pesar de sentirse así, Clarissa siempre le dio a Aurelio su apoyo absoluto” (298). While she knows that her husband’s involvement in political life

will damage her ability to function in the world, she also understands that her responsibilities as a dutiful wife require her to lend her unconditional support to Aurelio's aspirations. Later, the narrator writes that "Mamá idolatraba a Papá" (323). Doing so means that she places him above all else in her life, focusing all of her energy on him. Still, Clarissa tries to cling to her anonymity for as long as she can. Her desire for privacy gives her daughter the opportunity to try to replace her as her father's companion on the campaign trails. Whereas Clarissa admits to viewing politics as a rival, she does not anticipate her daughter being one also.

Elvira

Though their relationship is marked by tension and silence until after Clarissa's death, Clarissa and Elvira lead surprisingly similar lives. Mother and daughter share the same desires in their youths. Both wanted to be educated independent women; both said they would not marry because they would not be able to find men as good as their fathers; both are appendages of their fathers; and both consequently sacrifice their independent selves in the name of marriage, fulfilling the expectations of their social class as quiet, unassuming wives who promptly provide children in order to fulfill what they take to be their responsibilities as wife. Most tellingly, both have difficult relationships with their mothers, the effect of which is that both women have little interaction with the mother archetype, that which "cherishes and sustains" (*Archetypes* 82). Like her mother before her, Elvira declares outright as a child that she would rather be anything than be like her mother (321).

Yet there is evidence throughout the novel that Elvira is both repulsed by, and yet longs for her mother. Elvira writes of finding a scrapbook commemorating her sibling's birth. Clarissa enters copious details about his first months of life, including his first steps and his first words (315). Alongside it she finds a small box with his birth and baptismal certificates, his first report card, and other keepsakes of his first few years of life (316). The narrator writes, "Yo no había visto nunca un libro igual. Al pasar, las páginas no hacían ruido, y si se ensuciaban se podían lavar con jabón y quedaban como nuevas. Era blando y suave como una almohadita, y uno se lo podía llevar a la cama y ponerlo bajo la cabeza En seguida me enamoré de él" (316). In taking care to include the sensual experience of touching the book, the narrator conveys her appreciation for the beauty of such a text, as well as an admiration for the carefulness and attention to detail it takes to record these moments.

Upon learning that there exists a similar book about her own birth, Elvira is excited, only to be severely disappointed. "Después de tres o cuatro apuntes – el hospital donde había nacido, el día y la hora --, el resto del libro estaba en blanco. No había nada escrito; hasta olía Nuevo. Me sentí como si me hubiera caído del pico de la cigüeña y me precipitara al vacío" (316). The failure to document the important instances of Elvira's life may simply be attributed to the fact that often the novelty of having a child exists only with the firstborn. Still, this daughter once again blames her mother. After badgering Clarissa for details of her childhood, Elvira fills her own scrapbook so that it resembles her brother's. She writes, "Fue la primera vez que me di a luz a mí misma" (317). Writing about the image of a woman giving birth to herself, Norma Alarcón writes that "the daughter has no choice but to be her own mother, to provide her own supportive,

nurturing base for physical and psychic survival.. [She] has no alternative, even though she would have wanted more options, but to first love the self and then proceed to regenerate and nurture it by becoming her own mother” (184). Elvira unambiguously states that she fears becoming her mother. Yet behind that fear exists an obvious identification with her mother, Clarissa. Although it is clear that Elvira longs for her mother’s love, she herself does not reach this conclusion until her mother is on her deathbed. She instead continues her criticism of her mother and her preference for her father.

In point of fact, contrary to her claim that the act of rewriting her scrapbook is the first time she created herself, the narrator has by this point already included a re-visioning of her birth. Speaking about her father’s piano, she writes of her astonishment that it was imported from Europe to Puerto Rico on the *Hindenburg*. She writes, “me imaginaba acurrucada en su vientre mientras flotábamos por encima del Atlántico, y quizá por eso cuando Papá tocaba el piano, me encantaba esconderme debajo de la cola y dormirme arrullada por su música” (304). Here she envisions her father giving birth to her, rather than her mother, thereby circumventing her mother’s involvement in her origin.

Though Elvira strenuously denies her mother’s influence on her life, she continues to use Clarissa as a point of comparison. For example she vows to behave differently from her mother: “juré que yo no iba a ser como Clarissa; yo no me iba a sacrificar” (427). Yet that is exactly what she goes on to do. When she expresses an interest in continuing her education, this time a doctorate in English literature at Harvard-Radcliffe, her mother urges her to return home. Clarissa does not understand her daughter’s desire to examine literature, saying: “si nos dijeras que quieres estudiar algo

práctico, como contabilidad, enfermería o hasta agronomía, te daríamos permiso. Pero separarte otra vez de nosotros e irte a vivir tan lejos para estudiar literatura cuando puedes leer todos los libros que quieras en la biblioteca de tu padre no me parece sensato” (431). Once again, Clarissa is not able to look beyond herself and see the wishes of her child. She cites her own interests as the only fields that Elvira can pursue. Another important part of this passage has to do with the comparison that Clarissa establishes: whereas hers is the world of nature, as made evident by her love of gardening as well as the fact that she comes from a landowning family, Aurelio’s world is that of books, of the written word. Clarissa identifies the library in the house as his, thereby acknowledging that she recognizes the importance of her husband on her daughter’s life. In trying to carry on her studies in literature, Elvira demonstrates her father’s influence on her life.

Her mother continues to try to dissuade her from pursuing a doctorate by saying: “Hace ocho años que te fuiste de casa, Elvirita. Sería bueno que pasáramos un tiempo juntas” (431). The use of the diminutive indicates intimacy and love. For the first time, it occurs to Elvira that her mother may have missed her: “Mamá lo dijo con cariño, me di cuenta de que le hacía falta.” This is the first moment in which Elvira records that her mother may have had warm feelings for her. It is notable that Clarissa tries to appeal to her daughter’s desire to spend time together only with her, not with both her and Aurelio, as evident by the word “juntas.” She most likely sees Elvira’s life being confined to the house, as hers has been. Their history of battles prevents Elvira from being persuaded to return home: “nuestras discrepancias venían desde tan lejos, que mi corazón se había vuelto de piedra. Clarissa no me daba ninguna pena” (431).

Rather than allow herself to believe that her mother may truly care for her, Elvira decides to escape her mother, marrying a man who doesn't let her work. She notes: "quería una esposa que le diera hijos y cuidara de su hogar, con quien disfrutar legalmente de la relaciones sexuales. No tenía ni pizca de intelectual. Yo estaba de acuerdo con lo del sexo, pero no estaba segura en cuanto a lo demás. Me guardé mis opiniones, sin embargo, y me hice la que respondía a su ideal mujer" (430). In seeking an example to emulate, Elvira looks no further than her own mother. She says, "Para atrapar a Ricardo yo había simulado parecerme a Mamá, una esposa conforme, sumisa, que sabía cuál era su lugar en el mundo" (433-434). Ironically, in attempting to gain independence and live an adult life, Elvira repeats her mother's actions. Like Clarissa before her, who marries Aurelio to escape her family, Elvira marries Ricardo without loving him (432): "era sencillamente mi puerta de escape del infierno de Mamá" (432). Prevented from living on her own, she therefore moves from her father's house to that of her husband. She admits to a desire for some type of direction in her life, but she recognizes that her marriage would not allow her to pursue this goal: "Mi vida no tenía propósito, pero junto a Ricardo a lo mejor me evaporaba de la faz de la tierra y entonces qué más daba" (430). While Elvira obviously views marriage to Ricardo as a threat to her selfhood, it is the compromise she makes in order to flee the overwhelming need for rescue that her mother feels. Identified as her father's daughter, she is now willing to be defined by the identity of her husband.

Within a year, she begins to realize that she has made a mistake in that her husband is an irrational and violent man (434). Still, her marriage lasts for nine years, during which time she feels that her husband has taken advantage of her. She writes,

“Tenía treinta años, mi respeto propio estaba en añicos, y no podía sentirme orgullosa de ningún logro. Para colmo, estaba casada con un hombre que odiaba y temía” (435). Once again, like her own mother before her, Elvira reaches a point of dissatisfaction with her life. Aside from being an extension of her husband, she has very little in which she can take pride. Moreover, she makes the point that while she strains to manage her ambitions, her children and her marriage (435), those struggles are not evident to the public. She notes, “ante los ojos de la sociedad, yo era la esposa perfecta” (435). Elvira presents the fact that she has three children in passing, which only reinforces the notion that this is the narrative of a daughter, not of the mother. We hear nothing about her experiences raising her children, whether or not she enjoys this part of her life. Her own voice as a mother remains silent. Perhaps because she has not yet found reconciliation with her mother, Elvira can only represent her own voice as that of the daughter. This silence represents yet another attempt to distance herself from a maternal discourse. The girl who vowed to her mother that she would have a profession when she was an adult, anything other than being a housewife (321), grows up to follow her mother’s footsteps almost exactly.

Mother’s Illness

As Aurelio becomes more involved in politics, Clarissa begins to suffer physically. When he campaigns for the governorship of the island, she is confined to her bed. Within two years of his winning the position, she dies of a cerebral hemorrhage. Only when Clarissa is dying do mother and daughter confront their similarities. Until that moment, Elvira has reveled in being her father’s daughter, in being a Vernet. She has

supported his political ambitions, going so far as to accompany him to political rallies. It is at this point that she questions her mother's decision to support her husband: "¿Por qué no te opusiste a que Papá se postulara? ¿No te dabas cuenta del daño que me hacía? ¿Qué nos hacía? ¿Por qué siempre te quedaste callada, sacrificando lo que de veras te importaba?" (440, italics in the original). Adrienne Rich writes that "the daughter's rage at her mother is more likely to arise from her mother having relegated her to second-class status, while looking to the son (or father) for the fulfillment of her own thwarted needs" (244). With her interrogation, Elvira reveals her frustration with the model of wifedom that her mother has provided. In response to her daughter's questions, Clarissa repeats something that she may have told herself over the years: "Es imprescindible que los hombres cumplan con su destino" (440). Clarissa has learned, and has taught her daughter, that in order to be a "good" woman, she must forsake her self, caring for others in the process. Only a "bad" woman would renounce her obligations to others in the name of fulfilling her goals. Elvira wholeheartedly disagrees with this position. She makes known her desire to end her marriage, only to be met with her mother's disapproval: "Ninguna Rivas de Santillana se ha divorciado...Si te divorcias los fantasmas de la familia te perseguirán y te empujarán escaleras abajo, o te arrollarán bajo las ruedas de un automóvil. Tus tías y tíos se pondrán furiosos. La familia entera te rechazará" (438). The final scene of the novel, in which Elvira dreams of herself and her mother safely navigating the flooding Río Loco, provides another counterargument to Clarissa's threats. Elvira and Clarissa are in the family car, whereas her aunts are caught in the current of the flooding river, desperately trying to swim against the tide (448). Elvira notes: "Y mientras nos alejábamos de allí todavía oía las voces de quiénes ya no podía ver, pero

cuyas historias, estaba segura, no habían sido un sueño” (448). Elvira here makes known that she has heard the voices of her family members; by composing this text, Elvira is making those voices known. All of her aunts are women who seek nurture and love from various sources, only to be frustrated in their attempts. In a certain way, Clarissa’s admonition comes true: Elvira has heard about her aunts’ lives, and treats them as a cautionary tale. Elvira resolves that she needs to be truthful to herself, thereby avoiding the mistakes her aunts and her mother make. Still, Clarissa’s warnings may represent the rationalizations that have kept her in her marriage. To be sure, there is nothing more upsetting to this woman than her family’s disapproval. Having experienced it once in her youth in the months after her father’s death, Clarissa may be trying to prevent her daughter from repeating her error.

It is at this critical moment that Elvira protests her disagreement with the assertion that her duty is to stay within her marriage. She cries out: “Tú nunca me quisiste, Mamá. Por eso siempre me recordabas lo mucho que me parecía a Papá” (440). With this statement, Elvira calls into question the veracity of the preceding narrative. Until now, she has positioned herself as her mother’s rival, the one who loved Aurelio more. Unexpectedly, it appears that her actions were more a call for her mother’s attention than they were about love for her father. Clarissa immediately recognizes the magnitude of their exchange. She moves the plastic that covers her bed and begins to rock her daughter, as if she were a child again. She then tells her, “Yo te decía que te parecías a tu padre porque a ti te encantaba que te lo dijeran. Pero tú siempre te has parecido a mí. Y yo te quiero muchísimo” (440). With that one statement, Clarissa soothes her only

daughter's fears and implicitly gives her permission to move ahead with her life. No longer rivals, they begin to mend their relationship.

Three days after this conversation, Aurelio attains his dream of becoming the governor of Puerto Rico. He and Clarissa move to the capital of San Juan. Already incapacitated, she cannot participate in many of the political events that her husband as governor has to attend. Two years into his term, Clarissa dies.

The Stain of Sacrifice

Elvira bathes her mother's body in order to prepare her for her burial. In death, Clarissa finds a peace that eluded her in life. Elvira describes her mother's body: "Aquella blancura como de seda cruda. Aquella quietud absoluta de cabellos y pestañas. El pecho un receptáculo tranquilo para un corazón en calma. Todo había terminado, no había nada que hacer. Mamá se había reconciliado por fin consigo misma" (445). Having struggled to find her own identity within her marriage, Clarissa only finds tranquility when she no longer lives. As if to emphasize the argument of this cautionary tale, the following occurs: as the nurse goes to wash Clarissa's back, "vomitó una bocanada de sangre fresca que manchó las sábanas de un rojo vivo... El sacrificio había sucedido, después de todo" (445). The implication is that Aurelio demanded everything of Clarissa, including her life.

In the aftermath of her mother's death, and perhaps due to the vividness of this final moment with Clarissa's body, Elvira asserts herself and makes extraordinary changes in her life. With the money she inherits from Clarissa she divorces her husband,

purchases a new home, returns to the university to pursue her doctorate and begins to write. This is a remarkable shift when taking into account how resolutely she rejects her mother for the greater part of the novel. “La muerte de Mamá me hizo posible lo que ella había ansiado para sí cuando era joven: una carrera que le ganara el respeto propio y la independencia económica. Irónicamente, gracias a ella obtuve mi libertad” (448). Until her mother’s death, Elvira regards her mother as the enemy. Her comment about her mother providing her the means by which she could obtain her freedom is only ironic given her resistance to recognizing the love Clarissa has for her. Only with her mother dead does Elvira allow herself the opportunities for which almost all of the women in her family labored: the independence to pursue an education and a career without having to depend on a husband.

Conclusion

In *Vecindarios excéntricos*, Rosario Ferré dramatizes the ambivalent process of self-constitution for women. This process is ambivalent for the daughter because it necessarily includes a symbolic matricide. As Benigno Trigo writes, “The speaking self, the poetic voice, Rosario’s identity as writer, all identity, in fact, emerges as a separation, a flight, and as a defense from the material source of words, from the abject origin, from its destabilizing ambiguity” (76). He later continues, “The subject’s language, its writing, its second skin, is made from the material of the abject, and the speaking subject will communicate its sounds, like it or not” (76).

In this text, Elvira records both her fear of and her identification with her mother. All of her female relatives, and most importantly her mother, are archetypal images of the maternal for Elvira. In interacting with them, she is simultaneously interacting with the archetype. Writing gives her the opportunity to make peace with her past, of which her mother plays a large part. It is a means by which she can transform all of their experiences, as well as her own, in order to understand them. Writing, therefore, is the method by which Elvira interacts with the maternal archetype. It is for her a dynamic process that allows Elvira to transform from the aggrieved adolescent voice at the beginning of the text to the mature woman of its conclusion.

In this chapter, I have written about a daughter who achieves an awareness of herself by writing about the life of her mother. In the next chapter, I argue that it is a mother articulating her own life that allows for the daughter figure to more firmly establish a sense of self.

CHAPTER IV

MATERNAL “FILTH” IN *SINGING SOFTLY / CANTANDO BAJITO*

(1989)

In this chapter, I explore what I call the “discourse of dirt” that Carmen de Monteflores employs in her novel *Singing Softly / Cantando bajito* (1989). The crux of the novel is the relationship between daughters and their mothers within one family. Each daughter longs for her mother, and yet remains emotionally distant from her. With one exception, these daughters are able to maintain their distance by identifying their mothers with dirt or filth. Only when one of the maternal figures reacts to this identification by telling the narrative of her life is this “discourse of dirt” interrupted. I argue that this character, Alba, disrupts the mother-daughter detachment that marks the novel precisely by speaking about her life, thereby allowing for a reconciliation to take place. Moreover, all of the mothers in the novel are images of the archetypal Mother, and Alba most fully embodies this archetype. Monteflores presents a series of women who yearn for a healing that interaction with the Mother can provide. This curative process occurs only when the narrator composes the text detailing the lives of all these women. Indeed, the text dramatizes Alba’s act of articulation, and it gives each woman the opportunity to verbalize the reality of her life. The protagonist’s contact with Alba, the personification of the archetypal Mother, through the stories of the lives of the women of her maternal

line provides the narrator reconciliation with her past, thereby giving her the nourishment she has long sought.

Plot Summary

Singing Softly / Cantando bajito is an autobiographical narrative told from the perspective of Meli about her life and the lives of the women in her family. As a child, the protagonist decides to leave behind all she knows in her native Puerto Rico for an education in the United States. At the beginning of the novel she returns to the island as an adult due to her grandmother's illness. During the flight to the island¹, she recounts the stories of the women in her life, including not only those of her mother, Luisa, her grandmother, Pilar, and her great-grandmother, Marta, but also that of the local *curandera*, or healing woman, Seña Alba.²

As narrator, Meli makes Pilar, her grandmother, the focus of her recollections. One of ten children (9), Pilar is born into the rural poverty of early twentieth-century Puerto Rico. Her father is a sugar cane worker, her mother, Marta, a housewife.³ At the age of fifteen, Pilar elopes with Juan, a Spanish merchant twice her age. Together they

¹ Travel between the island and the mainland is a prominent theme in Puerto Rican literature beginning in the 1950s. See Sandoval Sánchez.

² The novel is written in both Spanish and English: the narration is in English, whereas the dialogue is presented first in Spanish and then translated into English.

³ While the historical moment in which the story takes place is ambiguous, the narrator suggests that her grandmother Pilar grows up in the years after the Spanish-American War of 1898 but before the industrialization of the island that occurs with Operation Bootstrap in the 1940s. Therefore Pilar is probably a child in the first or second decade of the twentieth century. When describing her own childhood, Meli wishes her mother were like “the American mothers who bought store dresses, read magazines in English, [and] drove cars” (80), an indication that she comes of age in the 1950s, when Puerto Rico's commonwealth status was established. They live in a suburb of San Juan (28).

have four children, the second oldest being Luisa, the narrator's mother. The family lives in complete isolation, as Juan has expressed his displeasure at the idea of Pilar maintaining contact with her humble beginnings. While Pilar passionately loves her husband, the children are estranged from their father, due to his many trips abroad. On one such trip to Spain, he dies, leaving his family without a claim to his financial holdings; only then do the children learn that their parents had not been legally wed. They lose access to all of his assets, including the house and the surrounding lands.⁴ Luisa goes on to marry a financially stable man, though one who physically and emotionally abuses her. Her daughter, Meli, vows to live a life independent of men, choosing instead a life in education. Shortly thereafter, with the assistance of her mother and grandmother, she leaves the island.

The text itself recounts Meli's past. According to Sánchez González, the novel "transforms into a historical journey traversing three generations of psychologically tortured women in Meli's family. These women's emotional trials bleed from one character into the next, forming clusters of at times indistinguishable female voices..." (142). The center of these emotional trials is the simultaneous fascination and repulsion that each daughter feels for her mother. The personal mother, as Jung calls her, is a child's first interaction with the mother archetype; this constant attraction and revulsion that marks the novel is therefore one that replicates the extent to which each character feels nurtured and cherished.

⁴ Monteflores dedicates the novel "to mami and abuelita: here is a piece of the land we had lost." Sánchez González goes on to suggest that the text "proposes itself as a figurative recuperation of a lost personal inheritance, a *terruño* denied an elite female protagonist" (143).

The “Discourse of Dirt”

There is a “discourse of dirt” in this novel, one that identifies all that is unclean as unattractive, undesirable, and therefore silenced. Within this text, it is the mothers / maternal figures who are categorized as such. As explained by Michel Foucault, “discourse” refers to the practices that assist in the definition of anything as normal or rational.⁵ These practices necessarily include both the promotion of that “norm” as well the exclusion of anything that does not correspond to it. That which is excluded is usually silenced. Robyn R. Warhol writes: “Broadly speaking, ‘discourse’ refers to a particular use of language in a given time and place” (653). Discourse, or rather, discourses, cannot therefore be limited solely to language, but rather, are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 428). Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace elucidate further: “in any given historical period we can write, speak or think about a given social object or practice... only in certain specific ways and not others. ‘A discourse’ would then be whatever constrains – but also enables – writing, speaking, and thinking within such specific historical limits” (31).

In her highly influential work *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (1966), Mary Douglas examines the symbolic significance of dirt. She concludes, after defining “dirt” as “matter out of place” (36), that it “is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves inappropriate elements” (36). At the beginning of her text, Douglas writes: “In chasing

⁵ See Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.

dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea” (2). Later she continues, “...ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, about and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created” (4).

Julia Kristeva draws on Douglas’s work in writing her text *Powers of Horror* (1982). There, she explicitly relates that which disturbs the system, which she names the “abject,” with the maternal. She writes: “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite” (4). Later writing about defilement itself, Kristeva identifies the excremental and the menstrual as both having to do with the “*maternal* and/or the feminine” (71). She concludes, “Maternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self’s clean and proper body; it is distinguished from paternal laws which, with the phallic phase and acquisition of language, the destiny of man will take shape” (72). Along this same train of thought, Luce Irigaray observes that the lack of accurate representation of the mother and her body leads to a sentiment that both are threatening: She writes: “In the absence of any representation of it, there is always the danger of going back to the primal womb... And so, the openness of the mother [*ouverture de la mere*], the opening on to the mother [*ouverture à la mere*], appear to be threats of contagion, contamination, engulfment in illness, madness and death” (40). By associating the maternal body with defilement, therefore, the subject, the I, is assured of decontamination and as a result, cleanliness.

Throughout the novel, each daughter, with one exception, associates her mother both implicitly and explicitly with dirt. While the novel successfully configures this discourse, there is also a simultaneous undermining of this identification. The challenge comes about because almost every image used as evidence of filth hearkens back to historical representations of the archetypal Mother. This dissonance underscores the lack of positive images of the Mother in Western culture. Indeed, these varied portraits have been lost to history. These are portraits that I attempt to recover in this dissertation.

Manifestations of the “Discourse of Dirt”

Marta, Meli’s great-grandmother

Early in the text, the narrator, Meli, describes Marta, her great-grandmother, as follows: “[She] stood there with her brown hands on her hips. Her belly was round from many pregnancies and her breasts were low to her waist. She had suckled enough, she said. Each one had made her lose a tooth... But, Marta said, it was God’s will” (8). The narrator does little to “provide any insight into the interior life of her great-grandmother. Instead, she provides a portrait of a woman whose primary responsibility, it appears, is reproduction. The primary focus of her portrait is Marta’s breasts and stomach. Stating that Marta believes that her lot in life is the will of God, the narrator also conveys a critical stance toward her great-grandmother by highlighting what she understands to be a submissive attitude toward life. Although Marta’s reliance on her faith may be troublesome to her great-granddaughter, it accurately reflects her experience. Rather than attempt to be like her mother, Pilar (Marta’s daughter) becomes more and more

disenchanted with her. She vows not to be like her mother, whom she views as “working all the time, getting angry and having nobody listening to her” (32). Upon meeting Juan, the man with whom she falls in love, she immediately compares him to her mother, who is standing next to him: “Pilar kept looking at her mother. Noticed how her dress was not very clean and how dark she was next to him” (48). In stark contrast to her father, who, in her words, was “so brown [she] often forgot he was white” (23), Juan “was pale like an apparition. She had never seen a man like him... There was no dirt on his white shirt, or under his fingernails. Not at all like the cutters who were dark and rough like trunks of trees” (47). It is notable that Juan presents an alternative view of masculinity for Pilar, one that includes a standard of cleanliness.

After Juan exposes Pilar to the life led by his relatives, her shame of her mother becomes more acute. She notes: “After being in town, she noticed how Marta smelled and how dirty her hands were. And how loud her voice was too” (81). This is in direct contrast to how she describes her father: “Pablo came from the fields and he sat on the front steps without his shirt on until it was time to eat. He ate, then got up to sit on the steps again, chewing tobacco and spitting until dark, then went to sleep” (81). Although there is a mention of his body, there is no mention of the odor he emits; while she refers to his habit of spitting, there is no focus on the spittle itself, nor is there any indication that she is repulsed by this habit. Instead, she directs all of her repugnance toward her mother. Ultimately, it is Marta and the way in which she lives her life that drives Pilar to flee from her family. Looking at her mother, she notes: “Marta’s face looked very, very tired. Like the ground. Like it had given everything it could give and now there was nothing left. And the last rain had left hard ruts” (180). Again, Marta is a woman who

puts her family, the lives of her husband and children, at the center of her world. There is no description of her emotional life. The lack of familiarity with Marta's thoughts might reflect the fact that Pilar does not have the opportunity to form a relationship with her mother when she is an adult. One reason for this is that her husband does not allow Pilar to bring their children to visit her family (63). Another is that Pilar grows more and more ashamed of her parentage as time passes (168). Finally, she resolves to adhere to her husband's dictate that they not see her family, thereby protecting her children from possible unpleasantness.⁶

Later in the novel, Pilar recalls a moment when Marta rescued her from a river: "Pilar fell in and was hanging on to a branch. Her sisters didn't dare get in... Marta got right in, grabbing on to the branch to get to Pilar. Pilar remembered she had never hugged her mother so tight... Sticking to each other. Her mother's heavy breasts and belly against her" (64). In this moment, Pilar temporarily leaves behind the repulsion she feels toward her mother. Rather, she longs for a time when she was not a separate subject from Marta, instead expressing a desire to being attached: "sticking to each other" (64). For that instant, Pilar has returned to her mother's womb, where there is safety and protection. She and her mother are one. As an adult, Pilar is ashamed of her mother, and still, she continues to long for her presence. As an adult she chooses to no longer unabashedly rely on her mother as she did as a child. Whereas early in the text, Pilar

⁶ The hiding of a black grandmother on the part of her children and grandchildren because they are ashamed of their African heritage is a notable motif in Puerto Rican literature, beginning with Eleuterio Derkes and his play *Tío Fele* (1883). Perhaps the most famous example of this is the poem "Y tu abuela... ¿aonde está...?" by Fernando Fortunato Vizcarrondo. See Falcón 20-21. The presence of this motif in the novel confirms Monteflores's preoccupation with a problem that has been addressed by other writers from Puerto Rico.

recalls her mother's breasts and belly as a testament to her many pregnancies, in this moment, the body of her mother represents comfort. More importantly, she explicitly associates herself with her mother: "*she had never hugged her mother so tight*" (64, emphasis mine). This memory appears to give consolation to Pilar. Since she left Marta, Pilar can no longer look to her mother for this affective nourishment, and so she consoles herself by remembering Marta's body.

Still, the description of Marta's breasts and belly reveal the way in which she recalls historical images of the archetypal Mother. Kathie Carlson notes that in prepatriarchal religions, representations of the Woman emphasized "Her thighs, Her belly, Her breasts" (78). She goes on to write that artists accentuated both the womb and breasts of this figure because this was the center of the origin of their creativity: "Out of Her body all things came into being. Extending far beyond literal biological events, the womb was the essence of the Creative and creativity was female" (79). Although she does not consciously recognize it as such, Pilar's focus on her mother's body shows an instinctive interaction with one aspect of the Mother, namely, that of the Creator, the origin of life. In that instant, Marta becomes the personification of "all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility" (*Archetypes* 82).

Alba, Meli's spiritual guide

Of all of the mothers in the novel, Señora Alba is the most fully representative of what I call the archetypal Mother in the introduction of this dissertation. Alba is not the biological mother of either Pilar or Meli; rather, she is a maternal figure who serves a critical role in the development of both women in that she is their spiritual guide. Still,

because she serves in a maternal capacity, she continues to exemplify the mother archetype. It is precisely because she was not physically born of Alba that Pilar does not reject her as she does Marta, her biological mother. When Pilar grows disillusioned with Marta, she develops a close relationship with Seña Alba, the local midwife who has a reputation for being alternatively a *curandera* (healer woman)⁷ or a *bruja* (witch). The narrator presents this character as an earth mother figure, in that she lives in nature, in the brush of the island (87). She is also associated with the ocean. Seña Alba marks time, in fact, by the ocean's movements, remarking that it is "the only kind of time that makes sense" (89). It is from the ocean that Alba learns to breathe, as well as to cry (89). Jung writes, "the maternal significance of water is one of the clearest interpretations of symbols in the whole field of mythology... All living things rise, like the sun, from water, and sink into it again at evening" (*Symbols* 218). Rich compares women's menses to the ocean, "whose tides respond ... to the pull of the moon, the ocean which corresponds to the amniotic fluid in which human life begins, the ocean on whose surface vessels (personified as female) can ride but in whose depth sailors meet their death"

⁷ The figure of the *curandera* is one that can be found throughout the literature of the African Diaspora in the New World; Barbara Christian identifies this same figure as the conjure woman within the African American literary tradition (*Black Women Novelists*). The representation of this character reflects the popularity of herbal medicine in this region of the world. Margarite Fernández Olmos writes:

The *curanderismo* tradition is in fact a complex cultural healing system with common roots in healing modalities found throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. It combines Hippocratic humoral (hot-cold) theories of disease with Amerindian herbal medicine and diverse spiritual traditions ranging from African-based systems to the Spiritist philosophy of Allan Kardec. (208)

Fernández Olmos goes on to comment on the centrality of women in this tradition: "Unorthodox medicine, like its religious counterpart, has been more accessible to women; there they can claim an authority denied them in mainstream institutions and are more at liberty to utilize female traditions of care-taking to alleviate their suffering communities" (209).

(108). In addition to her identification with the ocean, Alba is a midwife, that is, one who literally assists in bringing life into the world, as well as a healer. Throughout the novel, Alba is associated with roots, herbs, and the earth. While assisting pregnant women to give birth, she burns herbs so that these women can once again smell like the earth, which, in her opinion, helps in the birthing process (25).

Throughout the text, the narrator identifies Alba with other aspects of nature: the “coconut trees, the moon, even the sugar cane fields” (7). Jung writes that trees are a common mother-symbol⁸ that are associated with the notion of the tree of life (219). He cites myths in which the hero emerges from the tree, and goes on to mention that “numerous female deities were worshipped in tree form, and this led to the cult of sacred groves and trees” (219). In addition to trees, the moon was a common object of worship in ancient times. Rich writes: “The moon is generally held to have been the first object of nature-worship, and the moon, to whose phases the menstrual cycle corresponds, is anciently associated with women” (107). She goes on to note that the lunar deity was closely related to the “Virgin-Mother-Goddess... whose power radiates out from her maternal aspect to the fertilization of the whole earth, the planting and harvesting of crops, the cycle of seasons, the dialogue of humankind and nature” (107).

While for Pilar, Alba is an alternate mother figure, the rest of the community identifies her as a witch (10), mistaking her for a *santera*⁹ (108). She is therefore

⁸ Jung writes that symbols “are not signs or allegories for something known; they seek rather to express something that is little known or completely unknown” (222). He asserts that they are, in fact, “grounded in the unconscious archetype” (232).

⁹A *santera* is a priestess initiated in *santería*, the syncretic religion that derived from the Yoruba peoples in Africa and that was brought to the Americas by slaves. It can be found throughout the Spanish Caribbean, with other manifestations of these religious practices found throughout the New World. See Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert. *Santería*,

restricted to a life at the margins of the population of her village, a position that allows her to examine the societal norms that Pilar unquestioningly assumes in her adulthood. In fact, Alba offers both Meli and Pilar a counter discourse to the one that Pilar learns from her parents. From them, Pilar understands that her world can be ordered by excluding that which she declares dirty. By the time she and Alba meet, the community has already marginalized Alba; understandably, she is in a position to disrupt the “discourse of dirt.” From the periphery, she has the power to disturb Pilar’s organizing principles before they are well established.

Pilar, Meli’s grandmother

Unlike the others mothers in the text, there is very little that overtly connects Pilar, Luisa’s mother and Meli’s grandmother, to the archetypal Mother. On the contrary, Pilar goes to great lengths to remove any possible identification with the women that surround her. The narrator notes that “For years... Pilar tried to scrub off the smell of [her mother] Marta’s house with Castile soap, powder and perfume” (25). Earlier she specifies that the odor of this dwelling is a mixture of “sweat, blood, wood fire, mold, and earth” (25). At the same time that she characterizes her mother and her mother’s household as having an unpleasant aroma, Pilar vigorously identifies herself with cleanliness. The narrator Meli compares her own mother’s smell to that of her grandmother: “Abuelita [Pilar] sweated too when she was out sweeping the front terrace, but it was a kind of clean sweat... Abuelita smelled of powder” (83). Given the absence of affirmative statements about the body of women, I would argue that Pilar is more than

like *candomblé*, discussed in the second chapter of this work, provides worshippers with a variety of images of female power.

likely ashamed of her own body, which provides another motivation for her insistence on cleanliness. Pilar goes to great lengths to distance herself from the corporeal, from the woman's body in particular. In so doing, she reveals the extent to which she has internalized the values of a culture that denigrates much that is feminine.

Luisa, Meli's mother

Luisa, daughter of Pilar and mother of Meli, is the only daughter in the text who does not engage in the "discourse of dirt" by associating her mother with all things unclean. On the contrary, though they are estranged, she idolizes Pilar. As a child, she asks to be home-schooled rather than go to the village school, citing as a reason that she does not want to spend time away from her mother (64). Luisa trusts her mother completely, adoring Pilar until her death. The narrator recalls how her mother had told her "La madre eh lo mah grande que hay" (181). Meli continues, "[Luisa] had only been happy as a child. Her mamá had been at the center of that happy time. After that there was no more innocence and too much suffering" (181). Interestingly, there is very little in the narrator's portrait of her mother that suggests Luisa's happiness. Also, there is no evidence that Meli understands her mother's words about the influence of the mother as specifically addressing their relationship. That is, she does not reveal whether or not she feels this way about Luisa. Instead, she presents them as a commentary only about Pilar.

The narrator does not offer an objective portrait of Luisa; we see her solely from her daughter's perspective. Meli notes that as a child, she could not speak with her mother: "It was no use trying to talk to Mami. She was looking at Mami sitting in her rocking chair in the living room. Mami would say yes or no and keep rocking" (61). The

narrator Meli calls attention to her mother's appearance, thereby employing the same discourse as her grandmother. She speaks of Luisa's "long toenails [with] dirt in them" (82), her "rough feet" (82), her "hair not combed" (82). Again, this serves as emphasis of the awkwardness of her relationship with Luisa. She continues: "Mami got up and hugged Meli. Meli wished she wouldn't. She pulled away a little. Mami smelled of sweat" (82). Later, she elaborates: "Meli just didn't like her smell. And Mami's cheeks were always sticky from sweat" (83). Once again, a mother's bodily waste, seemingly innocuous in that it is perspiration, symbolizes pollution for the daughter. More dangerous is Meli's oblique references or allusions to her mother's sexual organs. First she notes that though she would rather not think of it, her mother sits on her porch in her housedress wearing no underwear and "with her legs spread open" (82). Soon after she mentions that while she enjoys sleeping alongside her grandmother, doing the same with her mother makes her uncomfortable because "Mami made blood spots on her sheets sometimes and even on her dress. And she didn't cover herself. It made Meli angry at Mami" (83). Notably, Meli the adult narrator does not provide insight into her mother's behavior.¹⁰ Instead, she depicts her mother using her child's voice for the entirety of the novel, articulating her anger and disappointment.

The narrative voice's emphasis on menstrual blood calls attention to an aspect of the archetypal Mother. Carlson writes of how menstruation was once considered "the Blessing, women's particular creative magic. The blood that flows of itself and not from a wounding was thought to be the very source of life" (78). Given that generally every woman menstruates, every woman could therefore experience this sacred substance

¹⁰ Sánchez González writes that Luisa is a "casebook study of clinical depression...Luisa is a chronically depressed character who has more or less lost her grip on reality" (146).

(79).¹¹ She suggests that taken symbolically, menstrual blood is powerful (90). Adrienne Rich also implies the power of menstrual blood in her discussion of the menstrual taboo in *Of Woman Born* (1976). After citing the work of Joseph Campbell, Erich Neumann, Esther Harding, Mary Douglas and Margaret Mead, Rich writes that the “mere existence of this taboo signifies, for better or worse, *powers only half-understood; the fear of woman and the mystery of her motherhood*” (105, italics in the original). While Meli disparages her mother for Luisa’s apparent lack of cleanliness, she is also unknowingly interacting with another image of the archetypal Mother, again, she who is the origin of life.

Meli

Though she acknowledges at the opening of the text that she has children (4), Meli does not include an account of her own experiences of motherhood. Instead, the narrative voice is one of daughter and granddaughter. Her interaction with the archetypal Mother occurs within her relationships with Luisa and Pilar. It is Pilar’s adherence to cleanliness that attracts Meli, the narrator, to her grandmother. Interpreting this insistence on hygiene as a positive trait, Meli more easily associates her mother, Luisa, with the unclean. For both Pilar and Meli, the mother embodies all that they as daughters believe to be unattractive. They both separate themselves from their respective mothers, thereby forming a more coherent sense of self, by associating their mothers with a lack of cleanliness.

¹¹ Carlson goes on to cite the provocative study *The Wise Wound: Myths, Realities, and Meanings of Menstruation*. See Shuttle and Redgrove.

Meli also employs this “discourse of dirt” to other members of her family. Pilar takes Meli to visit relatives who live in the *caseríos*, housing provided by the government in Puerto Rico. Once again, there is a mention of filth: “All the buildings were the same. They were made of concrete and had writings on the walls. [They] Looked bare and dark. There was packed dirt around them and bushes that looked like someone had been pulling their leaves off. Dark kids played in the dirt and fat women leaned over the railings” (172). When Pilar identifies these people that they visit as nieces and nephews (173), Meli fails to understand that this means they are her cousins. Instead, she notes not only the dirt in which they live, but also the smells that permeate the apartments: urine, disinfectant, alcohol, and lard (172-173). She comments: “She didn’t like it when she could smell people’s plates, their towels and their rooms. They gave their smell to everything around them. It was almost as if they were putting their hands on her” (173). The odors that the people of the *caserío* emit are therefore invasive, overrunning her personal space. Meli has learned that everything has its proper place; smells and all that is bodily is to be contained accordingly. In the face of such disorder, she is at a loss as to how to comport herself. She chooses to remain quiet.

The Role of Silence

Silence maintains the emotional separation of each mother and daughter pair in this novel. What I have termed the “discourse of dirt” fortifies this detachment. Early in the text, the narrator records the comment that generates this discourse. When Marta, Pilar’s mother, tries to communicate the pain one of her daughters feels while giving

birth, her husband abruptly ends the conversation by declaring “Cosas de mujeres” (23). Later, the narrator clarifies: “Pilar knew that Pablo didn’t want to hear any more when he said that. She also knew that it made Marta feel bad. Women’s things was [sic] bleeding and crying” (23). With those words, Pablo manages to relegate the experience of childbirth to silence by conveying that the subject matter is unworthy of conversation. He also effectively essentializes all women by reducing them to the production of bodily fluids.¹² Finally, he shames his wife and makes an indelible impression on his child, Pilar, who will herself subsequently associate her mother with all that she deems to be “women’s things.” Indeed, Marta’s silence in the face of her husband’s opinion perhaps inadvertently demonstrates to Pilar that her father is correct. Because Pablo categorizes blood and tears as negatives, and because he classifies both as having to do with women, both Marta and Pilar (Meli’s great-grandmother and grandmother) intuitively understand that to be a woman is undesirable. It is to be less than a man. Pilar therefore learns that being a woman is not only disadvantageous; it is also to be assigned a life filled with pain. In her silence, Marta demonstrates that she can dismiss her own daughter’s pain, something that does not escape Pilar’s attention and which contributes to the detachment between mother and daughter.

Later, as a mother herself, Pilar unwittingly follows Marta’s example and does not tend to her child’s needs. Because of the distance between Pilar and Luisa, the latter does not confide in her own mother. At the age of twelve, Luisa (Meli’s mother) witnesses the rape of a young girl by a sugar cane worker (162), and she says nothing. Her mother

¹² This attitude recalls Luce Irigaray’s writing that the male protects himself “from that indecent contact...woman. From any possible assimilation to that undefined flow that dampens, wets, floods...” (64).

comes to learn about the incident from a dream, in which she sees the image of Luisa hiding in the foliage, scared to move, overhearing a man commanding a girl to stay still and not say anything (162). When Pilar awakens, she finds herself in Luisa's house, with Luisa now an adult, preparing coffee. One would expect that given the circumstances a conversation between them would follow but Pilar stays quiet. Like Marta before her, Pilar allows her daughter's pain to be relegated to silence.

The most vivid illustration of the insidious effect of this kind of imposed silence occurs after Pilar verbally assails Alba (Meli's spiritual guide), calling her a "negra borrachona" and a "puta negra" (169, 170). In the immediate aftermath of this verbal attack, Alba is stunned into silence. The narrator notes: "Each word from Pilar nailed a piece of her flesh. And her breath was drawing in blood" (184). In this moment, Alba becomes the personification of the archetypal Mother as currently conceived by popular culture in that she is without speech. Prior to this moment, Pilar had depended on Alba for love and emotional support. It is from Alba, in fact, that she receives the emotional nourishment that she does not get from her mother, Marta. Her reliance on the local *curandera* for this type of encouragement seemingly makes Pilar uncomfortable, however. In cursing Alba, Pilar tries to establish her own separate identity from Alba, and from this mother figure. She commits a form of symbolic matricide. Both Kristeva and Irigaray cite this step as critical to the formation of one's sense of selfhood. Naming it *matrophobia*, Adrienne Rich develops a similar notion: "[this] can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all... to become individuated and free... Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap without mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins,

we perform radical surgery” (236). With this outburst, Pilar successfully distances herself from her surrogate mother, Alba, relegating herself to an isolation that nearly all of the women in the novel experience. In this novel, silence sustains this remoteness.

The Actualization of Discourse: The Attempted Destruction of Alba

As a young woman, Pilar notes that she feels safe with the *curandera* Alba (21, 150). Their rift begins later in life, when Pilar (Meli’s grandmother) becomes interested in Juan. A well-known philanderer, thirty-year-old Juan already has several children by the time he becomes interested in fifteen-year-old Pilar (51). The divergent voice in the community, Alba values that which is disparaged and continuously questions that which is automatically considered to be good. Consequently, she belittles whites while in Pilar’s company, praising instead her own African heritage. Soon after making Juan’s acquaintance, however, Pilar begins to voice a racial consciousness, claiming her European as well as African heritage (43). As a result, Alba immediately stops speaking dismissively of “lo blanco” (43). She witnesses the love her surrogate daughter has for this older Spanish businessman, and she recognizes the potential damage she can cause in her relationship with Pilar. After establishing a life with Juan, Pilar becomes self-conscious about her speech, preferring Juan’s Castilian accent to her own rural Puerto Rican enunciation. Alba instead encourages her to speak as she has always spoken, saying there is “no use trying to make a black woman come out white” (75). Rather than follow Alba’s advice, Pilar chooses to speak at rare occasions, in an attempt to assimilate further into her husband’s world and leave that of her childhood behind.

After a number of years, Pilar directly confronts her past with the illness and subsequent death of her sister Elena (Meli's great-aunt). By this point, she has conformed to Juan's way of life: she is the wife of a successful businessman, she is in charge of a household of four children and a number of servants, and she is completely estranged from her family. At her sister's wake, Pilar is incapable of summoning any feelings other than numbness: "she felt she didn't belong there" (167). Meticulous about her appearance, she brushes the chair before she sits in it (167). All that surrounds her, from her perspective, is "too hard... and too ugly" (168): drunken men, dying flowers, people cursing, and vomit (167-168). Ashamed of her parentage (168), she realizes that she does not want to expose her own children to the "filth" that surrounds her. In the midst of her observations, she goes outside to urinate, only to find Alba, drunk, in the bushes. The narrator notes: "Pilar couldn't get the image out of her head for a long time: Señá Alba in the candlelight, drunk and looking at her with wild eyes and vomit drooling out of her mouth. They both stood there as if time had stopped" (169).

To this point, Pilar has not associated Alba with any of the ugliness of her past. She was a mysterious figure, but one that provided much needed love and guidance to this girl since their first meeting when Pilar is nine. Despite their differences regarding Pilar's choice of a husband, she continues to depend on Alba for support. Here, however, Pilar has already expressed disgust with her environment, wishing instead that she was in her own home (168). She immediately loses respect for the woman who has been a mother to her over the years: "¡Quiero sacarte de'ehta mierda, negra borrachona!" (169) She goes on to curse Alba: "¡Putá negra!" (170). Alba's response is: "¡Me salió blanquita la niña! ¡Blanquita! ¡Blanquita!" (169-170). This exchange reveals the additional

significance of the “discourse of dirt” that Pilar has internalized over her lifetime. Whereas the emphasis used to be primarily on gender, race in this instant becomes a central element of the discussion. Seeing her surrogate mother literally mired in human waste amplifies Pilar’s frustration with her family; her cursing reveals her frustration with the manner in which they live. Also, though the narrator has revealed throughout the novel Alba’s penchant for rum (51, 77, 87, 97, 108-109, 113-114, 152), this is the first instance in which Pilar sees Alba drunk. For her part, with her reply, Alba communicates the degree to which she feels Pilar has effectively assimilated the values of her husband, and, more broadly, of a bourgeois sensibility.¹³ Pilar has lost all esteem for this woman: whereas once she was the source of safety for her, now Alba is nothing but a drunk black woman. In naming her as such, Pilar treats her as the rest of the community does: disparagingly. She betrays their relationship, thereby ending their years of trust.

Ironically, in cursing Alba, Pilar repeats word for word the insults her mother Marta uses when she discovers that Pilar has met Juan in secret when she is fifteen. Marta learns of their assignation from a neighbor known as Doña Bochinche (“Mrs. Gossip”), who shames Pilar’s mother by informing her that all the village knows and that the *curandera* served as a chaperone. She reports: “La negra loh vela... Dioh sabe lo qu’esa vé polque siempre ehtá picá” (113). Her comment informs the reader that Alba’s consumption of alcohol is common knowledge within the community. When Pilar pleads with her mother to ask Alba regarding the tryst, Marta exclaims: “¡La puta negra borrachona! ¿Qué t’enseña esa de putería? ¿Y ehtáh bebiendo ron también? ¡La hija de la gran puta! Negra sucia!” (114) This is the sole instance where Marta engages in this

¹³ For a discussion on the creation of a unified Puerto Rican cultural identity, of which the ideology of *blanqueamiento* (“whitening”) is critical, see Roy-Féquièrè.

“discourse of filth,” indeed, where one mother utilizes it against another. In this case, Marta reveals that in her opinion, “filth” is not just sexual and racial but also moral. Though both are women of African heritage, Marta (Meli’s great-grandmother) is able to judge Alba because of her moral standing: she is married and she does not drink. For Marta, therefore, dirt is an indication of immorality. When she discovers Alba in the bushes, Pilar similarly stands in judgment the *curandera*, in a sense revealing an unconscious affinity for her mother Marta.

Alba next enters Pilar’s life after Juan dies on a business trip in Spain, five months after Elena’s wake. Again, race is the focal point of her exchange with Alba. She accuses Alba of disliking her husband because of his whiteness, declaring that she too is white, until she collapses in tears admitting her own blackness (183). She verbally assaults her surrogate mother: “¡No te me acerqueh! ¡Vete! ¡Sal de ehta casa de blancoh! ¡Vete a acohtarte en tu mierda!” (183) By declaring her household to be white-only, Pilar suggests that there is no place for those of other racial heritages. Her house becomes the literal representation of civilization, and Pilar allows only the civilized to inhabit it. With Pilar instructing Alba to rest in her own feces, the narrator makes literal the symbolic connection that Kristeva argues exists between excrement and the maternal and/or feminine. She writes: “maternal authority is experienced first and above all, after the first essentially oral frustrations, as sphincteral training” (261). It is the mother who removes excrement from the child, and who, therefore, is associated with it. This interaction is critical in the abjection of this mother figure. Her outburst in some ways is therefore vital to the development of her own subjectivity. She continues:

Yo creía que erah la persona máh valiente y humana que conocía... pero ereh una cobarde. Téhcondelh dentro de la caña para emborracharte. Ni siquiera tieneh la

valentía de decírmelo. Pretendiendo ser algo que no era... ¡No me hables de la hipocresía de los curas! ... Y yo que te tenía tanta admiración, que te veía caminar en la noche sola como un ser mágico, salvando vidas, ayudando a todos, y lo que hacía en la noche era emborracharte y arrastrarte por la tierra como un animal... (183)

With her acerbic accusations, Pilar reveals the full extent of her shame and disappointment in her surrogate mother. She has spent her childhood resenting her biological mother for being incapable of spending time with her (32). In her adulthood, she similarly rejects her spiritual guide because Alba has betrayed Pilar's childlike view of her. Throughout her youth, Pilar expresses disgust and fear of the men in her village because they drink alcohol (12, 32-33). In one conversation with Alba, she says, "Eso borracho en el pueblo me enfelma... Mamá dice que el Diablo se metió en el ron" (33). Again, Marta has passed on to her daughter an ethical maxim; in their judgment, rum is the greatest symbol of moral decay. Implicit in this is rum's association with "filth". For Pilar, rum causes illness, at least metaphorically. In her drunkenness, therefore, Alba assumes the opprobrium that Pilar reserves for the majority of men she encounters, including her father. Alba has transgressed, thereby taking on characteristics of masculinity that Pilar vilifies.

Seeing Alba standing in her own waste, Pilar (Meli's grandmother) projects all that is negative onto Alba, thereby discarding her, ejecting Alba from her life. The rejection of Alba is the clearest example of the deployment of the "discourse of dirt." In order to establish her own sense of self, Pilar needs to think of herself, and everything she creates, as exemplary. As a response to the family to which she was born, Pilar has children with Juan, a man whom she identifies as unlike any other man she had ever known (26). She ensures that her children want for nothing, unlike her own experience as

a child. She sees to it that they are educated (64-65), unlike herself and her siblings. Pilar identifies everything that she associates with herself as clean, ordered. Alba has no place in this system, in Pilar's life, and so must be removed.

She Speaks: Contesting the Discourse

I previously made the argument that Alba is the embodiment of the archetypal Mother in the novel. I read Pilar's attack on Alba as an attempt to make permanent the distance she has established between herself and both her surrogate and biological mother. In this way, she would have clearly marked the boundaries of her identity. At the time of her argument with Alba, Pilar conceives of herself solely as Juan's wife and mother to his children, rather than as the daughter of Marta and of Alba. Her condemnation of Alba is Pilar's effort to set this idea of herself more firmly in place. The *curandera*, however, does not remain silent: "Then out of somewhere in her, a place deep in the bowels of the earth, a place of the dead and the dying, where nothing matters anymore, a place where truth is all that's left because every shred of flesh and all the lies have been eaten by worms, out of that place a voice came" (184). Whereas for every other character in this novel, "filth" and "dirt" represent all that is unattractive, repulsive, undesirable, for Alba it serves a source for life: it is from here that Alba draws to speak her own truth. At this moment, Alba becomes the personification of what Jung says are the negative qualities of the mother archetype, in that she becomes associated with "anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead..." (*Archetypes* 82).

Critically, Alba's statement reverses the "discourse of dirt" that has been well established in the text. Already metaphorically dead, in that Pilar has apparently effectively silenced her, Alba has nothing more to lose. In speaking about her life, she gives life to herself; she resurrects herself. She shouts:

¡Cállate! No sabeh lo que diceh. Cuando hayah pasa'o lah nocheh de tu juventu' llorando pol tu hijo que murió de hambre, llorando pol un hijo que vino de un ultraje, el ultraje de un cura blanco... cuando hayah vihto a tu mai vendel su cuelpo pa' dalte de comel... cuando t'ehcupan pol la calle polque ereh la víctima de abuso y te gritan: ¡puta!... o cuando la gente te llame bruja cuando loh ayudah...cuando nadie te quiere en su casa, na' máh que cuando te necesitan... cuando te tartan como un perro... cuando hayah pasa'o pol to' eso, niña, entonceh podráh pasal juicio pol mí. (184)

She proceeds to describe the rape she suffers at the age of twelve at the hands of a priest, which results in a pregnancy and the birth of a child who dies shortly thereafter. She relates how her mother prostitutes herself so that they may eat, in doing so, contracting numerous infections that lead to her death at an early age. Finally, she recounts how the midwife who assists at the birth of her child teaches her everything she knows, including herbal medicine, which allows her to survive.

There are several moments of significance about the narrative of her life. First, Alba (Meli's spiritual guide) is the only daughter in this novel who uncritically loves her mother. That is, there is no mention of conflict between the two. On the contrary, she presents herself as feeling nothing but love and understanding for her mother. Secondly, Alba knows what it is to be a mother and daughter simultaneously, and yet by the time she meets Pilar, neither her mother nor her child is alive. While Alba is someone's mother and someone's daughter, she does not engage in the same struggles with the rest of the female characters in the novel. Whereas the root of identity in the novel is the

struggle for definition between mothers and daughters, the characterization of Alba prompts the related but in a sense opposite question, who is a woman without a mother or a child? The narrator seems to suggest that, at the very least, she is someone who has the power of speech, who does not allow the permanent loss of her voice, and thereby, her capacity to define herself.

After Alba finishes her story, she sits Pilar on her lap, rocking her as if she were a child (191). The narrator notes that Alba “smelled of herbs, coconuts, [and] sand” (191), an indication that she has once again become the magical being that Pilar knew as a child rather than the drunk black who should “live in her own waste.” Alba is again “the earliest silent presence of something that could be believed in. That didn’t betray” (191). Meli’s narrative voice comments that in the midst of the turbulent emotions that these women have exchanged “a calmness rose that felt like love. Something warm and vast... Here was something deeper. A gift found in the struggle to understand. Here was forgiveness... Here was something inside she could yield to, something true in herself she had forgotten” (191). Sitting on her lap, and fully enveloped in Alba’s love, Pilar finds the nurture for which she has been yearning. In this moment, Alba offers, and Pilar accepts, “that which cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth” (*Archetypes* 82). With this exchange, both Pilar and Alba emerge from the mother-daughter dynamic that had defined their relationship and instead speak woman to woman. This conversation is the climax of the novel, its placement at the conclusion of the text strongly suggesting that a similar dialogue is necessary for all mothers and daughters.

Following her grandmother’s example, Meli also develops a relationship with Seña Alba. There is little evidence that these two women interact in the novel; after all,

Alba leaves Pilar's life while her children are young. Rather, it seems that Alba appears to Meli almost as an imaginary friend, or as a spiritual guide. Like Pilar, Meli invokes Alba when she needs to be comforted, such as when she is scared of the dark (79). On her returning trip to the island, Meli meditates on her life, and the lives of her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, and she wonders as to what Alba would say: "An answer began to form in me as if Seña Alba had curled herself in my heart and her voice were coming through me. Escape was not enough. I had to return to the island to give something back; to say what lay so deep in me that words had not reached it yet" (194). It is the memory of Alba, therefore, that gives significance to the trip. Alba is the inspiration for the text that we hold before us. Meli reaches the conclusion that she is to "call back to myself what was mine: memory, song, sound, the voice of my mother. My own" (194).

Conclusion

Carmen de Monteflores's *Singing Softly / Cantando bajito* is an autobiographical narrative that suggests the need to disinter the maternal figure from its metaphorical crypt from what I term a "discourse of dirt." This prevalent cultural discourse denigrates the feminine. Monteflores both constructs and challenges this cultural discourse of dirt with the characterization of each mother. All of the women in the novel convey a longing for more intimate relationships with other women, and yet, to some extent, they remain incapable of having them, until one, Alba, articulates the reality of her life. In giving voice to her experiences, she disrupts the notion that the Feminine should remain

silenced. I have written that Alba is the most full representation of the archetypal Mother because she possesses varied characteristics of the loving and terrible mother, as Jung calls her. In addition, Alba best exemplifies the notion of the abject in that she challenges and interrogates all that surrounds her. Indeed, the abject is “what calls into question borders and threatens identity” (Oliver 225). In this dissertation, I argue that interaction with the archetypal Mother allow for an understanding that womanhood is a complex and multifaceted experience. The inclusion of the diverse images of the archetypal Mother is implicitly an interrogation of the images of mother as defined in popular culture. It is also one response to the abjection of all that is feminine. Much like the other women writers I present in this study, Monteflores succeeds in providing a variety of images that allows for a more full definition of maternity, and, more broadly, of womanhood itself.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have focused on the varied manifestations of the pursuit for a sense of completeness on the part of the female protagonists of these novels. It is not a coincidence that I have chosen texts that women have authored. On the contrary, I believe that for the last several decades women in the Americas have consciously attempted to map the self in the mode of fiction. I am in agreement with Gerhild Reisner, who writes: “The strategies of self-figuration manifest themselves in the rewriting of traditional icons of the female [...] Questioning conventional views of woman and women writers, they often weave into their textual fabric the more or less fantasized perceptions others may have of them” (218). Reisner concludes that by actively incorporating socially constructed images in their works, the artists have the opportunity to systematically challenge them, in what he calls a “mode of defiance” (218). One fundamental manifestation of the Female is that of the Mother. I argue that these authors have broadened the way in which one can interact with the Mother, which I understand, following Benigno Trigo’s lead, to be “phantasmatic and symbolic as well as libidinal and organic” (2).

The majority of these texts are written from the perspective of the daughter.¹ In the case of the last two novels in particular, there is a concerted effort to speak solely as a daughter and granddaughter, rather than as a mother. In both of the novels from Puerto Rico, Elvira and Meli mention in passing that they have offspring, and those references

¹ The protagonists in *Sula* being Sula and Nel; in *Mulher*, the unnamed protagonist who recalls her relationship with her father in great detail; in *Vecindarios*, Elvira being the narrative voice; and Meli being the narrator in *Cantando bajito*.

are the only indication that each is a mother. In the introduction to *The Mother / Daughter Plot* (1989), Marianne Hirsch writes of her experience when she gathered with a group of other feminist scholars. She notes that there was a “painful set of divisions which emerged between the discourse of mothers and that of daughters[...] The sympathy we could muster for ourselves and each other *as mothers*, we could not quite transfer to our own mothers. Although as mothers we were eager to tell our stories, as daughters we could not fully listen to our mothers’ stories” (26). Hirsch views this moment as a clear example of the extent to which women suffer from “matrophobia,” the term made famous by Adrienne Rich to describe the “fear not of one’s mother or of motherhood but of *becoming one’s mother* (235, italics in the original). She goes on to say that this fear is present not only “within the culture at large, but also within feminism, and within women who are mothers” (26).

Hirsch finds that she, along with her feminist cohort, could not articulate her own experiences as mother. She finds the inability to do so reflected in psychoanalytic feminism, in that the figure of mother is relegated to the object position. When her discourse is voiced, however, she is moved to the position of subject. And yet because the focus of much psychoanalysis, from Freud to Chodorow, is on the development of the child, the mother remains an object, and so never truly speaks as a subject (12). Consequently, maternal discourse is marked by silence, or in the language of Julia Kristeva, by the maternal realm, the semiotic, and the unspeakable (172). To a great extent, the texts in this study support Hirsch’s findings. All of the mothers or mother-figures are either silent, or the daughters try to force them into silence. In *Sula*, Sula places her grandmother in a home for the aged after Eva challenges how she lives her

life.² In *Mulher*, the protagonist explicitly states that her mother lived uneasily in her father's world: "ali, minha mãe se inscrevia, em silêncios e sussurros" (30-31). There are only a few chapters in *Vecindarios* where Elvira attempts to record her mother Clarissa's voice, and those chapters solely deal with her relationship with Aurelio. It is only toward the end of the novel that Elvira directly addresses their relationship to her mother. Finally, I have shown how most of the daughters in *Cantando bajito* attempt to marginalize their mothers by associating them with filth, the most vivid example of this being Pilar's verbal attack against Alba. In each case, however, I have demonstrated that the daughters seek another source of mothering, and behind each is the maternal archetype.

I fully recognize that by focusing on the daughters rather than on mothers in this dissertation, I may have contributed to the "daughter centrism" (Reddy and Daly 2) of feminist literary criticism. I also know that the very argument of this study (i.e., that these novels reveal how women characters are interacting with the maternal archetype) also necessarily places these figures in the subject position of "daughter." However, I believe that women's position is never static. I agree with Rich when she writes, "We are, none of us, 'either' mothers or daughters; to our amazement, confusion, and greater complexity, we are both" (253). Luce Irigaray reaches a similar conclusion when she

² While the title character of the novel tries to silence her grandmother, *Sula* is also the only work in which we clearly hear a maternal voice, from Eva. In her article "Maternal Narratives: 'Cruel Enough to Stop the Blood'," Hirsch puts forward that Eva has a "double identity, as an individual subject and as a mother, signaling perhaps the self-division that by necessity characterizes and distinguishes maternal discourse" (266). She later concludes that "maternal discourse [...] remains both absent and present in the novel, a mark of difference which does not provide the novel with its momentum, but which to do so must to a degree remain unspoken" (270).

writes: “We are always mothers once we are women” (43). She goes on to further elucidate this observation when she notes, “We bring something other than children into the world [:] love, desire, language, art, the social, the political, the religious for example” (43). She suggests, therefore, that mothering is not just a matter of biological reproduction but also includes creation of all kinds. This recalls Jung’s argument that the positive aspects of the mother archetype include “all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magical transformation and rebirth... are presided over by the mother” (82).

Out of the Silence

Each of the novels in this study brings the maternal out of the silence to which it has traditionally been relegated. Perhaps more than the others, *Sula* is a novel that contains a series of unique portraits of mothers. Morrison reveals the extent to which the mother is at the heart of the African-American community. With *Mulher no Espelho*, Parente Cunha offers a scathing commentary on the effects of upper class Brazilian patriarchal society on the interior lives of females³: daughters, wives, mothers, all are alienated from themselves. The text vividly represents this divide with the multiple voices of eu, *a mulher*, and the author, as well as the third person narrative voice that scarcely appears. The significance of the text is not so much that Parente Cunha presents a non-unified subject as much as she allows all of these voices to speak their own truths, to present moments from their own perspectives. Ferré does something similar in

³ The damaging effect of patriarchy on the males of the novel would be a fruitful subject for further examination.

Vecindarios excéntricos: although Elvira is certainly the predominant voice, the text includes the voices of Clarissa, Elvira's mother, as well as the voices of Elvira's extended family of grandmothers, aunts, and cousins. Finally, Monteflores also allows for a good number of women in her text to speak. While some mothers are deliberately marginal, they nevertheless contribute the voice of their own experiences.

Othermothers

In all of these novels, women who are biologically unrelated to the protagonists play a significant role in the raising of the children. They work alongside the biological mothers in caring and nurturing the young. In *Sula*, Eva leaves her three children for a time with a neighbor, Mrs. Suggs. They remain with this woman for eighteen months, until Eva returns with ten thousand dollars, enough money to establish her family's economic security. The narrator observes, "first, [Eva] reclaimed her children, next she gave the surprised Mrs. Suggs a ten-dollar bill, later she started building a house on Carpenter's Road" (34-35). The reaction of Mrs. Suggs is interesting because it suggests that she was prepared to continue caring for the Peace children, and perhaps did not expect Eva to return. Sula herself is raised not only by her mother, Hannah, but also by her grandmother, Eva. In *Mulher no Espelho*, the protagonist does not distinguish her love for her mother from that of her nanny. In fact, this woman had taken care of the protagonist's father as well as her brother and herself. To a certain extent, then, she may be considered almost a grandmother figure in the household. Before her younger brother is born, the protagonist has all of the attention of the adults in her life. She writes: "Quando eu era muito pequena, habitava livremente o colo de meu pai. O colo de minha

mãe era meu. O colo de minha ama não tinha metade” (67). She implies that of the three caretakers, her nanny is the one who provides unconditional love for her. In *Vecindarios excéntricos*, Clarissa looks not to her biological mother, Valeria, for emotional support, but to Miña, the Afro-Puerto Rican woman who serves as the family’s maid. The narrator notes how as a child, she came upon a ball of soap in Miña’s bathroom that included all of the scents of everyone in the house, Elvira’s maternal grandparents, her aunts and uncle, as well as that of her mother. She adds: “Y sobre todos los perfumes reinaba el olor de Miña, que mantenía unidos todos aquellos fragmentos” (127). Elvira herself grows up in the midst of an extended family, one that includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins from both her mother’s and father’s families. Finally, in *Cantando bajito / Singing Softly*, Pilar is estranged from her biological mother Marta when she elopes with Juan. Instead, she stays in contact with Señá Alba. Pilar goes on to raise her own children, and she plays a significant role in the life of Meli, the narrator of the novel.

All of these examples reveal the importance of what Patricia Hill Collins has labeled “othermothers – women who assist bloodmothers [biological mothers] by sharing mothering responsibilities” (*Black Feminist Thought* 178). Collins reveals that this occurs not only in the African-American community but also throughout Black diasporic societies, of which Puerto Rico and Brazil are two. She goes on to write that the centrality of women in the raising of children is characterized less by the *absence* of husbands and fathers than by the significance of women (178, italics in the original). Indeed, in almost all of the novels I have just mentioned, with the exception of *Sula*, the fathers and husbands of the female protagonists are fully present. Still, a common focus of all of these novels is the care that mothers, of all kinds, provide to the daughters. Collins points

out that “the centrality of women in African-American extended families reflects both a continuation of African-derived sensibilities and functional adaptations to intersecting oppressions of race, gender, class, and nation” (178). This certainly holds true in both *Sula* and *Cantando bajito*, where we get portraits of women who are trying to survive poverty, and so rely on other women to raise their children. In *Mulher no Espelho* and *Vecindarios excéntricos*, the othermothers are domestic workers.⁴ Nonetheless both the nanny in *Mulher* and Miña in *Vecindarios* provide much needed emotional sustenance to their young charges.

The Role of the Daughters

In all of these novels, the daughter seeks out her mother (or the woman who demonstrates maternal characteristics) despite feelings of ambivalence. It is the daughter who assists her mother in speaking. The personal mother might be a disappointment to her daughter, as Hannah is to Sula. She could exist in the shadow of the father’s presumed brilliance, as does the mother of the woman between mirrors. She might demonstrate moments of annoyance and inexplicable illogic, as Clarissa does. She could be the inspiration for escape, as Marta is for Pilar, and Luisa is for Meli. Nevertheless, the daughters in these novels all try to remove their mothers from the petrified state to which they are relegated in patriarchal discourse. These offspring both speak for their mothers

⁴ Collins names the “mammy,” or rather, the domestic worker, as the first of her controlling images. She writes: “Juxtaposed against images of White women, the mammy image as the Other symbolizes the oppositional difference of mind / body and culture / nature thought to distinguish Black women from everyone else” (73). She goes on, “The mammy image buttresses the ideology of the cult of true womanhood, one in which sexuality and fertility are severed. ‘Good’ White mothers are expected to deny their female sexuality. In contrast, the mammy image is one of an asexual woman, a surrogate mother in blackface [who demonstrates] devotion to her White family” (74).

and for themselves. This suggests that it is the responsibility of all women, who are, as Irigaray notes, all mothers, and who are certainly all daughters, to alter the definition of motherhood as it currently exists in the patriarchal maternal imaginary.

Engaging the Maternal Archetype

With his formulation of the collective unconscious and its archetypes, Jung presented a theory that would lead, he believed to the attainment of a sense of balance and wholeness, as embodied in the archetype of the Self. To Jung, it was a person's responsibility to engage with dreams, myths, drawings, and writings that contained archetypal resonances. In this dissertation, I have shown how the female protagonists of these novels interact with the maternal archetype. They do so in order to find the nurture and support they crave, and they do so in spite of a social injunction that dictates that the maternal should be buried in order to firmly establish one's autonomy. First, they look to their relationships with their personal mothers, as well as with women who serve as mother figures to them (othermothers) and friends. If possible, they then find suggestions of the maternal archetype in other sources, such as marginalized spiritual systems.

The Presence of Alternate Religious Thought

Writing about the archetypes, Jung associates the maternal archetype with things that "represent the goal of our longing for redemption, such as Paradise, the Kingdom of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem. Many things arousing devotion or feelings of awe, as for instance the Church, university, city or country, heaven, earth, the woods, the sea or any

still waters, matter even, the underworld and the moon, can be mother-symbols” (81). Each of these novelists presents varied portraits of spiritual systems that exist outside of orthodox Christianity, all of which carry the resonance of the maternal archetype. The portraits suggest that the writers acknowledge the limiting role for women that exists within modern-day Christianity. In *Sula*, a text that is replete with representations of “monstrous” mothers, Morrison offers the mother of Ajax, one of Sula’s lovers. Ajax is attracted to Sula precisely because he reminds him of his mother: “other than his mother, who sat in her shack with six younger sons working roots, he had never met an interesting woman in his life” (126). The narrator goes on to note that Ajax’s mother was “an evil conjure woman, blessed with seven adoring children” (126). In fact, she “was as stubborn in her pursuits of the occult as the women of Greater Saint Matthew’s were in the search for redeeming grace” (127). For the mother of Ajax, propriety is less important than providing a supportive, loving environment for her family. Indeed, the narrator emphasizes that, despite what the community may think of her, and despite her nonconformity with black societal ideals of motherhood, she “inspired thoughtfulness and generosity in all of her sons” (126). Ajax considers his mother to be “brilliant” (128), a woman who knows her life is her own (127) and who could “deal with life efficiently” (127). Barbara Christian discusses the figure of the conjure woman in her work *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (1980). Writing about the appearance of this figure in antebellum literature in the United States, she observes

the conjure woman image incorporates the signs of traditional African religions that the southern gentry pointed to as dark and evil, heathen forces [...] On the other hand, the image of the conjurer was, in southern literature, treated with some measure of respect and awe, as if the dark, incomprehensible forces did exist and had some power to affect the fortunes of men (16-17).

While the people of the Bottom marginalize Ajax's mother, they respect her to a certain degree: she is able to earn a living due to her knowledge of "the weather, omens, the living, the dead, dreams and all illnesses" (126). The population of the community implicitly acknowledges, therefore, that she possesses a certain knowledge that they do not.

The community in *Cantando bajito / Singing Softly* exhibit this same distance and grudging respect for Alba, the *curandera*. Like the mother of Ajax, she also works with roots and herbs. The people of her village call her "Seña," a form of "Señora," which is a title of respect, and yet they do so disparagingly. At the end of the novel, when she voices her life story to Pilar, Alba says, "...cuando la gente te llame bruja cuando loh ayudah... cuando nadie te quiere en su casa, na' máh que cuando te necesitan... cuando te tratan como un perro... cuando haya pasa'o pol to'eso, niña, entonceh podráh pasal juicio pol m'" (184). Alba here gives voice to the hypocrisy with which she has to contend on a daily basis. In addition to her work with plants, Alba has also been trained as a midwife, an occupation that historically has also been associated with witchcraft.⁵ Furthermore, she is accused of being a *santera*, a priestess in the form of Yoruba religion that was blended with Catholicism when African slaves were brought to the Caribbean.

Parente Cunha prominently features the Afro-Brazilian manifestation of this religion in *Mulher no Espelho*. In that novel, the protagonist not only falls in love with a child of Xangô, but also discovers while in trance that two of the *orixas*, Oxum and Iansã, have claimed her as their daughter. I have argued that this religion allows the protagonist, fragmented by her society's definition of womanhood, to recuperate parts of her identity

⁵ See the works of Elizabeth Brooke; Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English; and Adrienne Rich 135-155.

that she previously allows to languish. Both Oxum and Iansã are images of full womanhood, in that they exhibit qualities that are neither wholly good or bad but both. By interacting with these entities, the protagonist learns to embrace all of herself.

The grandmother of the narrative voice in *Vecindarios excéntricos* presents a different idea of womanhood to her. Elvira adores her maternal grandmother, Valeria, to the extent that she does not understand her mother Clarissa's disputes with her (43). Ferré devotes a chapter to Valeria's practice of *espiritismo*, a Caribbean form of nineteenth-century European Spiritism. This primary tenet of this religion is that "the primary purpose of life on earth is to master, through knowledge and participation, the lower nature and to be guided and influenced by the higher aspects of the divine spirit within" (Fernández Olmos 174). Elvira, therefore, learns of a body of thought that differs from the Catholic Church, which is predominant on the island.

Indeed, until quite recently, Catholicism was prominent throughout Latin America, while in the United States, Protestantism is the dominant form of Christianity. The inclusion of portraits of varied spiritual systems in these novels strongly suggests that there is no room for women to flourish in orthodox religion. All of the novelists seemingly reach a similar conclusion, that there exists a different source of spiritual knowledge, one that can better address the needs of women, outside of the predominant faith. I would argue that these spiritual practices are another image of the maternal archetype, in that they all "represent[] the goal of our longing for redemption" (*Archetypes* 81) as well as "arous[e] devotion or feelings of awe" (*Archetypes* 81). In presenting these alternate forms of spiritual practice, the authors of these works are

offering different resources through which women may obtain the emotional care and nurture that they crave.

Art and Its Relationship to the Mother Archetype

Jung writes that the positive qualities associated with the archetype are as follows: “maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility. The place of magical transformation and rebirth... are presided over by the mother” (*Archetypes* 82). He also speaks of the negative manifestations of the mother archetype: “anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate” (*Archetypes* 82). Throughout this dissertation, I have shown that all of the protagonists of these novels come across many of these traits when interacting with the mother archetype. They do so when interacting with their personal mothers, as well as with women who act in a maternal role (aunts, grandmothers, nannies, spiritual guides; they do so in their friendships with other women; they do so with alternate spiritual systems; and they do so with art, whether it be writing, painting, creating in any sense.

In her text *In Her Image: The Unhealed Daughter's Search for Her Mother* (1989), Kathie Carlson writes that the pursuit of nurturing is one that both men and women alike share. Using psychoanalytic theory such as that of Nancy Chodorow, Carlson establishes that it is with in her relationship with her mother that a woman

develops “her feelings about herself, her body, and other women” (xi). For women, therefore, the search for support and love manifests itself differently than it does for men. She identifies what I have called a search for wholeness as a hunger for healing. Carlson writes: “The hunger of the unhealed daughter has a collective, archetypal core. More deeply and broadly, what we long for is a fuller version of Woman, a vision that can mother our hearts and our souls into their truest being” (xii). I offer that these novelists are but a small sample of a number of women writers in the Americas who try to amplify that vision of the Female by focusing on mothers and daughters as they search for wholeness against a patriarchal maternal imaginary.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barros, José Flávio Pessoa de, and Maria Lina Leão Teixeira, "O Código do Corpo: Inscrições e Marcas dos Orixás." Candomblé: Tipos Psicológicos nas Religiões Afro-brasileiras. Carlos Eugênio Marcondes de Moura, ed. Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 2000.
- Beard, Laura J. "The Mirrored Self: Helena Parente Cunha's Mulher no Espelho." College Literature 22.1 (Feb 1995): 103-118.
- Belsey, Catherine. "Constructing the Subject: Deconstructing the Text." Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism. 2nd ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997. 657-673.
- Bennett, Lerone, Jr. Before the Mayflower: A History of Black America. 6th ed. New York: Penguin, 1993.
- Benjamin, Jessica. The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination. New York: Pantheon, 1988.
- Boff, Clodovis. Maria na Cultura Brasileira: Aparecida, Iemanjá e Nossa Senhora da Libertação. Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 1995.
- Brennan, Jonathan, ed. Mixed Race Literature. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2002.
- Brodzki, Bella. "Mothers, Displacement and Language." Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader. Ed. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1998. 156-159.
- Brooke, Elizabeth. Women Healers: Portraits of Herbalists, Physicians, and Midwives. Rochester, VT: Healing Arts P, 1995.
- Brown-Guillory, Elizabeth, ed. Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th-Century Literature. Austin: U of Texas P, 1996.
- Burrows, Victoria. "'Knots of Death': Toni Morrison's *Sula*." The Mother-Daughter Knot in the Fiction of Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid and Toni Morrison. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
- Carby, Hazel V. Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Carlson, Kathie. In Her Image: The Unhealed Daughter's Search for Her Mother. Boston: Shambhala, 1989.

- Carmo, João Clodomiro do. O Que É Candomblé. São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1987.
- Chaves Tesser, Carmen. "Post-Structuralist Theory Mirrored in Helena Parente Cunha's *Woman between Mirrors*." Hispania 74 (3): 594-597.
- Chodorow, Nancy. The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gendering. Berkeley : U of California P, 1978.
- Christian, Barbara. Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976. Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1980.
- . Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers. New York, Pergamon, 1985.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. "Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood," Representations of Motherhood. eds. Donna Basser, Margaret Honey and Meryle Mahrer Kaplan. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1994.
- . Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Cunha, Helena Parente. A Mulher no Espelho. São Paulo: Art Editora, 1983.
- DeLancey, Dayle B. "Motherlove Is a Killer: *Sula*, *Beloved*, and the Deadly Trinity of Motherlove." Sage 7.2 (Fall 1990): 15-18.
- Demetrakopoulos, Stephanie A. "*Sula* and the Primacy of Woman-to-Woman Bonds." Karla F. C. Holloway and Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, New Dimensions of Spirituality: A Biracial and Bicultural Reading of the Novels of Toni Morrison. New York: Westport P, 1987. 51-66.
- Douglas, Claire. "The Historical Context of Analytical Psychology." The Cambridge Companion to Jung. Ed. Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997. 17-34.
- Douglas, Mary. Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo. 1966. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Deirdre English. Witches, Midwives, and Nurses: A History Of Women Healers. 2nd ed. Old Westbury, NY: The Feminist Press, 1973.
- Falcón, Rafael. Lo afronegroide en el cuento puertorriqueño. Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1993.
- Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin, White Masks: The Experiences of a Black Man in a White World. 1952. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove, 1967.

- Fernández Olmos, Margarite and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Spiritismo. New York: New York UP, 2003.
- Ferré, Rosario. Vecindarios excéntricos. New York: Vintage, 1999.
- Fitz, Earl E. Rediscovering the New World: Inter-American Literature in a Comparative Context. Iowa City, IA: U of Iowa P, 1991.
- . Ambiguity and Gender in the New Novel of Brazil and Spanish America: A Comparative Assessment. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1993.
- . Brazilian Narrative Traditions in a Comparative Context. New York: MLA, 2005.
- Foucault, Michel. The Archaeology of Knowledge. Trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Harper, 1972.
- Frey-Rohn, Liliane. From Freud to Jung: A Comparative Study of the Psychology of the Unconscious. 1969. Trans. Fred E. Engreen and Evelyn K. Engreen. New York: Putnam, 1974.
- Fultz, Lucille. "To Make Herself: Mother-Daughter Conflicts in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Tar Baby*." Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th Century Literature. Ed. Elizabeth Brown-Guillory. Austin: UT Press, 1996. 228-242.
- Furman, Jan. Toni Morrison's Fiction. Columbia, SC: U of South Carolina P, 1996
- Gay, Peter, ed. The Freud Reader. New York: Norton, 1989.
- Gillespie, Diane and Missy Dehn Kubischek, "Who Cares? Women-Centered Psychology in *Sula*" Black American Literature Forum 24.1 (Spring 1990): 21-48.
- Gleason, Judith. Oya: In Praise of the Goddess. Boston: Shambhala, 1987.
- Goldenberg, Naomi R. Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions. Boston: Beacon, 1979.
- Grewal, Gurleen. Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle: The Novels of Toni Morrison. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 1998.
- Guy-Sheftall, Beverly, ed. Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought. New York: Norton, 1995.
- Harris, Trudier. Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison. Knoxville, TN: U of

- Tennessee P, 1991.
- Heinze, Denise. The Dilemma of Double Consciousness: Toni Morrison's Novels. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1993.
- Higgins, Therese E. Religiosity, Cosmology, and Folklore: The African Influence in the Novels of Toni Morrison New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Hirsch, Marianne. The Mother / Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1989.
- . "Maternal Narratives: 'Cruel Enough to Stop the Blood.'" Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and K.A. Appiah. New York: Amistad Press, 1993. 261-273.
- Hintz, Suzanne S. "The Narrator as Discriminator in (Auto)Biographical Fiction: Rosario Ferré's *Vecinarios excéntricos*." RLA 7 (1995): 503-508.
- . Rosario Ferré: A Search for Identity. New York: Peter Lang, 1995.
- hooks, bell. Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism. Boston: South End Press, 1981.
- . Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black. Boston: South End Press, 1989.
- . Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery. Boston: South End Press, 1993.
- Irigaray, Luce. The Irigaray Reader. Ed. Margaret Whitford. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1988.
- Jung, C.G. Symbols of Transformation. Ed. and Trans. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1967. Vol. 5 of Collected Works of C.G. Jung. 20 vols. 1966-1979.
- . The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious. Ed. and Trans. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1967. Vol. 9.1 of Collected Works of C.G. Jung. 20 vols. 1966-1979.
- Karade, Baba Ifa. The Handbook of Yoruba Religious Concepts. York Beach, Maine: Weiser, 1994.
- Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1982.
- . Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York:

- Columbia UP, 1989.
- Lacan, Jacques. Ècrits. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 2002.
- Laplanche, J. and J.B. Pontalis. The Language of Psycho-analysis. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: Norton, 1974.
- Lauter, Estella and Carol Schreir Rupperecht, eds. Feminist Archetypal Theory: Interdisciplinary Re-Visions of Jungian Thought. Knoxville, TN: U of Tennessee P, 1985.
- Lindstrom, Naomi. "Narrative Experiment and Social Statement: Helena Parente Cunha." Luso-Brazilian Review. 33.1 (1996): 141-150.
- Lorde, Audre. "Eye to Eye: Black Women, Hatred and Anger." Zami/Sister Outsider/Undersong. New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1993. 145-175. Rpt. of Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches. 1984
- McGuire, William, ed. The Freud/Jung Letters. Abr. ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994.
- McHoul, Alec and Wendy Grace. A Foucault Primer: Discourse, power and the subject. New York: New York UP, 1997.
- Malin, Jo. The Voice of the Mother: Embedded Maternal Narratives in Twentieth-Century Women's Autobiographies. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2000.
- Monteflores, Carmen de. Singing Softly / Cantando bajito. San Francisco: Spinsters-Aunt Lute, 1989.
- Moreno Vega, Marta. The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería. New York: One World-Ballantine, 2000.
- . When the Spirits Dance Mambo: Growing Up Nuyorican in El Barrio. New York: Three Rivers P, 2004.
- Morrison, Toni. Sula. 1973. New York: Plume-Penguin, 1982.
- . Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination. New York: Vintage, 1993.
- Murdock, Maureen. The Heroine's Journey. Boston: Shambhala, 1990.
- Murphy, Joseph M. and Mei-Mei Sanford, eds. Òsun across the Waters: A Yoruba Goddess in Africa and the Americas. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2001.

- Nikolchina, Miglena. Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf. New York: Other, 2004.
- Oliver, Kelly, ed. The Portable Kristeva. 2nd. Ed. New York: Columbia UP, 2002.
- Olivier, Christiane. Jocasta's Children: The Imprint of the Mother. Trans. George Craig. New York: Routledge, 1989.
- O'Reilly, Andrea. Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004.
- Patton, Venetria K. Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000.
- Pessoni, Michele. "She was Laughing at their God": Discovering the Goddess within in *Sula*." African American Review 29:3 (Autumn 1995): 439-451.
- Reddy, Maureen T., and Brenda O. Daly, eds. Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities. Knoxville, TN: U of Tennessee P, 1991.
- Reisner, Gerhild. "Introduction: Restlessness and Identity, Writing and Self." Daughters of Restlessness: Women's Literature at the End of the Millennium. Eds. Sabine Coelsch-Foster, Hannah Wallinger, and Gerhild Reisner. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1998. 217-225.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Motherhood: The Contemporary Emergency and the Quantum Leap." 1978. On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978. New York: Norton, 1979. 259-273.
- . Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution. 1976. New York: Norton, 1986.
- Rowland, Susan. Jung: A Feminist Revision. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002.
- Roy-Féquièrre, Magali. Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life in Early Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico. Philadelphia : Temple UP, 2004.
- Safi-Eddine, Khadija. "Woman between Mirrors: Writing the Self." Modern Language Studies. Spring 1994. 24 (2): 48-56.
- Salman, Sherry. "The Creative Psyche: Jung's Major Contributions." The Cambridge Companion to Jung. Ed. Polly Young-Eisendrath and Terence Dawson. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997. 52-70.
- Sánchez González, Lisa. Boricua Literature: A Literary History of the Puerto Rican Diaspora. New York: New York UP, 2001.

- Sandoval Sánchez, Alberto. "Puerto Rican Identity Up in the Air: Air Migration, Its Cultural Representations, and Me 'Cruzando el Charco.'" Puerto Rican Jam: Essays on Culture and Politics. Ed. Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997. 189-208.
- Sáenz de Tejada, Cristina. "Representaciones de la negritude brasileña en *Mulher no Espelho* y *As Mulheres de Tijucoapapo*." Afro-Hispanic Review 16.1 (Spring 1997): 47-52.
- . La (re)construcción de la identidad femenina en la narrativa autobiográfica latinoamericana, 1975-1985. New York: Peter Lang, 1998.
- Safi-Eddine, Khadija. "Woman between Mirrors: Writing the Self." Modern Language Studies 24.2 (Spring 1994): 48-56.
- Schramm, Margaret. "The Quest for the Perfect Mother in Toni Morrison's *Sula*." The Anna Book: Searching for Anna in Literary History. Ed. Mickey Pearlman. Westport, CT: Greenwood P, 1992. 167-176.
- Scoble, Gretchen, and Ann Field. The Meaning of Flowers. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle, 1998.
- Scully, Pamela, and Diana Patton, eds. Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2005.
- Senecal, Nikole Alexa. "(Mis)representations of Violent Women." Diss. U of Southern California, 2002.
- Silva, Vagner Goncalves da. Candomblé e Umbanda: Caminhos da Devocão Brasileira. São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1994.
- Spillers, Hortense J. "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism. Ed., Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. 1991. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997. 384-405.
- . "A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love" Feminist Studies 9.2 (Summer 1983): 293-323.
- Steele, Robert S. Freud and Jung: Conflicts of Interpretation. Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.
- Stepto, Robert. "Intimate Things in Place: A Conversation with Toni Morrison." Ed. Danille Taylor-Guthrie. Conversations with Toni Morrison. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1994. 10-29.

- Shuttle, Penélope and Peter Redgrove. The Wise Wound: Myths, Realities, and Meanings of Menstruation. New York: Bantam, 1990.
- Stevens, Anthony. Archetype Revisited: An Updated Natural History of the Self. Rev. ed. Toronto: Inner City Books, 2003.
- Szoka, Elizbieta, ed. Fourteen Female Voices from Brazil: Interviews and Works. Austin, TX: Host, 2002.
- Trigo, Benigno. "The Mother Tongue." *Posdata* 17 (2003): 25-36.
- . Remembering Maternal Bodies: Melancholy in Latina and Latin American Women's Writing. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Vickroy, Laurie. "The Force Outside/The Force Inside: Mother-Love and Regenerative Spaces in *Sula* and *Beloved*." Understanding Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Sula*: Selected Essays and Criticisms. Ed. Solomon O. Iyasere and Marla W. Iyasere. 297-314.
- Vilches Norat, Vanessa. De(s)madres o el rastro materno en las escrituras del yo. Santiago: Editorial Cuarto Propio, 2003.
- Walker, Alice. "In Search of Our Mother's Gardens." In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose. New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1984. 231-243.
- Wallace, Michele. Black Macho and the Myth of the Super Woman. New York: Warner, 1979.
- Warhol, Robyn R. "Introduction to 'Discourse'." Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism. 2nd ed. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997. 653-656.
- Washington, Teresa N. Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts: Manifestations of Àjé in Africana Literature. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2005.
- Wehr, Demaris S. Jung and Feminism: Liberating Archetypes. Boston: Beacon P, 1987.
- Woodman, Marion. Addiction to Perfection: The Still Unravished Bride. Toronto: Inner City, 1982.
- . Conscious Femininity: Interviews with Marion Woodman. Toronto: Inner City, 1993.
- Young-Eisendrath, Polly. Women and Desire: Beyond Wanting to Be Wanted. New York: Harmony Books, 1999.
- Zenón Cruz, Isabelo. Narciso descubre su trasero : el negro en la cultura puertorriqueña. 2 vols. Humacao, P.R.: Editorial Furidi, 1974-1975.

Žižek, Slavoj. "Notes on a Debate 'From Within the People.'" Criticism 46.4 (2004) 661-666.