



---

Mothers and Daughters

Author(s): Marianne Hirsch

Source: *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 200-222

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173518>

Accessed: 24/03/2009 13:51

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Signs*.

## REVIEW ESSAY

# Mothers and Daughters

Marianne Hirsch

In 1976 Adrienne Rich alerted us to the silence that has surrounded the most formative relationship in the life of every woman, the relationship between daughter and mother: "The cathexis between mother and daughter—essential, distorted, misused—is the great unwritten story. Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has labored

---

EDITORS' NOTE: *Marianne Hirsch's central question challenges the ideas expressed on mothering in several other pieces in this issue. She asks whether all our theories about women's sexuality and mothering are not still so enmeshed in the language of male thinkers that our very experiences as we describe them become a shadowing forth of some man's theory. Even if we deny that this does describe our experience, we continue to use the theorist's phrasing in our denials.*

I am grateful to the Wellesley Center for Research on Women whose grant enabled me to do a great deal of research for this essay and for the comments of other Mellon Seminar members to whom I presented some of these ideas. I wish to thank the members of the Dartmouth University Seminar on Feminist Inquiry and of the Newberry Library feminist criticism group for their reactions, especially Elizabeth Abel and Brenda Silver for their detailed suggestions.

[Signs: *Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1981, vol. 7, no. 1]  
© 1981 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. 0097-9740/82/0701-0014\$01.00

to give birth to the other.”<sup>1</sup> Since Rich demonstrated the absence of the mother-daughter relationship from theology, art, sociology, and psychoanalysis, and its centrality in women’s lives, many voices have come to fill this gap, to create speech and meaning where there has been silence and absence. In fact, the five years since the publication of Rich’s book have seen a proliferation of writings that have both documented the relationship from its most personal resonances to its most abstract implications and uncovered a variety of precedents for their inquiry. Books, articles in scholarly journals, essays in popular magazines, novels, poems and plays, films and television scenarios, discussion groups at national and international conferences, and courses in universities, junior colleges, and high schools throughout the country all attest to the dramatic reversal of the silence Rich deploras. It is the purpose of this essay first to account for this reversal and the subsequent centrality of the mother-daughter relationship at this particular point in feminist scholarship and then to delineate the range and direction of the work done in this area. Although I shall concentrate primarily on major psychoanalytic and literary studies that have appeared since Rich, I shall by necessity go back to some of their conceptual and theoretical sources.<sup>2</sup>

## I

It seems appropriate to begin with Rich’s extraordinary and controversial book itself, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, the first systematic study of the fact that “all human life on the planet is born of woman. The one unifying, incontrovertible experience shared by all women and men is that months-long period we spent unfolding inside a woman’s body. . . . Most of us first knew love and disappointment, power and tenderness, in the person of a woman” (p. 11). Rich’s analysis of motherhood as an institution in patriarchy—a female experience that is shaped by male expectations and structures, and virtually unrecorded by women themselves to date—is revolutionary not only in its content but also in its methodology: “It seemed to me impossible from the first to write a book of this kind without being often autobiographical, without often saying ‘I’ ” (p. 15). Rich’s voice, both personal and scholarly, resting on research in various academic fields, as well as on her own experience as a mother and a daughter, has helped create a novel form of feminist discourse which, I would like to argue, has freed scholars to consider extremely personal experiences as valid objects of scholarly inquiry.

1. Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1976), p. 225.

2. For an earlier review of some of this literature, see Judith Kegan Gardiner, “The New Motherhood,” *North American Review* 263, no. 2 (Fall 1978): 72–76.

Rich's chapter on "Motherhood and Daughterhood" is, as she says, "the core of my book" (p. 218). It contains, in fact, the germs of many of the other studies I shall mention in this essay. It is both an evocation of the desire that connects mother and daughter, of the knowledge they share, "a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, pre-verbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other" (p. 220), and an account of what Lynn Sukenick has called "matrophobia," the "desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage, to become individuated and free" (p. 236). It traces a relationship "minimized and trivialized in the annals of patriarchy" (p. 236), as well as the close female bonds that seem nevertheless to have persisted. It deplores the silences surrounding this relationship: "The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy. We acknowledge Lear (father-daughter split), Hamlet (son and mother), and Oedipus (son and mother) as great embodiments of the human tragedy; but there is no presently enduring recognition of mother-daughter passion and rapture" (p. 237). And it reminds us of the Eleusinian mysteries that celebrated the reunion of mother and daughter, the assertion of a maternal power that could "undo rape and bring her [daughter] back from the dead" (p. 240). Most important, Rich reminds us forcefully and persuasively of every woman's participation in the experience and institution of motherhood: "The 'childless woman' and the 'mother' are a false polarity, which has served the institutions both of motherhood and heterosexuality. . . . We are, none of us, 'either' mothers or daughters; to our amazement, confusion, and greater complexity, we are both" (pp. 250, 253).

In drawing on literature, theology, psychology, anthropology, myth, and history, Rich's book announces in both content and form the work that has followed on mother-daughter relationships. Its emergence at this particular moment can be explained by a glance at prevalent trends in feminist scholarship. There can be no systematic and theoretical study of women in patriarchal culture, there can be no theory of women's oppression, that does not take into account woman's role as a mother of daughters and as a daughter of mothers, that does not study female identity in relation to previous and subsequent generations of women, and that does not study that relationship in the wider context in which it takes place: the emotional, political, economic, and symbolic structures of family and society. Any full study of mother-daughter relationships, in whatever field, is by definition both feminist and interdisciplinary.

The study of mother-daughter relationships situates itself at the point where various disciplines become feminist studies, as well as at the point where the feminist areas of a number of disciplines intersect: sociology, where it concentrates on sex-role differentiation, where it attempts to distinguish between the individual and the roles she has to assume, and where those roles are studied in relation to their social

determinants; anthropology, where it examines theories of matriarchy and their validity, matrilineal social organizations, matrilineal residence, and the effects of these different kinship structures on gender configurations and power distributions; religious studies, where it seeks evidence for a mother-goddess and attempts to develop a female-centered spirituality; history, where it examines the private stories of women's lives in journals, letters, and autobiographies that document family relationships; philosophy, where it challenges the dominant Western dualistic thought that banishes woman into the position of nature to man's culture, matter to man's spirit, emotion to man's reason, object to man's subject;<sup>3</sup> and psychology and literary criticism, where the focus is so specific and where the points of intersection are so numerous that they demand detailed analysis.

The most complete and complex work on mother-daughter relationships to date has been undertaken in the area of feminist psychoanalysis. As Juliet Mitchell has demonstrated, psychoanalysis is particularly useful to feminist scholarship in that it shows us "how we acquire our heritage of the ideas and laws of human society within the unconscious mind."<sup>4</sup> In spite of certain limitations to which I shall return, it helps us to understand how the laws underlying and underwrit-

3. Jessie Bernard's important book *The Future of Motherhood* (New York: Dial Press, 1974) studies motherhood as a social institution, not as a fact of nature. It is a role that women learn, a role subject to certain cultural imperatives, and, at this point, a role that is being changed profoundly by factors such as women's increased participation in the labor force, an ever-decreasing birthrate, and the isolation of the nuclear family. Bernard studies, as well, the effects of all-female mothering on our society where it fosters a polarization of nurturance and power. On matriarchy, see J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion and Mother-Right: Selected Writings*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967); and Robert Briffault, *The Mothers* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1969). See also Joan Bamberger, "The Myth of Matriarchy: Why Men Rule in Primitive Society," in *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 263-80; and Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Rapp Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975). In religious studies, see, e.g., Carol Christ and Judith Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979); Carol Christ, *Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1980); and the critique by Rosemary Ruether, "A Religion for Women: Sources and Strategies," *Christianity and Crisis* 39, no. 19 (1979): 307-11. In history, see, e.g., Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29; Gerda Lerner, ed., *The Female Experience: An American Documentary* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1977); and Mary Kelley, "Peculiar Circumstances: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America" (Hanover, N.H.: Department of History, Dartmouth College). On woman as the "other," see Dorothy Dinnerstein, *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and the Human Malaise* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976); and Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. and ed. H. M. Parshley (New York: Alfred Knopf & Sons, 1953).

4. Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (New York: Random House, 1975), p. xiv.

ing patriarchy function within each of us, whether male or female, and how they affect our most intimate relationships. Moreover, feminist revisions of psychoanalytic texts allow us to appreciate the specificity of female, as distinguished from male, development and the effect of those differences on relationships among women.

Female writers' accounts of the mother-daughter bond are the most articulate and detailed expressions of its intimacy and distance, passion and violence, that we can find; they are the most personal and at the same time the most universal. Recent critical studies of works written by women have answered Rich's charge: the story of mother and daughter has indeed been written, although it is not often found on the surface but in the submerged depths of literary texts. The question now becomes the analysis of its intricacies and complexities, and especially of its influence on literary forms and structures. For as Mary Carruthers wrote in "Imagining Women: Notes toward a Feminist Poetic," "Language is the medium in which we carry our past, determine our present, and condition our future."<sup>5</sup>

## II

Three trends have emerged in recent feminist psychoanalytic works about mothers and daughters. Dorothy Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and the Human Malaise*, Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, Jane Flax's "The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother/Daughter Relationships and within Feminism," and Jean Baker Miller's *Toward a New Psychology of Women* all draw, more or less directly, on the Freudian oedipal paradigm and on neo-Freudian theory, especially object-relations psychology.<sup>6</sup> A second trend is represented by

5. Mary Carruthers, "Imagining Women: Notes toward a Feminist Poetic," *Massachusetts Review* 20 (1979): 281-307. Carruthers analyzes three main themes in women's poetry in the 1960s and 1970s: the mother-daughter relationship, the tradition of romantic love, and the nature of the powerful woman.

6. Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978). See also Chodorow's earlier essay, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," in Rosaldo and Lamphere, eds., pp. 43-66, which includes a cross-cultural comparison of mother-daughter relationships that she unfortunately does not pursue in her book. Other essays by Chodorow include "Mothering, Object-Relations and the Female Oedipal Configuration," *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 1 (February 1978): 137-58, and "Feminism and Difference: Gender, Relation and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective," *Socialist Review* 46 (July-August 1979): 51-69, also reprinted in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine, eds., *The Future of Difference* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980). See too Jane Flax, "The Conflict between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother/Daughter Relationships and within Feminism," *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 1 (February 1978): 171-89. (This special issue of *Feminist Studies* is devoted to delineating "a feminist theory of motherhood." I shall mention some of the essays included

Jungian studies; Nor Hall's *The Moon and the Virgin: Reflections on the Archetypal Feminine*—as well as a number of literary studies—draw on Jung, on Erich Neumann's *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, and on Carl Kerényi's *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*.<sup>7</sup> A third trend emerges in the work of French feminist theory, in particular Luce Irigaray's *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*, but also at crucial points in the writings of Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous; all are based in Jacques Lacan.<sup>8</sup>

This brief and sketchy introduction already reveals the problem I perceive to be inherent in these analyses: at the source of each of these important and useful feminist theoretical studies we find not only a male theorist but a developed androcentric system, which, even if deconstructed and redefined, still remains a determining and limiting point of departure. I shall return to this criticism; first, however, it is useful to summarize these three trends and their points of intersection.

In his three late essays on female sexuality, Freud revises his equilateral theory of early individual development, and he stresses, for both boys and girls, the importance of the pre-oedipal attachment to the mother.<sup>9</sup> The significance for women of this pre-oedipal phase and of the resultant bond to the mother had for Freud the surprise that archaeologists experienced when they discovered the Minoan-Mycenaean civilizations behind the Greek. All three of his essays revolve around the central mystery of female development—the source of a girl's transfer of attachment to her father. Freud himself admits that his numerous theoretical explanations (mostly based in the girl's supposed hostility for having been deprived of a penis) are not ultimately satisfying. His admission clearly disproves the perceived notion that Freud outlines the Electra complex; in fact, he rejects the term, even while insisting, as best he can, on the idea of natural heterosexuality. Boys experience only rivalry with the same-sex parent; threatened with castration, they resolve

---

in it.) See also Jane Flax, "Mother-Daughter Relationships: Psychodynamics, Politics and Philosophy," in Eisenstein and Jardine, eds.; Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1976).

7. Nor Hall, *The Moon and the Virgin: Reflections on the Archetypal Feminine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980); Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955); and Carl Kerényi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken Books, 1976).

8. Luce Irigaray's work, translated by Hélène Vivienne Wenzel and entitled "And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other," appears in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 7, no. 1 (Autumn 1981): 60–67. The original French version, *Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*, was published in Paris by Editions de Minuit in 1979.

9. These three essays—"Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes" (1924), "Female Sexuality" (1931), and "Femininity" (1931)—are conveniently reprinted in Jean Strouse, ed., *Women and Analysis* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1974).

the oedipal conflict very rapidly. Girls, in contrast, feel ambivalent toward the mother who is both rival and object of desire. In fact, Freud emphasizes that the pre-oedipal attachment to the mother is never totally superseded by the desire for the father; neither is the oedipal rejection of the mother ever overcome. This ambivalent relationship dominates a woman's entire life, especially her relationship with her husband or lover.

Dinnerstein, Chodorow, and Flax take as their starting points the formative importance of the pre-oedipal period and the female parent's domination of that period for both sons and daughters. In studying the consequences of exclusive parenting by women for adult personality and for the gender configurations of our culture generally, Chodorow and Flax rely not so much directly on Freud but on the work of object-relations psychologists, in whose theory the pre-oedipal period is seen not as a stage through which infants progress instinctually (drive or *Trieb* theory), but as an interpersonal field of relationships internalized by the infant and therefore configurative in the adult personality.<sup>10</sup> The mother thus remains an important inner object throughout adult life. Chodorow and Flax find that this interpersonal field functions differently for male and female infants: mothers identify more strongly with female infants, seeing them more as extensions of themselves, whereas they encourage boys to become separate and autonomous. Ego boundaries between mothers and daughters are more fluid, more undefined. The girl is less encouraged to be autonomous, but she is also less nurtured, since the mother projects upon her daughter her own ambivalence about being female in patriarchal culture. Chodorow finds in these dissatisfactions the source of the "reproduction of mothering"—a woman becomes a mother in order to regain a sense of being mothered and in order to compensate for a heterosexual relationship with a man who values separation while she values connection and continuity. In her relationship with her daughter, a mother works out her unresolved relationship to her own mother. Differences in adult male and female personality are based, according to Chodorow, Flax, and Dinnerstein, on the different interpersonal configuration that occurs in the pre-oedipal phase:

Feminine personality comes to be based less on repression of inner objects, and fixed and firm splits in the ego, and more on retention and continuity of external relationships. From the retention of pre-Oedipal attachments to their mother, growing girls come to define themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self

10. See esp. D. W. Winnicott, "Mirror-Role of Mother and Family in Child Development," in *Playing and Reality* (New York: Basic Books, 1971); Margaret Mahler, Fred Pine, and Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); and W. R. D. Fairbairn, *An Object-Relations Theory of Personality* (New York: Basic Books, 1952).



contains more flexible and permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiations. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate.<sup>11</sup>

Chodorow's and Flax's conclusions about the continuity and the lack of separation or differentiation between mother and daughter has tremendous implications for anyone studying female identity. In *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, Jean Baker Miller concurs: "Women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships"; her term "affiliation," of course, points to the connections between the relation to mother and all subsequent interpersonal relationships in a woman's life.<sup>12</sup> Dinnerstein's view of these pre-oedipal differences and of exclusive female parenting provides us with the most far-reaching analysis to date of the sources of woman's exclusion from history, of her own collusion in the perpetuation of patriarchy. She convincingly argues that woman is the "other" only because she is the "mother," that patriarchy itself is a reaction against female dominion in infancy. Maternal omnipotence is so great a threat that we are willing to acquiesce to male rule in adulthood; even to women, paternal authority looks like a reasonable refuge.

In a recent article, "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination," Jessica Benjamin interprets the same fundamental asymmetry we all experience in early infancy differently; yet her conclusions are, in fact, quite similar to Dinnerstein's.<sup>13</sup> According to Benjamin, "Selfhood is defined negatively as separateness from others" (p. 148). Because of the ways boys and girls relate to and differentiate from their mothers, they grow up to play different roles in the relationships of submission and domination, object and subject. We all seem to need these oppositions in order to perpetuate a "false" sense of differentiation. As a result of the "false" differentiation we all choose instead of equality, "a whole, in tension between negation and recognition, affirming singularity and connectedness, continuity and discontinuity at once" (p. 161), our culture is dominated by a form of rational violence that is the basis of sadomasochism. "The male posture . . . prepares for the role of master. . . . The female posture disposes the woman to accept objectification and control. . . . He asserts individual selfhood, while she

11. Chodorow, *Reproduction of Mothering*, p. 169.

12. Miller, p. 83.

13. Jessica Benjamin, "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination," *Feminist Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 144-74, also reprinted in Eisenstein and Jardine, eds. See also Benjamin, "The Oedipal Riddle: Authority, Autonomy, and the New Narcissism," in Kahn and Diggins, eds., *Authority in America: The Crisis of Legitimacy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, in press).

relinquishes it" (p. 167). Benjamin and Dinnerstein both demonstrate the disastrous, the lethal effects of the asymmetry of the pre-oedipal period.

Chodorow and Dinnerstein perceive shared parenting in early infancy as the most important challenge to patriarchal rule, as the only way to balance the severely skewed "sexual arrangements" in which we live now, the only way to make us "fully human" (Dinnerstein's term). Shared child rearing, in Dinnerstein's rather global vision, will lead us to conquer the ambivalence we now feel toward carnal mortality, toward self-creation and autonomy, toward treating others as sentient beings, toward growing up and becoming adults. As all these writers point out so convincingly, women, like men, need the nurturance that will allow them to become creative, productive adults, and as long as mothers carry the burden of child rearing alone, they will not be able to nurture and support their daughters in their struggle for self-realization: the maternal role creates too much ambivalence about their own and their daughters' female identity. Although these writers disagree about the details of the interaction between mother and child (where Dinnerstein talks of the mother's power, for example, Benjamin perceives her weakness and frailty), the bases of their arguments as well as their conclusions are quite similar.

Since the publication of their books, Chodorow and Dinnerstein have received criticism from many sides, much of it in the pages of this journal, most of it centering on the limitations of the psychoanalytic paradigm on which their theory rests.<sup>14</sup> Yet it is important to perceive the far-reaching implications of their work, as well as that of Flax and Benjamin; it is important to recognize the significance of a theory that links the most private family structures to social, economic, and political structures, a theory that treats women's mothering as a "social structure which affects all other structures."<sup>15</sup> Because of its wide scope, this psychoanalytic work is as pertinent to scholars in the humanities as to social scientists; it is interdisciplinary in the fullest sense. Even though I have reservations about aspects of this work, my training as a literary critic makes me particularly sensitive to a usefulness in it that I shall shortly demonstrate.

The points of intersection between the Chodorow-Flax-Dinnerstein

14. In an early essay, "Mothers and Daughters in the World of the Father," *Frontiers* 3, no. 2 (1978): 16–21, Marcia Westkott criticizes the "fatalism that informs the psychoanalytic mode Chodorow uses in her essays." This special issue of *Frontiers* is devoted to *Mothers and Daughters* and contains a number of informative essays, as well as poems, stories, and a play. See also Judith Lorber et al., "On *The Reproduction of Mothering: A Methodological Debate*," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 482–514; and Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1980): 631–60.

15. Chodorow, "On *The Reproduction of Mothering*," p. 501.

model of mother-daughter relationships and the model created by Jung-Kerényi-Neumann in their studies of the archetype of the Great Mother, Eleusinian archaeological evidence, and other maternal or female symbolism are most illuminating. All stress the continuity between mother and daughter. Demeter and Kore are merely two sides of woman, the mother and the maiden. As Jung says, "Every mother contains her daughter within herself, and every daughter her mother. . . . Every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter. This participation and intermingling gives rise to that peculiar uncertainty as regards *time*: a woman lives earlier as a mother, later as a daughter. The conscious experience of these ties produces the feeling that her life is spread out over generations."<sup>16</sup> Nor Hall's recent book *The Moon and the Virgin*, a "quest for origins" that begins with the Mother, with the preconscious matriarchal phase in order to "remember . . . the mother-daughter body," proposes thereby to "cure the void felt these days by women—and men—who feel that their feminine nature, like Persephone, has gone to hell."<sup>17</sup> Again it is a question of reaching a balance or of correcting an asymmetry. However, because the Jungian approach to mother-daughter relationships is highly individualistic, particularly in its analysis of symbols and archetypes, it seems at this point to have more resonance in literary analysis than in critiques of social structures.

Even more illuminating are new points of intersection between French and American psychoanalysis, two traditions that have come more and more to be seen as divergent. In Luce Irigaray's "And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other" (*Et l'une ne bouge pas sans l'autre*), we find a similar insistence on the ultimate lack of separation between daughter and mother and an emphasis on multiplicity, plurality, and continuity of being. It is important to situate this short, lyrical address in the context of Irigaray's work, until recently a dense, heavily abstract deconstruction of Western philosophy from Plato to Freud and Lacan. As Carolyn Burke shows, it is only in the last section of *This Sex Which Is Not One*, entitled "When Our Lips Speak Together," that Irigaray begins to explore a different discourse, a "parler-femme," a "female-centered signification" that could express women's speech to each other.<sup>18</sup> Relationships between women are neither relationships of sameness

16. "The Psychological Aspects of the Kore," in Carl G. Jung and Carl Kerényi, *Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myths of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 162.

17. Hall, pp. xvi, 68.

18. Luce Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together," trans. Carolyn Burke, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 1 (Autumn 1980): 69–79. This essay, "Quand nos lèvres se parlent," first appeared in *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1977).

nor of difference, but of in-difference.<sup>19</sup> This new language and syntax must reflect the mutuality and interdependence of female being(s): therefore Irigaray insists on using the double pronoun “You/I” (“toi/moi”). “And the One Doesn’t Stir without the Other” is Irigaray’s first full work in this new, exploratory, and experimental mode. Desperately trying to untangle herself from within her mother and her mother from within herself, Irigaray comes to acknowledge and to accept the interpenetration that characterizes female identity.

Although this short text is the only French theoretical work directly concerned with the mother-daughter relationship, this relationship surfaces at crucial points in much current French feminist writing. Irigaray’s project, based in part on Lacan and Jacques Derrida, is an attack on phallogocentrism and aims, like the work of Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous, to deconstruct what she so aptly calls “that sameness in which for centuries we have been the other,” and to define the specificity of the female experience, which is to be found in the silences and absences, in all that our culture has repressed and suppressed.<sup>20</sup> The mother-daughter relationship is crucial in this process of exploration and definition. For Julia Kristeva, the repressed space—not exclusively female, but also to be found in the breaks that occur in avant-garde writing—is called “the semiotic” (*le sémiotique*) and is opposed to the symbolic—logic, logos, Name-of-the-Father. The semiotic is pre-oedipal, chronologically anterior to syntax, a cry, the gesture of a child. In adult discourse it is rhythm, prosody, pun, non-sense, laugh.<sup>21</sup> It is a break in the paternal order and woman, in large part because of her pre-oedipal relationship with her mother, has special access to it, at once privileged and dangerous. According to Kristeva, woman’s access to the symbolic paternal order depends on her repression of her connection to her mother, her censoring of the woman within herself, her denial especially of maternal sexuality, or, as she calls it, maternal “jouissance.” Woman in the symbolic order is the Virgin, impregnated by the Word. Woman has

19. Irigaray’s use of *indifférence* and *indifférente* is a good example of her word play, as she shifts its meaning from “detached” to “nondifferent” or “undifferentiated”; see “When Our Lips Speak Together,” p. 71n.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 71. For an overview of this work, see Elaine Marks, “Women and Literature in France,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3, no. 4 (Summer 1978): 832–42; Carolyn Burke, “Report from Paris: Women’s Writing and the Women’s Movement,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3, no. 4 (Summer 1978): 843–55; Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms: An Anthology* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), an anthology of these and other French theorists and writers; and Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Léon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981). See also Donna Stanton, “Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Disconnection,” and Jane Gallop and Carolyn Burke, “Psychoanalysis and Feminism in France,” both in Eisenstein and Jardine, eds. My own sketchy summary cannot do justice to these extremely complex concepts.

21. Julia Kristeva, *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), p. 14. See also “L’Herétique de l’amour,” *Tel Quel* 74 (Winter 1977): 30–49.

access to the semiotic through the functions of her body, pregnancy and childbirth.<sup>22</sup> Yet that access is dangerous, and Kristeva recalls the suicide of so many female writers: "For a woman, the call of the mother is not only a call beyond time, beyond the socio-political battle. . . . This call troubles the Word. It generates voices, madness, hallucinations. After the superego, the ego, that fragile envelope, founders and sinks. It is helpless to stave off the eruption of this conflict, this love which has bound the little girl to her mother and then lain in wait for her—black lava—all along the path of her desperate attempt to identify with the symbolic paternal order."<sup>23</sup> Kristeva reminds us of Electra, her "father's daughter" whose hatred of her mother, and especially of her mother's "jouissance," is the basis of a larger order of the city and politics. The deconstruction of that larger symbolic order depends on the reunification of mother and daughter.

Cixous's excursus in "feminine" writing also emphasizes the mother-daughter bond. Her medium is white ink, or mother's milk, and in every woman, Cixous insists, "there is always more or less of 'the mother' who repairs and sustains and resists separation, a force that won't be severed."<sup>24</sup>

The project in which all three of these writers are engaged, that of dismantling the sameness and unity of the symbolic order that has excluded woman, of creating a discourse of plurality, depends on a redefinition of the individual subject: it must be seen not as unified, integrated, whole, and autonomous, but as multiple, continuous, fluid, or, as Kristeva calls it, "in-process." It is interesting that although American psychoanalysis is essentially based on ego psychology and French psychoanalysis insists on the explosion of the unified ego, they intersect where female identity is concerned; for woman the delimited, the autonomous, separated, individuated self does not exist (although much of our discourse still functions as if it did). In their analysis of female identity, Chodorow, Flax, Dinnerstein, and Miller, in spite of their radically different methodology and discourse, find themselves in surprising agreement with Irigaray, Kristeva, and Cixous. Woman's being, because of the quality of the pre-oedipal mother-daughter relationship, is, according to both traditions, continuous, plural, in-process: "And what I love in you, in myself, no longer takes place for us: the birth that is never completed, the body never created once for all time, the face and form never definitely finished, always still to be molded. The lips never open or closed upon one single truth."<sup>25</sup>

22. Kristeva, *Polylogue*, p. 412.

23. Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, trans. Anita Barrows (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), p. 39.

24. Hélène Cixous, "Sorties," in *La Jeune Née*, by Catherine Clément and Hélène Cixous (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1975), p. 172.

25. Irigaray, "When Our Lips Speak Together," p. 78.

## III

The usefulness of theoretical paradigms lies in their outline of general trends, which help us to locate individual experiences and to relate them to each other. In the last few years, several interview studies have appeared that enable us to test just how well the analyses of mother-daughter relationships put forward by psychoanalytic theorists apply to individual women's experiences. On the whole, these studies based on the plural voices of a great number of women—rich, moving, illuminating in their diversity—do corroborate feminist theory. But these individual accounts are difficult to untangle from the biases and assumptions of the interviewers.

Nancy Friday's *My Mother/My Self: A Daughter's Search for Identity* deserves attention because it has struck an extremely responsive chord in the female readership of several countries.<sup>26</sup> More than any other work, it is responsible for the popularity of this subject, if not for the rigor with which it is studied or the seriousness with which it is regarded. In spite of its intrusively familiar tone, in spite of its profound antifeminism,<sup>27</sup> and in spite of Friday's highly questionable and embarrassingly simplified use of theoretical and interview sources, *My Mother/My Self* is instructive in several ways. First, it demonstrates the dangers of simplifying complicated and theoretical issues. For Friday the importance of pre-oedipal symbiosis is exaggerated to the point where absolutely everything in a woman's life rests on her mother. Friday certainly does not heed her own warning: "Blaming mother is just a negative way of clinging to her still" (p. 61). Next, it shows us the psychological determinism that results from an argument that disregards social, political, and ideological contexts. Friday's perspective, despite her own observations, is static and resistant to change. Finally, it demonstrates the impossibility of envisioning change if one subscribes, as does Friday, to all the damaging, self-hating stereotypes of our culture, expressed, for example, in her statement, "We are the loving sex. . . . We feel incomplete alone, inadequate without a man."<sup>28</sup>

26. Nancy Friday, *My Mother/My Self: A Daughter's Search for Identity* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1977).

27. For example, Friday's familiar voice—"We are so embarrassed about menstruation that we cannot abide to hear it spoken about"—and her antifeminism—"They are the revolutionaries, we are still our mother's daughters" (ibid., pp. 123, 210).

28. Ibid., p. 33. More examples abound: "But females are so cunningly made it is as if mother had a hand in the design of the vagina." "What human relationship contains as much ambiguity and ambivalence as women with women?" "To the degree that on any given day that I can believe in what my husband feels for me, and in my work, that is the degree to which I have surmounted that day's residual anxiety about being my mother's daughter. . . . But if I had a daughter . . . I would be my mother's daughter all over again" (ibid., pp. 107, 175, 382–83).

Still, it is not difficult to find in Friday's book reasons for its popularity. It contains much that rings true even to those who find her assumptions unacceptable—and peculiarly and embarrassingly so. It echoes much of the ambivalence, pain, desire, and fear we as feminists need to examine, and that is precisely the goal of much of the work reviewed in this essay. Luckily, most of this scholarship is more responsible and rigorous than *My Mother/My Self*.

Signe Hammer's *Daughters and Mothers: Mothers and Daughters* and Judith Arcana's *Our Mother's Daughters* make much more extensive use of the accounts gathered in interviews.<sup>29</sup> Hammer's study again is limited by its preconceptions: her bias in favor of full-time mothering, her minimization of the father's role as "helper," her unquestioning acceptance of Erikson's notion of "inner space" and of woman as biologically programmed to nurture. Although Hammer's approach is sociological—she speaks of the roles we are taught to play—the book suffers from her failure to criticize the limited social possibilities open to women even in today's changing culture. She fails, for example, to question the need to choose between motherhood and career: "Mothers of all classes are still primarily concerned about their daughters' future as wives and mothers."<sup>30</sup> Arcana's book is by far the most intelligent and satisfying of the three, perhaps because of its successful blend of personal confession, interview, and analysis. More important, it examines and questions a social context in which women, whether mothers or daughters or both, are oppressed: "All our mothers teach us is what they have learned in the crucible of sexism. They cannot give us a sense of self-esteem which they do not possess. We must learn to interpret anew the experience our mothers have passed on to us, to see these lives in terms of struggle, often unconscious, to find and maintain some peace, beauty and respect for themselves as women."<sup>31</sup> In addition to extremely illuminating insights about subtle aspects of mother-daughter interaction—the daughter's inability to see her mother as a separate person, for example, or many daughters' resentment at having to mother their mothers—Arcana's book leaves us with a sense of her own sympathy for all those who struggle within a complex relationship and of her willingness to explore the intense pain, longing, nostalgia, and joy of that struggle. All the interview studies, however, leave us hungry for more, especially for studies that cross ethnic, as well as racial and economic, lines.

29. Signe Hammer, *Daughters and Mothers: Mothers and Daughters* (New York: Signet Books, 1976); Judith Arcana, *Our Mother's Daughters* (Berkeley, Calif.: Shameless Hussy Press, 1979).

30. Hammer, p. 74.

31. Arcana, p. 70.

## IV

A different kind of confrontation between theory and individual experience can be found in textual analyses of literary representations of mothers and daughters. As moving as we find the accounts gathered by Hammer and Arcana, they cannot carry for us the weight and power of Demeter's reunion with Persephone in the Homeric hymn "To Demeter"; of the mother's crippling deathbed speech in *La Princesse de Clèves*; the appearance in *Jane Eyre* of the moon who guides, "My daughter, flee temptation!"; Mrs. Tulliver's instinctive though ignorant and uncomprehending loyalty to her daughter who has been disgraced; the plea of the middle-aged Colette for approval from the dead mother she conjures up in her imagination; Lily Briscoe's epiphanic vision of Mrs. Ramsay who, by appearing, approves; the mother's regrets in Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing"; the mother's generous protection of the ugly and needy daughter in Alice Walker's "Everyday Use."<sup>32</sup> These and other portrayals of mother-daughter relationships subtly challenge traditional literary structures, and feminist criticism of recent years has begun to pay them a great deal of attention. The fictions by which women have imagined and represented their bonds with their mothers and daughters form the subject of books and articles already too numerous and varied to discuss in full in this essay. I shall concentrate primarily on the book-length critical studies, paying particular attention to the methodology that defines these analyses.

Like so much of the work already discussed, these studies respond to Adrienne Rich's statement of absence: they are attempts to prove that the story of mother-daughter relationships has been written even if it has not been read, that it constitutes the hidden subtext of many texts. The project to uncover these hidden or disguised plots—much like the discovery of the Minoan-Mycenaean civilizations behind the Greek, to use Freud's metaphor—is an archaeological search for prehistory. The critic's work consists not so much in analyzing as in searching for texts to analyze. Those studies that do analyze the texts, rather than just name and retell them, often use Jung and Neumann to reach, through the images and symbols of the text, powerful mythic motifs.<sup>33</sup> Jung's sus-

32. There are two anthologies devoted to mother-daughter relationships and motherhood. Lyn Lifshin, ed., *Tangled Vines* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), collects eighty-five contemporary mother-daughter poems, a number of them written specifically for this collection; Stephanie Spinner, ed., *Motherlove: Stories by Women about Motherhood* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1978) is an excellent collection of short stories from Colette to Tillie Olsen.

33. The best of these is Jane Lilienfeld's "'The Deceptiveness of Beauty': Mother Love and Mother Hate in *To the Lighthouse*," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 23 (October 1977): 345–76. See also Myra Glazer Schotz, "The Great Unwritten Story: Mothers and Daughters in Shakespeare," and Karen Elias-Button, "The Muse as Medusa," both in Cathy Davidson and Esther Broner, eds., *The Lost Tradition* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1980).



tained explorations of the links between our individual and our cultural prehistory make his work particularly resonant for these analyses. Three additional approaches seem to prevail: psychobiographical analysis, also an attempt to find the (pre)historic sources of literary motifs, this time in a writer's life, and often an attempt to read her work as a response to real-life pressures and conflicts;<sup>34</sup> sociological analysis, an attempt to interpret private family relationships in the context of social possibilities that shape women's lives;<sup>35</sup> and analysis of alternative literary forms (oral literature, autobiography, ethnic literature) which, because they are more flexible than many other genres, are perhaps better suited to the expression of women's relationships to other women.<sup>36</sup>

As its title indicates, *The Lost Tradition*, edited by Cathy Davidson and Esther Broner, combines all of these methodological trends. Its historical framework, its breadth and scope, as well as its excellent and extensive bibliography make it a valuable teaching and research tool. However, the inclusiveness to which the volume aspires weakens many of its individual essays: short, sketchy, and often sweeping, many rely on narrative paraphrase rather than analysis. All participate in the same project of tracing "a lineage not found in any genealogy": "We who make history, who retrace history, must erect new stones and inscribe them with lost names."<sup>37</sup> The collection begins with accounts of absence and suppression: the essays point out that the only fully explored mother-daughter relationship in the Bible is that between Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi; that Kriemhild and Clytemnestra are punished for their independence and separated from other female family members by patriarchal ideology; that Shakespeare virtually condemns his heroines to motherlessness, except in *The Winter's Tale* where the reconciliation of Hermione and Perdita has the mythic force of renewal similar to the reunion between Demeter and Persephone.

The theme of absence is intensified in the two very useful sections

34. See, e.g., Sara Ruddick, "Learning to Live with the Angel in the House," *Women's Studies* 4 (1977): 181-200; and Bonnie Zimmerman, "'The Mother's History' in George Eliot's Life, Literature and Political Ideology"; Barbara Ann Clarke Mossberg, "Reconstruction in the House of Art: Emily Dickinson's 'I Never Had a Mother'"; and Mary Lynn Broe, "A Subtle Psychic Bond: The Mother Figure in Sylvia Plath's Poetry"; all in Davidson and Broner, eds. See also Elaine Showalter, "Florence Nightingale's Feminist Complaint: Women, Religion, and *Suggestions for Thought*," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 395-412.

35. See Nan Bauer Maglin, "Don't ever forget the bridge that you crossed over on": The Literature of Matrilineage"; Helen M. Bannan, "Spider Woman's Web: Mothers and Daughters in Southwestern Native American Literature"; and Natalie M. Rosinski, "Mothers and Daughters: Another Minority Group"; all in Davidson and Broner, eds.

36. See Germaine Brée, "George Sand: The Fictions of Autobiography," *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 4 (1976): 438-49; and Lynn Z. Bloom, "Heritages: Dimensions of Mother-Daughter Relationships in Women's Autobiographies," in Davidson and Broner, eds.

37. Davidson and Broner, eds., p. 2.

that describe the British and American nineteenth-century traditions: the powerful and celebrated nineteenth-century mother is so inhibiting a force for her daughter's development that she needs to be removed from the fiction. Hence the absence or inconsequentiality of the mother in Jane Austen's novels, which makes possible the daughter's development; hence the lack of a healthy vision of motherhood in George Eliot's novels, even while her life, according to Bonnie Zimmerman, is devoted to a search for the Mother. Cathy Davidson sees the motherless daughter in American literature as a symbol of America's uncertainty as a nation. According to Barbara Mossberg, Dickinson can be an artist only because she has been dispossessed of the mother whose destiny as the servant of her family she will not repeat. Emancipation and changing roles for women in the early twentieth century do not ease the strains of the relationship, according to Adeline Tintner's "Mothers, Daughters and Incest in the Late Novels of Edith Wharton," but increase the competition, ambivalence, and ambiguity.

The early twentieth century witnesses a reversal of the absence and silence that has prevailed since biblical times, bringing us several writers who are able to celebrate strong maternal figures, often traditional wives and mothers, yet ultimately enabling rather than inhibiting to their artist-daughters. Jane Lilienfeld's essay, "Reentering Paradise: Cather, Colette, Woolf and Their Mothers" takes up again the generation Ellen Moers analyzes in *Literary Women*.<sup>38</sup> These three writers along with Gertrude Stein, according to Moers, move away from courtship to the theme of "maternal seduction," celebrating their mothers, "mature, calm women of still sculptural beauty . . . great queens, who impose order on the world."<sup>39</sup>

In *The Female Imagination*, Patricia Meyer Spacks also corroborates the historical picture that emerges in *The Lost Tradition*, when she says, "In nineteenth-century novels women express hostility toward their mothers by eliminating them from the narrative; twentieth-century fiction dramatizes the conflict."<sup>40</sup> This conflict is explored in the last two sections of *The Lost Tradition*. In "The Muse as Medusa," Karen Elias-Button explains that even in contemporary literature studying mother-daughter relationships is an archaeological process: "The process of reclaiming the mother involves, in part, an historical reaching-back to the lives women have lived before us, to find there the sense that our experience is rooted in a strength that has managed to survive the centuries."<sup>41</sup> The identification of that strength, however, requires an act of revision,

38. Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977). See esp. pp. 352-68.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 353, 359.

40. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Avon Books, 1972), p. 191.

41. Elias-Button, p. 201.

and Elias-Button reverses Neumann's dichotomy of the Good/Terrible Mother as well as the mythic image of the Medusa, finding in the encounter with the Medusa a source of renewal: "We are turning toward the Terrible Mother to claim her as our own, . . . as a metaphor for sources of our own creative powers."<sup>42</sup> Conflict, imprisoning bondage, the fear of being devoured marks the writings of Lessing, Plath, the Jewish writers analyzed in Erika Duncan's "The Hungry Jewish Mother," and the authors examined in Lorna Irvine's "A Psychological Journey: Mothers and Daughters in English-Canadian Fiction." The minority fiction of "Matrilineage" which forms the subject of the last section of *The Lost Tradition* stresses for the most part a greater sympathy between mother and daughter, fellow victims in cultures where social conventions are more rigid and acceptable options for women are more limited.

One essay from *The Lost Tradition* has since been expanded into a book-length study of mother-daughter relationships in the medieval literary tradition: Nikki Stiller's *Eve's Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature*. The Middle Ages, as Stiller documents, were not only dominated by male authorship but also marked by an almost total separation between male and female spheres, to the point where most female experience was outside the domain of man's knowledge. It is therefore not surprising that "mothers are conspicuously absent" from medieval texts; all children legally belonged to their fathers and strong women identified with their fathers. Common sense, however, leads Stiller to look beyond this first impression: "Through all the barriers of class, male authorship and paternal domination, we begin to glimpse our mothers at last in an occasional reference, a fleeting portrait, or in a whole series of substitutes and surrogates: a hidden gallery in a closed-off wing." Stiller's search reveals natural mothers who are powerless, able to inculcate no more than passivity and subordination in their daughters. However, surrogate mothers appear to nurture and teach the heroines; supportive female communities emerge, mostly in religious contexts, to foster female autonomy; and women find in witches, hags, and crones "the powerful sympathetic mother whose amulets and charms give both the young woman and the old some control over the real world." The old hag/young girl opposition attests to the male writer's fear of the mother-daughter dyad, of female knowledge passed on from one generation to the next. Stiller's book asserts the strength of the mother-daughter bond that permeates a literature written by men who are "subconsciously opposed to it and afraid of it."<sup>43</sup>

42. Ibid., pp. 204, 205. See also Margaret Honton, "The Double Image and the Division of Parts: A Study of Mother/Daughter Relationships in the Poetry of Anne Sexton," *Journal of Women's Studies in Literature* 1, no. 1 (Winter 1979): 16-22.

43. Nikki Stiller, *Eve's Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval Literature* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 6, 7, 64.

More recent literary studies go beyond the "archaeological" approach represented by most of the essays in *The Lost Tradition* and by *Eve's Orphans*, beyond, as well, the purely thematic description of a number of other early essays, to analyze the effect of the mother-daughter relationship, in all its intricacy and complexity, on literary forms and structures. Psychological theory still offers the most useful and pervasive approach, although more and more literary critics are using Chodorow, Flax, Dinnerstein, and Miller instead of Jung and Neumann. Female identity in fiction can no longer be studied in the context of traditional ego psychology that fails to take into account women's fluid ego boundaries. As Jean Baker Miller states, "The ego, the 'I' of psychoanalysis may not be at all appropriate when talking about women. Women have different organizing principles around which their psyches are structured."<sup>44</sup> Literary critics are discovering these differences in women's literature and are beginning to study not separate and autonomous female characters but relationships between characters. Relationships between women emerge as important alternate, often submerged, plots, displacing the romantic love plot from the center of the text. Other themes are being studied: sister relationships, female friendship, female communities, women's work relationships, all related to, some based on mother-daughter affiliation. There are more general thematic studies about motherhood, such as maternal death and childbirth.<sup>45</sup>

More needs yet to be done. We need to look, for example, at the stylistic and linguistic characteristics of this literature: Is the sense of merging and fusion, of repetition and affiliation, of reflection and doubling, enacted in the texts' structure and style?<sup>46</sup> How is the author-character interaction affected by this network of relationships; how is the text's relationship to the female reader modified?<sup>47</sup> We need to speculate

44. Miller, p. 61.

45. For a study of submerged plots from a psychoanalytic perspective, see Marianne Hirsch, "A Mother's Discourse: Incorporation and Repetition in *La Princesse de Clèves*," *Yale French Studies*, vol. 62 (1981). On female friendship see especially Elizabeth Abel's excellent essay "(E)Merging Identities: The Dynamics of Female Friendship in Contemporary Fiction by Women," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 6, no. 3 (Spring 1981): 413-35; Janet Todd, *Women's Friendship in Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980); Louise Bernikow, *Among Women* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1980); and Nina Auerbach, *Communities of Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978). For an excellent study of "matrophobia" and its effects, see Judith Kegan Gardiner, "A Wake for Mother: The Maternal Deathbed in Women's Fiction," *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 1 (February 1978): 146-65. See also Carol Poston, "Childbirth in Literature," *ibid.*, pp. 18-31.

46. See Joan Lidoff, "Another Sleeping Beauty: Narcissism in *The House of Mirth*," *American Quarterly* 32, no. 5 (Winter 1980): 519-39. She is at work on an expanded study, "Fluid Boundaries: The Origins of a Distinctive Women's Voice in Literature" (Austin: Department of English, University of Texas at Austin).

47. Nancy Miller, in an illuminating essay, "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," *PMLA* 96, no. 1 (January 1981): 36-48, speculates on ways in which

further about a female literary tradition: Can the Bloomian father-son model be replaced by a mother-daughter one—as Virginia Woolf suggests when she says, in *A Room of One's Own*, “We think back through our mothers if we are women”—and what would the effect of such a replacement be?<sup>48</sup> More and more, the mother-daughter relationship is integrated into broader literary studies of female development and experience, both individual and communal. We have become convinced of its crucial role in women's literature.<sup>49</sup>

## V

It is not only in literary criticism that the study of mother-daughter relationships is being integrated into broader perspectives on female experience. Two recent essays will permit me to conclude with a comment on some new methodological directions and on some of the methodological and ideological divisions that surround all of this scholarship about mothers and daughters. Sara Ruddick's “Maternal Think-

---

“implausible” plots of women's fiction reflect the authors' characteristically female daydreams. Judith Kegan Gardiner is at work on a book entitled “The Hero as Her Author's Daughter” (Chicago: Department of English, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle). See also Ronnie Scharfman's “Mirroring and Mothering in Simone Schwartz-Bart's *Plui et vent sur Têlumée-Miracle* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*,” *Yale French Studies*, vol. 62 (1981).

48. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1957), p. 79. On a female literary tradition, see Moers; Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977); Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979); Joanne Feit-Diehl, “‘Come Slowly Eden’: An Exploration of Women Poets and Their Muse,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 3, no. 3 (Spring 1978): 572–87; and Annette Kolodny, “A Map of Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts,” *New Literary History* 11, no. 3 (Spring 1980): 451–67. In her recent book, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), Margaret Homans explores the effect of the mother-daughter relationship on women's ability to assume a poetic voice.

49. I am aware of several other works in progress that reflect some of these trends. Two works deal specifically with mother-daughter relationships: Jane Lilienfeld's “The Possibility of Sisterhood: Women, Mothers, and Their Texts from Mary Wollstonecraft to the Present” (Boston: Department of English, Boston University; and Marianne Hirsch's “The Double Image: Mothers and Daughters in Literature” (Hanover, N.H.: Department of French and Italian, Dartmouth College). One section of Elizabeth Abel's “Psyche's Semblances: Literary and Psychoanalytic Representations of Female Identity” (Chicago: Department of English, University of Chicago) is devoted to mother-daughter relationships. Many of the essays in the anthology “Formation/Deformation/Transformation: The Female Novel of Development,” ed. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Nashville, Tenn.: Department of English, Vanderbilt University), touch on the mother-daughter relationship, some considering it the key factor in female development as it is represented in the novel. Many of the essays in *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*, ed. Jane Marcus (London: Macmillan Co.; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981) focus on the mother-daughter relationship and other forms of female bonding in Woolf's life and work.

ing” is an attempt to identify a “coherent and benign account of maternal power and influence.”<sup>50</sup> “Maternal,” for Ruddick, is a social and not a biological category: she concentrates on what mothers do rather than on what they are; thereby her essay enables us more fully than any other study to break out of biological necessities. Ruddick insists on a privileged identification between maternal and female; thus, even those of us who are not mothers think “maternally” because we are daughters. The aim of Ruddick’s essay, based in the terminology of Habermas and other philosophical relativists, is to identify how mothers think and to bring that form of thought (thought which responds to the demands of preservation, growth, and acceptability) into the public eye and the public world. To do so is to insist that the characteristically “womanly” be valued, thus freeing women from the “ideology of womanhood [which] has been invented by men.”<sup>51</sup> Ruddick’s clear and straightforward exposition of the conceptual and emotional ways in which mothers approach their work frees motherhood and consequently mother-child relationships from mythic and psychoanalytic visions of maternal power and powerlessness that tend to obscure the more practical realities of the work involved in mothering. Ruddick looks forward to a world where children will be raised not by “parents” but by “mothers of both sexes who live out a transformed maternal thought in communities that share parental care.”<sup>52</sup> Ruddick’s extension of the term “mother” is a valuable breakthrough.

The second essay I want to mention here, Adrienne Rich’s “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” is more explicit in criticizing recent feminist scholarship, which, she says, confirms and participates in the mystification it aims at attacking. Feminist psychoanalysis in particular, Rich maintains, fails to deal with lesbian existence as a reality and as a source of power and knowledge available to women. According to Rich, Miller writes “a new psychology of women” as if lesbians did not exist, and Dinnerstein emphasizes so strongly women’s collusion in their own oppression that she is led to ignore all those women who have resisted and refused to internalize the “values of the colonizer.” Rich’s critique of Chodorow is more qualified because, she says, Chodorow “does come close to the edge of an acknowledgement of lesbian existence” by implying that women find heterosexual relationships “impoverishing and painful.” Yet Rich insists that “mothering-by-women is [not] a sufficient cause of lesbian existence.”<sup>53</sup>

Rich’s own vision of compulsory heterosexuality as an institution

50. Sara Ruddick, “Maternal Thinking,” *Feminist Studies* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 342–67.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 345.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 362.

53. Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality,” pp. 634, 635, 636, 638.

enforced by physical violence and false consciousness calls many of our assumptions into question; she demonstrates rather convincingly that much of feminist scholarship is a part of that institution. Her accusation points out dissatisfactions and limitations fundamental to the research on mother-daughter relationships. Rooted so strongly in Freudian psychoanalysis, Chodorow's and Dinnerstein's theoretical framework makes it difficult for us to envision relationships between women outside of the context of patriarchal oppression, of competition between women for men, of male identification. Firmly based in the nuclear family, their framework makes it difficult for us to see and analyze the varieties of "families" in which children are raised today: adoptive families, single-parent families, lesbian and communal households, or multiple families in the case of shared custody. Despite their far-reaching and incisive analysis, despite their usefulness for literary critics, these works suffer from these limitations.

This debate within the feminist scholarly community is a serious one. It is important for us to be able to see and recognize ourselves and each other without the blinders imposed by the traditional paternal order. At the same time, it is important to foster whole and healthy relationships between women, between women and men, between men. As Nancy Chodorow says, "I think that children who live exclusively with women or men, gay or straight, need to be given every opportunity for developing ongoing close relationships with people of the opposite gender from that of their primary caretakers."<sup>54</sup> Although none of us can predict what a generation raised by "mothers of both sexes" will be like, Chodorow's and Dinnerstein's confidence that they will be "whole human beings," that changes in family structure will produce fundamental social changes, is our only hope.

I have found the work of Chodorow and Dinnerstein, Flax, Benjamin, and Ruddick, Irigaray and Kristeva useful in the most generous sense; I hope to have shown that I have also found it frustrating. The last five years have revolutionized our thinking but have also convinced me of the need to transform more radically the paradigms within which we think, to invent new theoretical frameworks that allow us, in our study of relationships between women, truly to go beyond patriarchal myths and perceptions. Rich suggests one such direction when she outlines the notion of a "lesbian continuum": "If we consider the possibility that all women—from the infant suckling her mother's breast, to the grown woman experiencing orgasmic sensations while suckling her own child, perhaps recalling her mother's milk-smell in her own; to two women like Virginia Woolf's Chloe and Olivia, who share a laboratory; to the woman dying at ninety touched and handled by women—exist on a lesbian

54. Chodorow, "On *The Reproduction of Mothering*," p. 512.

continuum, we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not.”<sup>55</sup> This is one way to envision and to study the relationships between women outside of patriarchal conceptions, to approach perhaps the power and value they hold in themselves. There are other ways. Again Adrienne Rich has cut out our work for us.

*Department of French and Italian  
Dartmouth College*

55. Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality,” p. 651.