UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

# Divining Self With Kristeva:

# An Autocritical Exploration Into Five Mother/Daughter Memoirs

By

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**ABSTRACT**

This autocritical study explores memoir as a form of self-making in Jane Lazarre's The Mother Knot, Beyond The Whiteness of Whiteness and Wet Earth and Dreams, Elizabeth Ehrlich's Miriam's Kitchen and Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior. Through the lens of Julia Kristeva's theories of representation in the Symbolic order, principally abjection, as well as rejection which insures the interaction of the semiotic and symbolic elements in producing representations, the analysis shows these contemporary North American women/daughters using memoir practices to shape identity in relation to the unspeakable forces associated with the maternal. Drawing out these forces in the form of contradictory subject positions leads to a process of "divining self," a continual oscillation and fluidity of identity demonstrated by close readings of the texts and examples drawn from my own memoir.

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To my mother Eve whose inspiration I am only beginning to understand.

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...textual experience represents one of the most daring explorations the subject can allow himself, one that delves into his constitutive process.

(Julia Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language" 54)

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Troubling the Word:

## Divining Self With Kristeva

> For a woman, the call of the mother is not only a call from beyond time, or beyond the socio-political battle. With family and history at an impasse, this call troubles the word.
>
> (Julia Kristeva, "About Chinese Women" 156-7).

> But the pen is in her hand and that hand belongs now to a woman who has freed herself of what she has been taught to be.
>
> (Kim Chernin, Reinventing Eve 12).

Why divining?

In this study I argue memoir serves a role not unlike the ancient practice of divining, which according to Albert Einstein "shows the reaction of the human nervous system to certain factors which are unknown to us at this time" (12). In this work I will explore how three women writers' use of memoir practices re-establishes a connection with unspeakable forces associated with the maternal that produce reactions or contradictions. I will also show how these authors exploit the tension produced by these contradictions to divine selves. I suggest the concept of divining because of the lack of plots or cultural road maps that exist for women writers attempting this type of subject

formation. A diviner needs no road map. The texts include three books by Jane Lazarre entitled The Mother Knot, Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness and Wet Earth and Dreams, Elizabeth Ehrlich's Miriam's Kitchen and finally Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts.

Why self?

When I use the term self I mean the individual's sense of what type of person she believes herself to be, which is a fluid and fluctuating point of reference. I understand individual to constitute a person who is a source and agent of conscious actions. But I do not see such an individual as a unified, autonomous individual exercising free will, but rather as a subject whose agency is created through situations and statuses conferred on her. Therefore being a subject in the 21st century means being an object that is subjected to social and historical forces. As Louis Althusser asserts, the subject is not self-contained, but in constant conflict with forces through which she is both dominated and interpellated as a certain kind of subject. She is hailed or called to a subject position, or to become a certain kind of subject, by institutions, such as schools, churches, governments and the media (qtd. Smith and Watson, "Introduction" 21). Therefore when I refer to an individual's subjectivity or identity I am referring to the subject's placement in the subject making process; to the totality of the subject positions she occupies at the time. At the same time as I see subjects as dominated and interpellated, I see individuals capable of taking up agency in the psycho/social constructions that make them whereby they can enter into discursive formations making "hailing" into more than a passive process. Self-making then refers to the practice of constructing a subjectivity/identity, in the case of this study, through the memoir form of life writing.

Why Kristeva?

I begin this study about divining a self in mother/daughter memoirs from the position of a self that is entangled in a mesh of contradictions and ironies. I am attempting to compose a work about women's connected and relational approach to shaping identity in memoir from a west coast island, remote and disconnected from my own birth family and children. My research focuses on the kind of "relational technology" Nancy Chodorow[1] claims originates in a woman's unique gendered relationship with mother and that Julia Kristeva argues can help a woman shape an identity or deconstruct her self[2]. After thirty years of disclaiming a connection between my journalistic writing and personal opinion I am embarking on a project that forces a connection between the two in an autocritical work. And finally, I write this study as a foundation work to facilitate the writing of my own memoir that requires me to connect with a mother I have been disconnected from most of my life. It is perhaps easy to conclude from this brief summary that as a writer wishing to explore identity in relation to mother I am in the wrong place at the wrong time. Especially considering the fact that at the time of writing a serious family crisis emerged that threatened to disengage me from this project. This series of contradictions is enough to collapse mental constructs and challenge the shaping of my self. As I write in a recent journal entry: "I feel like there is no compass, no north star by which to steer my life these days. It's uncomfortable and awkward. It's strange and frightening. Yet somehow it feels right." I suspect it feels

---

[1] See page 10.

[2] Kelly Oliver argues that Kristeva is "interested in both how the subject is constituted through language acquisition and in how the subject is demolished with the psychotic breakdown of language" ("Kristeva's Revolutions" xvi).

right because, as Kristeva argues, it is this very sense of contradiction and disconnection that drives people to seek connection between language and life and language and identity[3].

For all these reasons I choose to view mother/daughter memoirs as a form of self-making through the lens of Kristeva's theories. As Kelly Oliver says of Kristeva's work, "hers is not a discourse that strictly adheres to the logic of noncontradiction. Rather hers is a discourse that breaks the law of noncontradiction upon which traditional notions of identity are built. Kristeva's writing challenges traditional notions of identity" (Reading 1). Oliver also sees a search for connection in Kristeva's work. She argues Kristeva writes to negotiate an impasse between "our fragmented language and our fragmented sense of ourselves," ("Kristeva's Revolutions" xxii). I suspect I intuited from the moment my supervisor suggested I look at Kristeva's notion of abjection that a Kristevian study of mother/daughter memoirs as a form of self-making would facilitate a study of the contradictions and disconnections in my own subjectivity. What are they? What cultural and societal forces – or what Virginia Woolf calls invisible presences[4] -- lie behind them? Why do I experience so much angst about ambiguity and disengagement? What is it about memoir writing that I think will help me to come to some sort of peace with them? I suggest this study be read as an exploration of these issues at the intersection of memoir and Kristevian theory. This is an autocritical exploration of my memoir work in relation

[3] Oliver notes Kristeva's notion that in contemporary culture there is more slippage between words and affects, "between who we say we are and our experience of ourselves" ("Kristeva's Revolutions" xxii).

[4] In Woolf's "A Sketch Of The Past" she refers to invisible presences as "the consciousness of other groups impinging upon ourselves; public opinion; what other people say and think; all those magnets which attract us this way to be like that, or repel us the other and make us different from that" (Moments of Being 80).

to that of other women memoirists who divine selves outside the known map of the female self and beyond the lack of plots that exist for women.

To demonstrate what I mean by lack of plots I begin this study by exploring the Freudian and feminist roots to the family romance plots that influence women's representation in life writing. According to Sigmund Freud women's representation is prescribed by plots psychologically derived from a paternally centered family drama in which female identity revolves around erotic male relations. Chodorow's feminist revision opens the possibility for a "feminist family romance" that allows for some plots to emanate from a maternally centered family drama in which female identity is formed in relation to mothers. By exploring family romance models in conjunction with Marianne Hirsch's findings relative to mother/daughter plots in 19th and 20th century women authored literature, and Kristevian theory on the development of representations in the Symbolic order, I will reveal a tension in subject formation that I argue women memoir writers in this study exploit to divine selves.

The Freudian family romance

In the 1908 essay "Family Romances" Freud describes a process of imaginary interrogation into origins believed necessary to achieve liberation from parental authority, what he considers to be the definition of maturity. "Indeed," says Freud, "the whole progress of society rests upon the opposition between successive generations" (9:237). His claim is that the two sexes fulfill the two-stage process in different ways. In the first phase both male and female children attempt to deal with parents judged not attentive or affectionate enough by fantasizing about being step or adopted children. It is all about seeking out mythical external substitutes judged to be superior to the real parents. While

Freud claims both male and female children experience this opposition, he argues that only boys dream up scripts that lead to progress. In the rush to separate from parents, he claims boys lead the way in using their fertile imaginations to come up with alternate fantasies and myths that achieve their individuation. According to Freud boys' more intense impulses for Oedipal, sexual rivalry with the father fuel a stronger desire to be free of the father, more than that engendered by the mother. Girls are judged to have a weaker imagination because they do not participate in the kind of struggle over authority, or the anxiety over legitimacy that typically goes on between fathers and sons. In the second stage of liberation when children become aware of the difference between scripts played out by fathers and mothers and become sexually aware, Freud claims that the focus shifts. "The family romance undergoes a curious curtailment: it contents itself with exalting the child's father, but no longer casts any doubts on his maternal origin, which is regarded as something unalterable" (239). Fantasies (predominantly the boys') at this stage are either erotic or ambitious in aim.

Freud's representation of women in his family romance has its origins in his theories on the male and female Oedipus complexes. According to Freud, after discovering at about the age of three (when genital component drives become important) that she does not have a penis, the girl considers herself castrated and inferior. As a result, he argues in his essay "Femininity," "girls hold their mother responsible for their lack of penis and do not forgive her for their being thus put at a disadvantage" (22:124). Subsequently she turns to her father, who is seen as having the real power, for a penis which later turns into a desire for a baby. Her previous active sexuality becomes passive in relation to her father. In contrast, within the boy's Oedipus complex the boy's

preoedipal attachment to his mother becomes charged with phallic/sexual overtones, at which time he begins to view his father as a rival for maternal love. Fearing retaliation for his secret fantasizing about castrating and murdering his father, the boy breaks off his heterosexual feelings for his mother in order to reattach them to another woman. As a reward he enters a mode of representation identified with the masculine, which exercises superiority over the feminine. Not surprisingly, the Freudian family romance has the girl replacing her mother with her father, the phallus figure in order to gain access to power and influence. However, the replacement does not gain the daughter phallic power because when she abandons her mother as a libidinal object she trades an active masculine sexuality for a passive, feminine one and subordinates herself to the male.

In The Mother/Daughter Plot Hirsch argues the Freudian family romance, which focuses on the drama of the father and the son, is considered to be the theory that embeds gender into narrative and leads to particular modes of female representation revolving around erotic male relations (54). She writes: "the construction of the sentence and the ability to initiate and sustain narrative continuity are related to familial structures; the desire for the mother, the rivalry with the father, the anxiety about castration and the way that anxiety is overcome and transformed, all inform narrative design," (52). In her study of the representation of mothers and daughters in 19th and 20th century novels by women writers from the Western European and North American traditions she argues that language itself – of male sexuality, health, illness and death – is designed to play out the drama of the father and the son, leaving aside the experience of the mother and the daughter (54). Dana Heller in The Feminization of Quest Romance also argues that women are blocked from active roles "because they have internalized an image of

themselves as passive objects, framed by the classic structure of the myth, removed from the very symbols and activities quest traditionally evokes" (6). According to Heller plots involving female heroism achieved through marriage, "signal the female protagonist's recognition that individual aspirations and desires are impossible to achieve outside the institutions which she had once hoped to transcend" (11).

Kristeva on representation/identity

I look to Kristeva's theories regarding the Symbolic order and its function in producing identity because she points to the very roots of female representation in language. For Kristeva the Symbolic order[5] is the order of signification, or the order of verbal communication. She calls it "the paternal order of genealogy," which encompasses both symbolic and semiotic elements ("About" 152). It is the dialectical tension between these two elements that produces representation, meaning and identity ("Revolution" 34). Throughout this study I will distinguish the Symbolic order from the symbolic element of that order by using the upper case when I mean the Symbolic order and lower case when I refer to the symbolic element. In "About Chinese Women" Kristeva argues that women are placed in a powerless position by a Symbolic order that defines sexual difference in relation to a system of language, which privileges the paternal: "The economy of this system requires that women be excluded from the single true and legislating principle,

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[5] Oliver argues Kristeva's symbolic element of language is not the same as Jacques Lacan's notion of the Symbolic, which includes the entire realm of signification. Kristeva's symbolic is one element of that realm. Oliver argues that Lacan's Symbolic refers to signification in the broadest possible sense, including culture in general, while Kristeva's symbolic is a technical term that delimits one element of language associated with syntax. Kristeva's semiotic element (*le sémiotique*) should also not be confused with semiotics (*la sémiotique*), the science of signs ("Kristeva's Revolutions" xiv-xv).

namely the Word, as well as from the (always paternal) element that gives procreation a social value: they are excluded from knowledge and power" ("About" 143). According to Kristeva the paternal is set up as the temporal reference point against which everything else is measured and the unity of this one law is maintained by containing bodily desire in an other kept outside of the Symbolic order; that other is woman ("About" 151). The woman who is excluded from having a position in this economy of production that produces representation and identity then becomes the waste or sacrifice of the system. Indeed, Kristeva argues women are required to participate in their own repression because the very survival of the paternal word is dependent on a fight "between the orgasmic maternal body and the symbolic prohibition" ("About" 147). She asserts women's only access to the Symbolic order is to participate in this endless struggle because if the underlying causality[6] that shapes the fixed, governed word is projected it could blow up the whole construct ("About" 153). In other words women cannot seize phallic power – or challenge their unrepresented status in language -- without effecting the very foundation of society. If women do this they lose the only power they have as the mysterious unrepresentable and further their double bind. In addition, a woman must turn away from the maternal and identify with the paternal to be represented, which forces her to become a supporter of the very patriarchal order that represses her identity as a woman ("About" 155).

[6] Kristeva defines underlying causality as "a figure of speech that alludes to the social contradictions that a given society can provisionally subdue in order to constitute itself" (153).

Chodorow on women's relational identity

Based on Freud's and Kristeva's ideas it would seem as though all of the erotic and ambitious roles that enable individuation are only available to men and because women do not act out these roles they can never achieve individuation or maturity. But what if Freud's individuation is not the universal method through which an individual achieves maturity? What if the mother, rather than the father, is viewed as central to the formation of another type of identity, a more connected identity? After all, even Freud says of the preoedipal phase associated with the maternal: "the phase of the affectionate pre-Oedipus attachment is the decisive one for a woman's future" ("Femininity" 22:134). Chodorow discusses just such an alternate theory of subject-formation for women in her 1978 book The Reproduction of Mothering. Rather than looking to the Oedipal phase of development as the nucleus of neurosis and the basis of personality formation for both sexes, Chodorow investigates the modified view of feminine Oedipal object-relations that focuses on the unique nature of the preoedipal mother-daughter relationship: "The feminine Oedipus complex is not simply a transfer of affection from mother to father and a giving up of the mother. Rather psychoanalytic research demonstrates the continued importance of a girl's external and internal relation to her mother, and the way her relation to her father is added to this" (92-93). She asserts, while both boys and girls experience a preoedipal attachment to their mother, boys soon become preoccupied with the father as a rival. Because girls remain preoccupied with the mother and experience a continuation of the two-person relationship of infancy, girls linger much longer in a preoedipal phase and go through a process that entails a relational complexity in self-definition and personality that is uniquely feminine. Chodorow postulates that: "As a

result, representations of the father relationship do not become so internalized and subject to ambivalence, repression, and splitting of good and bad aspects, nor so determining of the person's identity and sense of self, as do representations of the relationship to a mother" (97). Instead, Chodorow contends, girls grow up defining and experiencing themselves as continuous and connected with others, with more flexible or permeable ego boundaries: "The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world" (169). The girl's imagination is not just used to free her from family constraints, but rather to re-experience a symbiotic union with the mother or struggle against such a continued profound closeness.

Disconnection in the "female family romance"

A maturation process that focuses on relation rather than on Freudian separation and alienation and that does not demand a break or opposition between generations points to a need to rethink the family romance and re-examine the modes of representation that are available to women in narrative and the relationship of women to language. Hirsch's study points to such a change in the writings of Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélèn Cixous who she argues are examples of psychoanalytic feminists who identify a characteristically female pattern of selfhood in relation to language. She notes that all three emphasize the preoedipal period and the domination of the mother's influence in that period: "The result is a theory of language founded not on lack but on a form of plentitude, a myth of a mother-tongue which affirms, or at least suggests, the existence or the possibility of constructing something outside the name of the father" (132). Hirsch's research into the construction of femininity in discourses of motherhood and daughterhood in 19th century realist and 20th century modern and post modern novels by

Western European and North American women writers points to the emergence of a "female family romance" that revises, but does not basically change the Freudian family romance. In reaction to a Freudian theory that forces women to kill or eliminate their mothers to avoid having a weak imagination, Hirsch argues, 19th century realist women's literature is based on a fraternal, rather than maternal attachment: "The nineteenth-century heroine, determined to shape a different plot for herself, tends not only to be separated from the figure and the story of her mother, but herself tries to avoid maternity at all costs" (14). Indeed, mothers are so thoroughly eliminated in fiction of this period, she contends, that plot structures based on maternal repression could be viewed as a form of social critique of an institution that refuses daughters access to any possibility of self-interest, sexuality and activity outside the home (50). Jane Austen, for example, is said to use nasty female characters in her novels to enable her to voice her anger, while at the same time forging identification with more compliant heroines (47). Hirsch suggests the absence of motherhood makes room for a heroine's fantasy to unfold, an imagined script wherein an authoritative father is replaced with other more nurturing men who it is hoped might provide an alternative to patriarchal dominance (57). But in the end the fantasy is unrealized because such an alliance can only offer the heroine a limited alternative to patriarchal power (58).

I argue women in these novels are written into roles featuring contradictory subject positions – of identifying with both compliant heroines and surrogate father figures – because Freudian narrative design and the Symbolic order do not recognize the maternal on which the daughter's identity is based. Kristeva argues, even though human symbolism is designed to provide an agency of communication and cohesion, it works

through division of thing/word, body/speech, pleasure/law, incest/procreation and it represents a paternal function that is "caught up in the grip of an abstract symbolic authority which refuses to recognize the growth of the child in the mother's body" ("About" 142). As Sara Ruddick contends in her article "Maternal Thinking," "Maternal work is done according to the Law of the Symbolic Father and under His Watchful Eye, as well as, typically, according to the desires, even whims, of the father's house" (85). Authors are discouraged from making a maternal connection, according to Kristi Siegel in her examination of the uneasy site of motherhood in text and culture, by a mother's irrational babble, a maternity that arouses distrust, and a type of work that remains outside of the public/cultural – and therefore valued – sphere. In what Hirsch calls the "female family romance," women authors who address the mother-daughter relationship in fiction and encounter this maternal silence, end up representing daughters as fragmented subjects, eternally seeking cohesion and mothers as objects of the child's imagination. She connects this trend to a reliance on psychoanalysis as a framework for the construction of motherhood wherein, "The adult woman who is a mother, in particular, continues to exist only in relation to her child, never as a subject in her own right. And in her maternal function she remains an object, always distanced, always idealized or denigrated, always mystified, always represented through the small child's view" (167). I find confirmation of this perspective in Chodorow and Susan Contratto's article "The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother." They argue the daughter's infantile fantasies, which tend to either idealize or blame the mother, have little to do with the realities of maternal behavior. From the child's perspective daughters tend to see mothers as all-powerful, self-sacrificing, giving and totally responsible for how her children turn out

(55). Despite the work of Chodorow and other feminists, argues Hirsch, mothers are still seen as overly invested in their children, powerless in the world, as a constraining rather than an enabling force in girl's development and as an inadequate and disappointing object of identification: "Daughter and mother are separated and forever trapped by the institution, the function and role of motherhood. They are forever kept apart by the text's daughterly perspective and signature: the mother is excluded from discourse by the daughter who owns it" (137).

Disconnection in the Symbolic order

These arguments remind me of Adrienne Rich's description of the cathexis between mother and daughter as "essential, distorted, misused" and as "the great unwritten story" (Of Woman Born 225) I look to Kristeva for a clearer understanding of what drives these two alike bodies apart in the identity making process in "Powers of Horror." In this text Kristeva introduces the concept of abjection to shed light on the process of separation and identification in both individuals and nations. She associates the abject with anything that has been rejected by the Symbolic order in the interest of protecting the Symbolic order. Although the abject represents an absence, it is still very much present, much like a mother is still present after birthing a child even though the infant has severed its physical connection with the cutting of the umbilical cord. She defines abjection as "a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous and also the feeling of an impossibility of doing so" (qtd. Oliver, Reading 55). So the abject, she argues, can be found in whatever disturbs identity, system or order: "What does not respect borders, positions, rules" ("Powers" 232). It is a kind of absence that haunts the borderlines of identity, threatening unity and calling into question the boundaries on

which society and subject are constructed. My interest lies in Kristeva's argument that the maternal body, the uncertain boundary between the bodies of mother and infant, is one such threat to the Symbolic order that has been abjected. Her contention that the maternal body is the ultimate symbol of ambiguous identity foregrounds the difficulties women experience when attempting to shape identity in relation to mother. On the one hand Chodorow claims a woman must relate to the maternal in order to form an identity. Yet according to Kristeva our culture requires a woman to reject or absent the maternal and if a woman does reject the maternal she is in danger of rejecting and absenting herself since she is potentially both a daughter and a mother: "how can She be that bloodthirsty Fury, since I am She…, She is I? Consequently the hatred I bear her is not oriented toward the outside but is locked up within myself" ("Black Sun" 198). Indeed, Kristeva contends, "For a woman who has not easily repressed her relationship with her mother, participation in the Symbolic order as Christianity defines it can only be masochistic" ("About" 147). Therefore in exploring the abject a woman risks putting herself on what Kristeva describes as "the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" ("Powers" 230).

The split female subject

Because the Symbolic order does not recognize the maternal on which a daughter's identity is based, Kristeva argues there are only two extreme representations open to her. She argues at one extreme a woman can passionately support the Symbolic order, identify with her father and wage war against her preoedipal dependence on the mother ("About" 149). This subject position prevents her from discovering her body as other to a man's and leads to repression of drives and a virile identity Kristeva calls

"playing at being supermen" ("About" 155). At the other extreme a woman more tuned into the mother and unconscious drives marked by rhythms, intonations and gestures can refuse this role in the Symbolic order by holding back from speaking or writing. This alternative leaves her in what Kristeva calls "a permanent state of expectation, occasionally punctuated by some kind of outburst; a cry, a refusal, 'hysterical symptoms'" ("About" 155).

My impression from Kristeva's preceding argument is that these two extremes represent an either/or choice for female subjects. But I prefer to see these two extremes as coming together in a both/and subjectivity. I argue the both/and subjectivity presents itself in the form of a dual consciousness like that described in the work of Susan Standford Friedman. In her article, "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice" Friedman quotes Sheila Rowbotham who says that when women do not recognize themselves in the reflections of cultural representation, they develop a dual consciousness:

> But always we are split in two, straddling silence, not sure where we would begin to find ourselves or one another. From this division, our material dislocation, came the experience of one part of ourselves as strange, foreign and cut off from the other which we encountered as tongue-tied paralysis about our own identity. We were never altogether in one place, were always in transit, immigrants into alien territory…The manner in which we knew ourselves was at variance with ourselves as an historical being woman (qtd. Friedman 75-76).

Friedman argues dual consciousness is more of an issue for women than men because women are continually reminded that they are a member of a group whose identity has been defined by the dominant male culture.

I find this dual consciousness in the female representations described in Hirsch's analysis of 20th century women's modernist novels written after World War I. While Victorian fiction distanced the heroine and her mother, Hirsch argues, literature of this period seeks connection as possible and even necessary. But because of the contradictory representation of women in books by male experts, these women authors find themselves oscillating between what Hirsch refers to as "androgyny and male identification, on the one hand, and the act of 'thinking back through our mothers', on the other hand," a process that is fraught with contradiction and ambivalence (95). Yet Hirsch sees the process of oscillating between these two poles of female representation as a productive tension that opens up the possibility for different constructions of femininity and brings forth formerly submerged narratives: "Although the language of darkness and concealment is still used, the fictions themselves bring the 'submerged' plots to the surface, thereby creating dual, sometimes multiple plots in which contradictory elements rival one another" (95). In the end, argues Hirsch, "female family romances" of this period feature the female artist in relation to a female mother-goddess, rather than a father or male lover, a connection that produces tremendous anxiety as the writers attempt to deal with the differences between their choices and those of their mothers. Citing Woolf's <u>To The Lighthouse</u> as an example, she notes how the young, unmarried artist Lily adopts a dual duplicitous posture that does not resolve the differences between

these opposite forces, and in fact "embraces contradiction as the only stance which allows the woman artist to produce" (110).

The anxiety to which Hirsch refers can be related to Kristeva's argument that women who attempt a more intimate connection with the maternal enter dangerous territory with regards to identity and sanity. Indeed, Kristeva contends, if a woman returns to the preoedipal link with the unrepresented silent mother she is forced to take up the position of repressed other and risk psychosis or suicide:

> For a woman, the call of the mother is not only a call from beyond time, or beyond the socio-political battle. With family and history at an impasse, this call troubles the word: it generates hallucinations, voices, 'madness'. After the superego, the ego founders and sinks. It is a fragile envelope, incapable of staving off the irruption of this conflict, of this love which had bound the little girl to her mother, and which then, like black lava, had lain in wait for her all along the path of her desperate attempts to identify with the symbolic paternal order ("About" 156-7).

With Kristeva's prediction in mind I look closely for signs of the troubled word at Hirsch's study of "feminist family romance" plots in which women authors attempt a more intimate connection with the maternal. She uses the term "feminist" to refer to plots that attempt to establish more consoling but dangerous female alliances and not to refer to plots designed to undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women. Hirsch argues women authors of the 1970s and 1980s try not to resolve the contradictions experienced by characters such as Lily in To The Lighthouse, but to revise them, to look at them from a fresh feminist perspective, while in the process creating a

new feminist subject: "The liminal discourse of female modernism, embedded in shifting affiliations, gives way here to a more passionate embrace of female allegiance as the basis both of female plotting and of female subject formation" (129). Unlike the Freudian and "female family romance" plots in which women are involved in romances with fathers, brothers and male lovers, Hirsch proposes, the "feminist family romance" distances daughters from the fraternal and instead entangles female characters in mother/daughter plots (138). But when these authors pursue plots that seek a more intimate connection with mother and preoedipal, pre-verbal origins, says Hirsch, they produce even more fragmented female characters and a structure of plotting and subject-formation that is continually undergoing a process of revision and destabilization (139):

> The effort to connect past and present, to assemble a sense of self is frustrated and ultimately redefined as the stories they try to tell seem more and more unnarratable – fragments virtually impossible to assemble into significant and meaningful narrative patterns, demanding to be ordered and reordered in a process of continual revision, requiring language and narrative form that might accommodate the unspeakable (139).

To prove her point, Hirsch provides an analysis of Margaret Atwood's Surfacing as the representation of female subject-formation before Oedipus in which a nameless narrator points out, "Language divides us into fragments, I wanted to be whole" (141).

Split subjectivity as a productive site for shaping of identity

Using Kristeva's theories on how representation is produced within the Symbolic order I wish to build on Hirsch's critical framework to demonstrate how the fragmentation in a female character's representation can be seen as a productive site for

the construction of identity. I contend the female characters in Hirsch's study that are shown to have fragmented identities in relation to mother demonstrate a process Kristeva argues is necessary to the production of representation and identity. I suggest these fragmented characters are experiencing the type of dialectical tension that Kristeva contends both threatens and develops signification and identity. These characters are shown as attempting to balance the forces of the small 's' symbolic and semiotic, elements Kristeva contends live within the Symbolic order. Indeed, Kristeva argues in "Revolution in Poetic Language" for a theory of identity that negotiates between these two elements (34). The semiotic is linked with bodily drives and affects, what Kristeva calls raw corporeality ("Revolution" 36). These are the drives that are not sublimated at the thetic phase of signification by enunciations (words or sentences) formed to represent subjects and objects ("Revolution" 40). These drives are not identified in language and are considered excesses that depend on the symbolic for articulation ("Revolution" 34). The enunciations formed at the thetic phase are part of the symbolic element that is associated with position and judgment ("Revolution" 39-40) and come into play after the Oedipal phase of human development when Freud contends the subject separates from mother and identifies with father to enter into a language developed under the law of the father ("Revolution" 42). Kristeva argues that the symbiotic union between these two elements is what makes a relationship possible between language and life, signification and experience, body (soma) and soul (psyche) (qtd. Oliver, "Kristeva's Revolutions" xvii-xviii).

What interests me is the Kristevian notion that these two opposing elements provide an opening for the possibility of new types of discourse, new representations, and

new identities. The concept is similar to Hirsch's idea of the productive tension opened for female characters when they are shown to oscillate between male and maternal identification[7]. Yet it is different because of Kristeva's contention that neither the semiotic nor the symbolic make sense without the interaction of the two:

> These two modalities [the semiotic and symbolic] are inseparable within the *signifying* process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse...involved; in other words, so-called natural language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic. On the other hand, there are nonverbal signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example). But...this exclusivity is relative, precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process, which is constitutive of the subject ("Revolution" 34).

It also differs because Kristeva contends that the maternal body – or what she calls the semiotic chora -- is the mediator between the two elements ("Revolution" 37). She calls the chora a maternal space because it is a place, like the mother's body, where a subject is both generated and negated long before the law of the father comes into play and the subject enters into language. Like the mother, whom Chodorow contends serves as a base from which a daughter develops a self, Kristeva sees the chora as both a harbour and threat to identity. She argues the chora is what maintains a reversed reactivation of the contradiction between the semiotic and the symbolic. Kristeva sees the semiotic chora as

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[7] Recall Hirsch's argument that this oscillation creates a productive tension that provides an opening for different constructions of femininity and brings forth formerly submerged narratives (95).

a place where the subject's unity succumbs before the process of semiotic charges and stases that produce him ("Revolution" 37). The process is a reactivation because it continuously triggers the contradiction between the semiotic and symbolic and a reversal because it repeatedly turns back on itself and thus exposes the sham of the unified self. Kristeva contends that before birth:

> Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body – always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated...Plato himself leads us to such a process when he calls this receptacle or *chora* nourishing and maternal, not yet unified in an ordered whole because deity is absent from it ("Revolution" 35-36).

It is therefore the sounds and rhythms of the maternal space, the semiotic chora that maintains the tension between the semiotic and symbolic that produce language, representation and identity ("Revolution" 36).

Based on Kristeva's theories it is understandable that Hirsch's women authors of fictional and theoretical writings of the 1970s and 1980s who attempt to return to a preoedipal, preverbal moment or origin to bind the fragments of self in a "feminist family romance" undergo a continuous process of subject formation featuring revision and

destabilization. I argue the destabilization that Hirsch is witnessing in subjects formed in relation to the maternal is a result, in part, of a continual negotiation of the symbolic and semiotic elements, a productive tension Kristeva argues is necessary for the production of identity. If we think of the semiotic domain as representing the preoedipal period when mother is the presence that enables self and other distinctions, and symbolic as the oedipal phase when father is required to sort out difference and turn subjects and objects into words and sentences, we can see the source of some of the productive tension. This is the tension Kristeva argues is required to make a connection between language and experience, or identity. I understand this tension to exist for both men and women as subjects of the Symbolic order, but I see the productive space it opens as more available to women because of their privileged and gendered relationship with mother in the preoedipal phase associated with the semiotic.

Exploiting the gap of disidentification

Accordingly I see the fragmentation of female characters' identities in Hirsch's study not as an unfortunate consequence, but as an opportunity and it is an opportunity I contend women in this study exploit to divine selves. I find Sidonie Smith's ideas in "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance" useful here because she brings the concept of fragmentation -- and the tension it produces -- together with the formation of identity in autobiography. Rather than refer to a tension like that produced in Kristeva's chora, Smith talks about the disruptions in subjectivity experienced by an actress who finds herself on multiple stages and expected to perform several roles at once: "These multiple calls never align perfectly. Rather they create spaces or gaps, ruptures, unstable boundaries, incursions, excursions, limits and their transgressions"

("Performativity" 110). I understand this gap of disidentification as that, which Felicity Nussbaum argues, occurs when "subjects are held in subject positions that are incompatible, and the ideologies are brought into contestation" (164). I see Chantal Mouffee as arguing for the use of this tension, or gap of disidentification, to make changes to self when she calls the identifications 'nodal points' or 'fixations' which both limit the flux and generate practices that can unfix imposed systems of identification (qtd. Smith, "Performativity" 111).

Through the work of psychoanalytical scholar Daniel Stern I see another way of looking at the notion of a gap of disidentification that provides a psychological framework for understanding how the tension it produces creates new identity patterns. In his book The Interpersonal World Of The Infant Stern describes two domains of self, the nonverbal (I link with Kristeva's semiotic element) and verbal (I associate with Kristeva's symbolic element), which once formulated continue to evolve and interact throughout adulthood. The nonverbal self formulates a process of organization that becomes a reference for her sense of self. But with the introduction of language and the emergence of the verbal self a natural tension, or a sort of zone of turbulence (that I align with Kristeva's chora), exist where the nonverbal interpersonal experiences as lived and the verbally represented meet. Just as Kristeva's two elements interact to produce representations, Stern argues that a verbal self is capable of recasting and transforming aspects of the nonverbal self so that they lead two lives, the verbal and nonverbal versions. The experiences that do not permit language sufficient entry or linguistic transformation, he says, continue underground "to lead an unnamed…but nonetheless very real existence" (175). I align these experiences with Kristeva's semiotics which

Oliver describes as a kind of excess in speech that cannot be said: "There is always something that cannot be said and that is why we keep talking. That something in excess is the remainder of the semiotic chora in language" (Reading 97).

Judith Butler provides an interesting insight into how unnamed, semiotic experiences that do not fall under the regulation of the super-ego or conscience in the process of linguistic transformation might function in the process of self-construction. She sees such a force as something which "haunt[s] signification as its abject borders or as that which is strictly foreclosed; the unlivable, the nonnarratizable, the traumatic" (qtd. Smith, "Performativity" 111). According to Butler these nonnarratizable forces make it impossible to be a deep, unified, coherent, autonomous self because such a requirement "produces necessary failure, for the autobiographical subject is amnesiac, incoherent, heterogeneous, interactive" (qtd. Smith, "Performativity" 110). It is within these failures that Butler locates opportunities for self-transformation because the failures provide for the possibility of a variation on the repetition of the rules that govern intelligible identity: "The coexistence or convergence of such discursive injunctions produces the possibility of a complex reconfiguration and redeployment" (qtd. Smith, "Performativity" 110). Building on Butler's argument I see how the repeated citation of subjectivating norms can be considered a way to perform a changed self. These repetitions, because they are never carried out according to expectations, become the material from which the subject draws to resist, subvert or displace the repetitive norms by which she is constituted. Philosopher Michel de Certeau provides a useful argument on how these unspeakable forces can be exploited in autobiography. According to de Certeau it is at the moment of flux that autobiographical subjects seize the opportunity to make an adjustment to the

norm with tactics that stake out habitable spaces, spaces that rupture a disciplined interiority: "Through tactical dis/identifications the autobiographical subject adjusts, redeploys, resists, transforms discourses of autobiographical identity" (qtd. Smith, "Performativity" 111).

Revolutionizing female representation

I argue this is the type of process Kristeva recommends for women seeking access to the knowledge and power they need to shape selves. In "About Chinese Women" Kristeva advises women to refuse the two extreme representations laid out for them by the Symbolic order; that of the virile superman or silent hysteric. She contends women should act on the socio-politico-historical stage as the negative of the capable and virile woman and refuse all roles to summon a "'truth' situated outside time…that cannot be fitted in to the order of speech and social symbolism" ("About" 156). Oliver provides a useful interpretation of Kristeva's argument when she says Kristeva is suggesting women seek a stronger identification with mother to rejoice in the discharge of drives in language as a means of undermining "constructions of identity and difference that repress the feminine and maternal" (Reading 112). In other words Kristeva is arguing for subversively working within the system to change women's status as other through stronger identification with the mother. Kristeva argues women must listen to the maternal from within the Symbolic order because the Symbolic order guarantees identity and keeps them from falling into psychosis. She suggests women locate their truth: "By listening; by recognizing the unspoken in discourse, however Revolutionary, by emphasizing at each point whatever remains unsatisfied, repressed, new, eccentric, incomprehensible, that which disturbs the mutual understanding of the established

powers" ("About" 156). But at the same time women must subversively resist the identities that are produced by the Symbolic order and find their own truth from which to project identity. The way to do this, Kristeva argues, is to change the truth from which the moment of speech is projected to alter identity patterns: "I project not the moment of my fixed, governed word, ruled by a series of inhibitions and prohibitions…but rather the underlying causality that shapes it…and which is capable of blowing up the whole construct" ("About" 153).

<u>Performing the female subject</u>

Changing the truth from which the moment of speech is projected sounds to me like a speech act. I suggest Kristeva is essentially arguing for a process similar to what speech act theorists call performing the self, wherein the subject becomes the result of the performance. The work of speech act theorists can better explain how this works. Building on the work of J.L. Austin, Jonathan Culler describes three types of utterances: the locutionary act which speaks a sentence; the illocutionary act which is the act performed by speaking the sentence; and the perlocutionary act which is the act accomplished by performing the illocutionary act. Austin's theories, he argues, shed a new light on language as performing an active and creative function, such as bringing characters, their actions, ideas and concepts into being: "it [literature] takes its place among the acts of language that change the world by bringing into being the things that they name" (506). Mary Louise Pratt, in referring to H.P. Grice's work on the 'Co-operative Principle', argues that the speech act is a form of cooperation between language and subject that creates a new subject position (64). Smith brings speech act theory into autobiography when she contends that autobiographical storytelling is always a

performative occasion where the power of discourse produces what it describes: "Every day, in disparate venues…people assemble, if only temporarily, a 'life' to which they assign narrative coherence and meaning…Whatever the occasion or that audience, the autobiographical speaker becomes a performative subject" ("Performativity" 108). Commenting on the work of de Certeau, Smith contends that discourse functions as a culturally credible means of making people believers in deep selves. Quoting de Certeau she writes, "To make people believe is to make them act. But by a curious circularity, the ability to make people act – to write and to machine bodies – is precisely what makes people believe" ("Performativity" 109). Smith concludes that autobiographical storytelling is one way through which people believe themselves to be 'selves' ("Performativity" 109).

Divining self with Kristeva

Building on the work of these theorists I argue women memoirists utilize performative writing tactics to draw out the unspeakable forces associated with the maternal in the form of contradictory subject positions which becomes the truth they use as a base from which to project or divine a relational identity. My definition of this truth comes from Kristeva who describes it as "A curious truth; outside time, with neither a before nor an after, neither true nor false; subterranean, it neither judges nor postulates, but refuses, displaces and breaks the symbolic order before it can re-establish itself" ("About" 153). In memoir I contend the truth to which Kristeva refers is the underlying causality generated by a subversively altered reaction between the symbolic and semiotic interaction that produces identity. In terms of the Einstein quote I use at the beginning of this chapter, I argue women use performative writing techniques to tap into unknown

factors associated with the maternal and in so doing subversively alter the reaction between the semiotic and symbolic. They draw out the unknown forces in the form of contradictory subject positions to enter a process I call "divining self," or a continual oscillation and fluidity of identity.

What do I mean by performative writing practices? Recall Kristeva's contention of how representation is shaped by the interaction of the symbolic and semiotic elements within the Symbolic order. In "About Chinese Women" Kristeva suggests, "A constant alteration between time and its 'truth', identity and its loss, history and that which produces it: that which remains extra-phenomenal, outside the sign, beyond time" (156). According to Kristeva this way of knowing -- this back and forth movement that originates in the preoedipal phase of human development when the infant learns about accepting and refusing an other through breastfeeding – is how rejection maintains the tension between the semiotic and symbolic elements that produce representations. Kristeva contends the rejection process – that refuses and accepts, refuses and accepts -- reconstitutes real objects, creates new ones, reinvents the real and resymbolizes it ("Revolution" 81). I propose when Kristeva argues that women should heed the call of the mother ("About" 156) to challenge their representations she is suggesting they tap into this preoedipal mode of self-construction and use paternal constructions -- the underlying causality behind language -- for their own purposes. She is arguing for the use of contradictions, ambiguities and tension to reinforce the rejection process and produce "new cultural and social formations which are innovative and subversive"("Revolution" 87). I argue women can function as subversive agents in this way by creating disruptions that energize the rejection process and forcing an interaction between the semiotic and

symbolic. In so doing they overthrow old representations and create new ones. In other words they use performative writing techniques to emulate the semiotic chora's constitutive process to create new identity patterns.

The case against traditional autobiography

Is all of this possible within an autobiographical tradition borne out of a Symbolic order Kristeva describes as "the paternal order of genealogy" ("About" 152)? There are those who see the autobiographical genre as the mode through which women can negotiate, or perform a subjectivity outside of those prescribed by cultural and political institutions. Smith, in her analysis of Gertrude Stein's The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and Cherríe Moraga's Loving in the War Years, claims these narratives are sites of resistance "where a complex and disruptive theorizing of autobiographical performativity takes place" ("Performativity" 114). Jean Perreault, in "Autography/ Transformation /Asymmetry," labels feminist life writing as 'autography,' what she describes as "writing whose effect is to bring into being a 'self' that the writer names 'I'" (191). Her point is that the writing itself forms a part of the subject performed. Because available discourses of selfhood have been largely masculinist, she argues, the feminist autobiographer experiences a sense of self that is contradictory and shifting and that it is her interpretation of the contradictions and shifts that will inevitably lead to changes in them and her subjectivity: "When 'received models' of self are narrow and too uniform, self invention may be an imperative" (193). Bella Brodzki argues that by performing, what she calls a double displacement, women are forced into roles of requestioning and subversion in autobiography: "In the case of the female autobiographer who is compelled to strive for modes of expression and self-representation in a patriarchal world not

generous enough to make room for her, 'double displacement' is both a way of reading and writing and a way of life" (156).

I would argue that the work of Smith, Perreault and Brodzki are part of a revision of our whole notion of what autobiographical practices are. Many critics see the traditional autobiographical form as a limiting genre for women attempting to perform alternative selves by establishing a connection with the preoedipal and the mother. Friedman argues with Georges Gusdorf's contention that individualism, "a conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life," must be the precondition for autobiography saying that it disallows the experience of women, minorities and many non-Western peoples (72). I agree with Friedman that Gusdorf's individualistic model does not apply to everyone because it does not take into account women's group identity or theories such as Chodorow's that define a difference in how women's subjectivity is formed. Writes Friedman: "The very sense of identification, interdependence, and community that Gusdorf dismisses from autobiographical selves are key elements in the development of a woman's identity" (75). As Lee Quinby contends in "The Subject of Memoirs: The Woman Warrior's Technology of Ideographic Selfhood" self-representation in traditional autobiography promotes the normalizing and disciplinary form of subjectivity Michel Foucault warns against in his essay "The Subject and Power" (298). She argues that autobiography "promotes an 'I' that shares with confessional discourse an assumed interiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority" (299). Indeed Smith and Julia Watson define autobiography as a narrative that "celebrates the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story," or as a "master narrative of 'the sovereign self'" which autobiographical theorists have institutionalized in literature

and culture (Reading Autobiography 3). The OED definition of autobiography as "the writing of one's own history; the story of one's life by himself," is very telling in its exclusion of the relational aspect.

The case for memoir

These various theoretical positions raise some interesting questions for me about how successful a daughter might be in constructing identity in relation to mother and through performative writing practices within a traditional autobiography. I argue there is little room in traditional autobiography for the evolutionary and continuous self-making process – the negotiation of Kristeva's symbolic and semiotic and back and forth movement of rejection -- found to be prominent in some of the women authored novels studied by Hirsch. In Kristeva's terms I suggest such women are seeking interaction with and recognition of the semiotic from within the straightjacket of a Symbolic order that does not recognize the mother, but rather depends on the father to occasion the narrative. In one of her early works Helen M. Buss, in arguing for women's revision of traditional generic formats, reminds me of Marcus Billson's argument that the ego-centred autobiography is preoccupied with historicity and becoming in the world and less concerned with being in the world, which she contends is a preoccupation of feminist life writing (Mapping 62).

Clearly, traditional autobiography is not the ideal solution for daughters that Chodorow claims seek to divine selves in relation to their mothers. Rather, I suggest memoir, a traditional practice pre-dating autobiography but undergoing revision in the hands of contemporary women, is the more suitable form for the daughter's quest for a number of reasons. The OED definition of memoir as a personal "record of events, not

purporting to be a complete history, but treating of such matters as come within the personal knowledge of the writer, or are obtained from certain particular sources of information" provides only a limited view of how this form accommodates the search for alternate subjectivities. For Quinby, who views memoir from the perspective of Foucauldian power relations, memoir is the ideal genre for marginalized groups such as women to use to challenge the conventions and power relations of traditional autobiography (298). Citing Michel Foucault's notion in "The Subject and Power," that modern power structures have imposed on us a simultaneous individualization and totalization, she suggests memoir is a way to promote new forms of subjectivity that refuse such a totalizing individuality (299). Using Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior as an example, she sees memoir as formulating a new subjectivity that refuses the particular forms of selfhood, knowledge and artistry that the modern era's systems of power have made dominant (298).

Quinby argues memoirs tend to construct a subjectivity that is multiple and discontinuous (299), a relational identity I contend is much like that constructed by daughters seeking the consoling but dangerous female alliances in Hirsch's "feminist family romance." Unlike traditional autobiography, which is an empirical record of events and individuals, Quinby reminds me that memoir is associated with Woolf's invisible presences, the influence of the thoughts of other groups (300). Woolf writes in Moments of Being: "If we cannot analyze these invisible presences, we know very little of the subject of the memoir; and again how futile life-writing becomes. I see myself as a fish in a stream; deflected; held in place; but cannot describe the stream" (80). I assert that such presences, what Kristeva calls underlying causalities, become the subject

daughters choose to investigate and make visible when they explore their subjectivity in relation to their mothers in memoir. Memoir provides the "relational technology" they need to describe Woolf's stream and even change their course within the stream. My argument for a "relational technology" of memoir is supported by Buss' contention that memoir suits women because it allows highly relational selves to tell highly relational stories that involve relationships with significant others as well as efforts to achieve autonomy: "Memoir has required a human subject whose autonomy is compellingly intertwined with relationships, and community, a human subject that does not seek to disentangle herself from those compelling ties, but builds autonomy based on them" (Repossessing 187). Women use the memoir form to explore themselves through an othering process, she argues, that requires them to go out from the self and bring back, in a non-appropriative way, "some quality learned from the other in order to remake the self" (Repossessing 65). For female identity making based on a relational process memoir provides an elastic framework within which a woman can do more than just recall past events or history.

Building on both Quinby and Buss's work, I contend memoir constructs new identity patterns because it utilizes performative writing tactics outside those designed to normalize subjectivity -- what I call "relational technology" -- because it involves the alternation action Kristeva suggests "disturbs the mutual understanding of the established powers" ("About" 156). For example, Quinby argues, memoir constructs a subjectivity that is multiple and discontinuous through the eyes and voices of others (299). This encourages the memoirist to define identity by bringing the personal and public into relation with each other. Quinby also asserts that memoir "rejects the discursive unity that

constructs subjectivity as simultaneously individualized and totalized" simply because of the way it brings together seemingly opposed discursive practices. She backs up her argument with the following OED definitions of memoir: the note, memorandum, record, autobiographical record, biography, essay, dissertation, memento or memorial (300). Buss argues that memoir initiates a process whereby these various generic discourses "clash with, inquire into, and blend into one another, in order to promote new forms of subjectivity" (Repossessing 31). She builds on the work of Billson to argue that the confrontation between fiction and nonfiction in memoir – between the memoirist's experienced past and imagination – also contributes to the development of new patterns of identity (Repossessing 32). In summary then memoir's "relational technology" makes it possible for the writer to explore her subjectivity through alternations or her relationship to:

a) public written reports or history and private oral accounts;
b) the individuals and events that have impacted her life;
c) fiction and nonfiction;
d) various discursive practices from poetry to recipes;
e) the memoirist and herself at various stages in her life
f) and the memoir form.

Much of the relational exploration is made possible by what Buss describes as a "tripartite voice structure." Buss proposes that the memoirist utilizes three narrative voices, which enable the narrator to speak as a witness to and participant in events and reflect on both to learn new things about the present and, most importantly, to reflexively alter her own subject positions (Repossessing 16). I propose the memoirist's back and

forth movement between the stances emulates the constitutive process of identity making in Kristeva's chora.

I see memoir as a performative practice because of Buss's assertion that memoir is a form that allows for the performance of alternatives to accepted gender roles: "In performing not quite as we are required to by our ideas of what is normal, we may find other possibilities for identity, ones which once performed – as if by accident – can be reiterated in a more deliberate manner. I suggest that in memoir women make those more deliberate performances" (Repossessing 64-65). Memoir encourages the writer to artistically compose a story of self by picking and choosing what reports and utterances to include and in what order. Because memoir is not as concerned with linear and historical correctness the form allows the writer's desire to propel the narrative forward with the use of such imaginative devices as poetry, recipes, dreams, dialogue and fantasies to draw out the unspeakable forces that produce contradictory subject positions and divine self. Memoir also allows for a full performance of female selves, argues Buss, because women can work through their own feelings and thoughts about themselves, as well as opinions, viewpoints, actions and reactions of significant others (Repossessing 15). I am reminded of Einstein's definition of divining when I read Buss's memoir description as:

> ...a form in which one cannot be entirely in control of self-construction, but must come to see that act of self-making as a process of performing the self. This self changes and grows, leaves parts of the old self behind, gains new performances that become more completely one's self as they become habitual (Repossessing xiv).

Indeed, Buss suggests, memoir offers interesting possibilities for women concerned with mother/daughter relationships because it is a form that negotiates self and other, self and culture and self and language (Repossessing 106).

In conclusion I argue memoir offers women the flexibility in form they need to rewrite family romance scripts through writing practices that perform a reiterative discursive series of acts that establishes their subjectivity in relation to a mother that would otherwise be lost in traditional autobiography. I see the woman memoir writer the way Kristeva views the true dissident who ruthlessly and irreverently dismantles "the workings of discourse, thought, and existence" and requires "ceaseless analysis, vigilance and will to subversion" ("Dissident" 299). I propose such women memoirists are capable of the playful language of Kristeva's dissident who overturns, violates and pluralizes to experiment with the limits of identity ("Dissident" 295). In what follows I will substantiate my arguments through close readings of five memoirs by three women authors who use the form to divine selves without established plots or cultural road maps. In the process I autocritically explore the possibility of divining my self through memoir.

The second chapter of this study should be read as a daughter's search for the maternal connection Chodorow argues women rely on to shape a self. I explore Jane Lazarre's search for a maternal connection in a series of three memoirs. Ironically, although Lazarre speaks as the mother immediately in The Mother Knot, she is unable to speak as a daughter until her final book Wet Earth and Dreams. As the author admits in the preface to this text, "When I reread The Mother Knot today, I hear the voice, the young woman trying to learn how to be a mother while she is longing for a mother herself" (xviii). Through the lens of Kristeva's abjection theory I investigate the invisible

presences that make it difficult for Lazarre to locate an identity in relation to the maternal in The Mother Knot and Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness. I trace the author's journey from abjection of the maternal to a connection, which leads to psychosis and physical illness. The chapter concludes with a description of how her final memoir, Wet Earth and Dreams, about illness and recovery makes it possible for Lazarre to connect with the maternal and to divine a self.

Chapter three deals with Elizabeth Ehrlich's search for a way to shape a self in relation to her communal history, without losing her self to what she regards as Judaism's overbearing patriarchal influences. This chapter should be read as an exploration of how a woman can cultivate a relationship with unspeakable maternal forces to shape new identity patterns within any traditional way of life. I enter Ehrlich's self/re/construction in Miriam's Kitchen by way of Kristeva's theories on how the symbolic and semiotic interact to produce representation and identity. I am interested in demonstrating how Ehrlich's memoir serves as a type of semiotic chora that re-energizes a semiotic logic of signification that originates in the preoedipal phase and reactivates the dialectic between the symbolism and semiotics of her communal history to divine a self. Much of my discussion deals with how memoir's unique tripartite voices enable the author to bring semiotic rhythms and sensual images into concourse with symbolism, or how Ehrlich is able to develop a subjectivity that allows for both personal experience and Jewish symbolism. Memoir then serves as a maternal space within which Ehrlich divines a self in connection to and separation from her communal history.

Chapter four should be read as an investigation into how one woman utilizes memoir practices to reveal and exploit the invisible presences that produce identity. My

view of Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior is from the perspective of Kristeva's position that women should refuse the extreme representations available to them under the Symbolic order and perform their own as projected from the point of view of women's truth[8]. I argue Kingston utilizes memoir as a subversive tool to perform her way out of the type of double bind introduced by Kristeva in "About Chinese Women" by heeding the call of the mother and utilizing what I call a "relational technology" to seek a fluid identity. I show how memoir's "relational technology" enables Kingston to seize the power of Kristeva's rejection process – the very device within the Symbolic order that develops identity in the first place – to overthrow those representations and create new ones. As reflected in the author's comment, "The beginning is hers, the ending is mine," the divining of a self is a joint effort requiring a connection between mother and daughter.

In the final chapter of this work I attempt to apply what I learn from this autocritical exercise to the writing of my own memoir. This is where I address the struggle with my own contradictory and awkward subject positions. It should be read as the beginning of my search for a maternal connection that has troubled my words for over fifty years.

[8] See page 28.

# CHAPTER TWO

## If I acknowledge her, she annihilates me:

## Searching for mother in the memoirs of Jane Lazarre

> My Eve understood that to get back to the knowledge of original creation she must listen with the far side of thought, to voices that speak in savage eloquence, with the naked presence of light, directly to intuition.
>
> (Kim Chernin, Reinventing Eve 148)

### The horror and fascination of the absent maternal

In my memoir I write about my dreams in an attempt to connect with a presence that calls to me from forgotten enclaves, a familiar presence that I have attempted, unsuccessfully, to banish:

> *I am being forced to look into my past by someone who looks like me. She hands me a file full of documents and pictures of me that I have never seen before, some reproduced on a newspaper page. In the images I look like one of those silent, suffering children in the TV ads designed to appeal for foster parent funding. I am less than four years old. My hair is short, like a boy's, and my too short dress is dirty and ravaged with holes. My kids want to see, but I hide the pictures. I bury my head in my arms and cry uncontrollably, experiencing a familiar sadness that has haunted me for*

> *decades. I become lost in the pain and feel myself drifting away from everyone as I imagine would happen in death.*

I was four when my mother reclaimed me from the social welfare system that shuffled me from home to home for three years with mechanical indifference. I was old enough to feel betrayal, abandonment, guilt and anger, but too young to understand such feelings or find a proper place for them. I began a long process of disidentification with the significant other who Chodorow claims is essential to my identity and sense of self, my mother. While separated from her I longed for the feel of her fingers stroking my forehead, the aroma of her Avon perfume and her childlike crooning of "What Will Be Will Be." But when she came to my foster home for visits I was torn between running into her arms and hiding out behind the garage. When she brought me home for good I admired the maternal prowess she demonstrated in the kitchen and at the sewing machine – all obviously compatible with subject positions available to women of the 1950s and 60s – but I was disappointed and confused by her absence from home. I realized a single mother had to work to pay the rent and put food on the table, but the discourse of the day encouraged me to view this necessity as abandonment and abuse. Similarly, when she brought a man into the house, I judged her based on the rules prescribed by the discourse of our Catholic faith. Common-law is living in sin. As a result the daughter who thought she was found when her mother picked her up at the foster home, who thought she had finally come home to mother, became hopelessly lost. I experienced an extreme form of disidentification, the kind of situation that Nussbaum contends occurs when "subjects are held in subject positions that are incompatible, and the ideologies are brought into contestation" (164). If, as Smith suggests, this space of disidentification is housed in the

unconscious -- the place where all the experiences and desires that cannot be aligned with normative subject positions are deposited[1] ("Performativity" 110) -- it is not surprising that I find myself lost in dreams like that described at the opening to this chapter since dreams are considered to be a doorway to the unconscious by the conventional wisdom of 20th century psychoanalytical theory.

But what do we make of the conflicted and suffering daughter in the dream? Is she simply torn between opposing ideologies as Nussbaum suggests? Why does her pain lead to a distancing she associates with death? The degree of disidentification implied here requires not only a theory of ideological contestation, but also a psychoanalytic theorization capable of explaining this extremity. In "Powers of Horror" Kristeva provides an interesting explanation in abjection, a concept she introduces to shed light on the process of separation and identification in both individuals and nations. Kristeva associates the abject with anything that has been rejected by the Symbolic order in the interest of protecting the Symbolic order. Although the abject represents an absence, it is still very much present, much like a mother is still present after birthing a child even though the infant has severed its physical connection with the cutting of the umbilical cord. She defines abjection as "a desire for separation, for becoming autonomous and also the feeling of an impossibility of doing so" (qtd. Oliver, Reading 55). So the abject, she argues, can be found in whatever disturbs identity, system or order: "What does not respect borders, positions, rules" ("Powers" 232). It is a kind of absence that haunts the borderlines of identity, threatening unity and calling into question the boundaries on

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[1] Smith's source for theorization is Teresa de Lauretis' , "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness."

which society and subject are constructed. She contends that the maternal body, the uncertain boundary between the bodies of mother and infant, is one such threat to the Symbolic order that has been abjected. It is the ultimate symbol of ambiguous identity. I find Oliver's interpretation of Kristeva's work useful here because she explains how the abject undermines the authority of the Symbolic order that produces representation and identity:

> Abject literature calls into question language itself, along with the authority of the subject. Kristeva suggests that like revolutionary poetry, the content of abject literature is maternal; it is the semiotic music and rhythm of language...On one level abjection is what is repressed with the symbolic element of language, and when this repressed shows itself, it undermines the authority of language itself (Reading 101).

Based on Kristeva's contention that the abject speaks to us in the "semiotic music and rhythm of language," I suggest the maternal can be thought of as a language of abjection -- a terror that dissembles -- and that it is this disturbing language that speaks to me from the repressed unconscious. Clearly, I am entering dangerous territory with regards to my emotional health when I attempt to explore the abject. On the one hand Chodorow claims I must relate to the maternal in order to form an identity. Yet according to Kristeva our culture requires a woman to reject or absent the maternal and if a woman does reject the maternal she is in danger of rejecting and absenting herself since she is potentially both a daughter and a mother: "how can She be that bloodthirsty Fury, since I am She..., She is I? Consequently the hatred I bear her is not oriented toward the outside but is locked up within myself" ("Black Sun" 198). Therefore in exploring the abject I

risk putting myself on what Kristeva describes as "the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me" ("Powers" 230). Understandably then, the abject stirs in me both horror and fascination. I feel compelled to reflect on my childhood for my very survival as an adult in the way Rich suggests in her 1972 essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision": "Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for a woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society" (18). After fifty odd years of trying to make sense out of a deep, abiding emptiness, I feel a need to re-examine the discourses that have constructed my subjectivity, either by their presence or absence. In order to do that Chodorow argues I must contend with the maternal, what Kristeva contends is abject. It is an abjection that has both protected and haunted my sense of self for decades. Jane Lazarre shares this fear in the second of her three memoirs when she quotes Audre Lorde: "the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation that always seems fraught with danger" (Beyond 22). While I can construct and confirm an identity in autobiography, I can just as easily deconstruct my self through an encounter with the abject. For women writers, argues Rich, "there is the challenge and promise of a whole new psychic geography to be explored. But there is also a difficult and dangerous walking on the ice, as we try to find language and images for consciousness we are just coming into, and with little in the past to support us" ("Dead Awaken" 19).

Lazarre is one such American writer who teaches me about the difficulty and danger associated with my own struggles with the abject as she explores the geography of

her identity in three memoirs written between 1976 and 1998. Lazarre has chosen wisely in using memoir to make her journey because it is a genre that allows her to develop her identity in the process of writing, unlike autobiography, which Quinby reminds me, demands a subjectivity that is unitary and continuous over time (299). Lazarre demonstrates the importance of the writing process to self in process in The Mother Knot: "I wrote in my record books to keep track of my life, I would say. But there was more to it than that...if I continued to write, a process began, a sort of a translation of the tension into words; and the words created the possibility for clarity to develop" (10).

The Mother Knot

As a young mother of two small children in 1976 when she publishes The Mother Knot, Lazarre finds she is unable to recognize herself in the motherhood discourses of the day. In her preface to the 1997 edition she admits that, "When I wrote this memoir, I felt I belonged nowhere, certainly not to the texts and sub-texts about motherhood, whether by artists or scientists, then passing for truth" (xvii). Much like other female authors of the 1970s and 1980s studied by Hirsch, I find Lazarre caught up in a turbulent zone of subject formation created by two conflicting representations of mother, the products of the Freudian and "feminist family romances" when she writes: "We learned always to expect sentences to have two parts, the second seeming to contradict the first, the unity lying in our growing ability to tolerate ambivalence – for that is what motherly love is like" (70). In this case I suggest the Freudian family romance be seen as representative of a narrative that abjects the maternal and the "feminist family romance" as that which Hirsch argues seeks connection with that abjection in the form of consoling but dangerous female alliances. The conflict between these creates a gap of disidentification.

The opening chapter illustrates Lazarre's ongoing struggle with these contradictory subject positions. In my reading of the text I see her blow-by-blow, critical account of her participation in, and witnessing of traditional childbirth as a demonstration of a fragmented identity. She makes it clear she is not the silent, passive type – or what she calls the good mother -- when she writes that her husband "did not marry a controlled sort of woman who could be counted on to keep her deepest feelings tucked neatly out of sight"(4). When she tries to adhere to paternally authored mothering instructions -- instruments of the Lamaze technique and copy of Dr. Spock – she hears an inner voice telling her: "You crazy girl, don't you know you're the wrong customer for this nonsense?"(23). Tension mounts in her gap of disidentification when she hears mothers' cries at the hospital; what I interpret to be "the semiotic music and rhythm of language." Although the medical staff continually insists she must not scream and cannot listen to the screams of other mothers -- "'Close the door, we can't listen to that,' said my doctor" (6) – Lazarre cannot deny their impact. She insists uterine pain is real and not a product of a woman's imagination or something that can be negated by breathing exercises as if "the more you can manage to think of something else, the more you will be able to endure the horror going on in your uterus"(4). I argue Lazarre's childbirth experience is a demonstration of how the Symbolic order – which I see as the fascist threat Lazarre says keeps her in line as the good mother (5) -- silences the voice of the mother and in so doing abjects the maternal and fortifies the boundaries constructed to protect the unity of the Symbolic order. I see the medicalization of the pregnant mother's body and its restrictions on her voice as representative of how the Symbolic order represses unspeakable maternal forces, or semiotic excesses.

The maternal silence confirmed in this birthing scene becomes more problematic for Lazarre as she works her way through the text in an attempt to shape her identity as a mother. Chodorow and Contratto provide a useful explanation for why the abject maternal creates difficulties for daughters constructing maternal subjectivities. They contend the silencing of the mother forces a daughter to construct a maternal identity from the perspective of a child. That means the daughter ends up shaping an identity in relation to infantile fantasies, which tend to either idealize or blame the mother and have little to do with the realities of maternal behavior. They argue from the child's perspective daughters tend to see mothers as all-powerful, self-sacrificing, giving and totally responsible for how their children turn out (55). I find this argument useful because it provides further insight into the conflicted nature of Lazarre's identity as a mother. I suggest she demonstrates Chodorow and Contratto's point when she admits to yearning for a different kind of mother than hers: "Like many sons and daughters who are themselves middle-aged, even those with living mothers, when I yearned for a mother it was the mother of my dreams" (72). Based on this fantasy Lazarre then becomes the kind of mother who assumes total responsibility for her infant son's well being and represses her own needs, which become increasingly difficult to articulate. She begins to hear her son's cries as accusations and experiences feelings of guilt and resentment: "The experts were right, I thought. Babies are born to be placid, contented creatures. It is only the bad mother repressing her unfair resentment…who is to blame" (27). Indeed, she compares herself to a sculptor who is solely responsible for molding her child: "I just kept thinking of him as a lump of clay, molded by me and taking shape only according to my discretion" (112). Evidence that the overly responsible mother archetype creates more

tension in Lazarre's subject position can be found in her response to another mother who seeks Lazarre's agreement on the rewards of motherhood. Lazarre answers: "Not really…Actually it is quite miserable and exhausting" (46).

Just as I experience a traumatic form of disidentification in attempting to identify with a mother who seems to straddle the fence between female roles from the Freudian and "feminist family romance" plots at the beginning of this chapter, I contend Lazarre experiences similar problems complying with what she calls the "Western myth of placid, fulfilling maternity" (xxi). She writes: "Yet I felt myself to be a guest in the world, following the rules written out for my sex, not wanting to obey them, but seeing nothing more desirable in the world of violence inhabited by men" (39). Like the female characters constructed to fulfill "female and feminist family romance" roles in Hirsch's study, Lazarre and I seem to be undergoing a self-construction process fraught with contradiction. But as I contend in my introduction this tension packed process can be exploited to make visible previously invisible aspects of ideologies that produce subjects (Nussbaum 164); what Kristeva calls underlying causalities that can be used to rupture imposed systems of identification ("About" 153). However, Kristeva reminds me, for a woman the exploitation of this tension involves identification with the abject maternal, which can be hazardous to her mental health because she must abject herself in the process. I suggest Lazarre recognizes this burden when she writes: "And psychic health? That was something you dragged around with you like a ball and chain" that "pulled on your ankles until they were raw" (90). Nevertheless, I contend, Lazarre's goal in this book is to "demolish that impossible set of standards which oppresses us all – the motherhood mystique" (xxiii) through speaking about what motherhood is really like,

which involves shaping a self in relation to the abjected maternal. I assert Lazarre is arguing for a process that disrupts the Symbolic order's representations of women when she says speaking out about the realities of motherhood is the only way to change the conclusions and theories which always hover on the edge of her experience, demanding that she sacrifice her self-knowledge to their established vision of the truth (xxii). As she writes in the 1997 preface: "The mother knot tightens and loosens for me. Protecting and constraining, it is the source of my own awakening" (xviii).

At first Lazarre seems to be successful in utilizing knowledge generated by her conflicted subject position to make the kind of changes in her life that would allow her to develop what Chodorow describes as identity in relation. She decides to seek connection by way of joining a women's liberation group: "Through feminism I would seek community in social action. Perhaps I would carry my baby on my back after all, and my sisters would help me care for him" (40). But she soon discovers, what Kristeva contends, is feminism's failure in seeking identity for women. Kristeva argues feminists who claim an identity for women separate from the maternal in order to fight for the emancipation of women fall into the trap of supporting the patriarchal constructions of woman as unrepresentable other (145). Lazarre drops out of the feminist group when she realizes motherless women cannot relate to her pregnancy and that her very maternity is what isolates her: "I had been isolated by the definitions of maternity which seemed inevitably to stop short right outside the reality of my experience" (68). I find the conflict in her subject position becomes more pronounced when she realizes she cannot locate a connected identity (like that Hirsch contends exists in the "feminist family romance") in a type of feminism that actually promotes the same autonomous, independent model of

maturity as the Freudian family romance. Lazarre admits she agrees with feminist ideals, but sympathizes with mothers like those she sees in the park with their children who "have been robbed of self-respect by a society which idolizes and damns them, and most recently, by the women's movement too" (132). Her gap of disidentification forces her to "vacillate continually between hating them for their cowardice and loving them for their endurance" (132). Lazarre continues to look for connection by joining an informal neighborhood women's group, studying anthropology "to search for connections I had lately been unable to make in my own life" (91), and finally starting a co-operative daycare that provides her with the camaraderie of other mothers. I suggest all of these efforts to seek a more connected identity and uncover the knowledge Lazarre needs to evolve her identity are unsuccessful because of her failure to establish an ongoing connection with the abject maternal, or her dead mother, a connection Chodorow claims is essential to the shaping of her self. As Lazarre relents in a prayer at the close of the first chapter: "Mother, I can't find you, let alone be you" (8).

Why in a book so clearly intended to deal with mother, does the author have so much difficulty connecting with her own mother? Perhaps because Lazarre is looking for the maternal in the wrong places through a narrative constructed on Hirsch's definitions of Freudian and "feminist family romances." Kristeva reminds me in "Stabat Mater" that Freud "offers only a massive *nothing*" when it comes to articulating the complexities and pitfalls of maternal experience (179). In fact, argues Kristeva, Freud only offers various remarks punctuated by his mother from the kitchen and a picture of his wife, a mute story: "There thus remained for his followers an entire continent to explore, a black one indeed" ("Stabat" 179). Oliver also reminds me of the Kristevian notion that women who

devote themselves to the Symbolic order in the guise of feminism do so as a defense against the mother (62). Oliver describes the two relations Kristeva contends women can have with their mothers: they either carry the abject mother around as a "living corpse," which they close their eyes to, or they form a defense against the mother using the Symbolic order (62). Kristeva describes these two options in "About Chinese Women" as the silent, hysteric and virile superman (155).

I argue Lazarre bounces between both forms of representation, which serves to keep the abject maternal at a distance. Although she continually tries to disassociate with the passive silent self-construct of the Freudian family romance, Lazarre cannot seem to align her self with the "feminist family romance" representation of woman. She writes:

> I was swinging back and forth between my ever present contradictions. First I was jerked in one direction, bumping hard into my revulsion at the sight of my body...feeling an unhappiness which I was sure must indicate my unfitness as a future mother. Then I would swing back, holding on to consciousness for dear life, frightened of retreating into fantasy or dream (19).

Like female characters in Hirsch's "female family romance" plots who avoid maternity and instead construct fantasies, "wherein an authoritative father is replaced with other more nurturing men it is hoped might provide an alternative to patriarchal dominance" (57), Lazarre retreats into fantasy. Pregnant with her first child she fantasizes about making love to a TV actor. At the market she fantasizes about lopping off men's penises and decorates her fantasies "with weapons of death" (86). At the end of the book she projects herself onto a stage acting out the roles of an independent woman "who would

always be alone, unreachable, invulnerable to friendship or love" and a mother who's "eyes flashed alternately with sympathy and anger" (143). But she only achieves a limited power through her imagination because she does not use it to connect with the maternal as evident in her description of her behavior in that period as that of "a hibernating animal" (89). I see the hibernating animal as Kristeva's silent, hysteric. Yet Lazarre also occupies a subject position similar to the female characters constructed by Hirsch's women authors of the 1970s and 1980s who seek the consoling but dangerous alliances of the "feminist family romance" plot. I find Lazarre attempts to look at the contradictions in her life from a fresh feminist perspective in the hopes of creating a new feminist subject when she writes: "Somewhere on the fringe of the men's revolution there was a spot called 'women's movement'. It was there I would sit comfortably again and find ways of changing the world" (40). But Lazarre's strategy does not work because she is using feminism as another protection from the abject maternal. I suggest when she occupies the subject position described by Kristeva as a virile superman Lazarre employs another strategy for avoiding talking about her experience as the daughter of a mother – her mother's mothering experience -- that Chodorow claims is necessary to help her define her identity. Lazarre admits to her inability to speak as a daughter in the new preface to the 1997 edition of The Mother Knot: "I had struggled to learn the language of a mother's voice. Now in my early fifties, forced to confront the myths I had constructed about my mother, I saw I had learned the mother's language so well I had to learn the daughter's voice again" (xviii)[2]. Lazarre is unable to find the maternal language of

[2] I interpret the mother's language in this case only as that constructed by the patriarchally dominated Symbolic order and the daughter's voice as that constructed by interaction with the abject maternal

abjection she needs to articulate mother, which is why she ends up identifying with the feminists as a defense against the abject maternal. The abject maternal, Kristeva contends in "Powers of Horror," is the Symbolic order's safeguard, what is intended to keep identity, system and order in check (230 & 232).

It is my position that the maternal language of abjection – a terror that dissembles – is what haunts at the borderlines of Lazarre's identity and makes shaping a more integrated self problematic. But how is this manifested in the text? The answer lies partly in the energy Lazarre invests in her search for self. She refers to her work on transformation in The Mother Knot as an "obsession" in her 1997 preface (xvi). She also notes how this text is only the beginning of her work on motherhood. It is a central theme in both her fiction and the two other memoirs that are discussed in this chapter. At the beginning of The Mother Knot Lazarre provides an insight into why she clings to her motherhood obsession: "For many years I lived primarily to search for her [her mother]…For a while I tried secretly being her. But that only made the confusion worse. I ended up, during my teen-age years, holding on to reality by my fingernails, unsure whether I wanted to be her, the price of which was the loss of myself, or to be myself without her" (9). In other words Lazarre does not want to abject the maternal for fear that she will have to reject her self. On the other hand she doesn't want to admit to housing the abject maternal within or she has to experience the horror of not knowing where her identity begins and ends. I argue this is the struggle that lies at the heart of the text and that cannot be resolved without the help of Lazarre's dead mother. I suggest this is the reason behind Lazarre's obsession with issues of boundary. For example, when her mother-in-law prepares to leave her alone with her newborn, Lazarre is forced to

recognize the merging of boundaries between her as mother and daughter. She becomes so tormented and confused by the feelings caused by the overlapping of identities that she flees from her family "to bleed to death on the road" rather than risk "insanity in the living room" (27). In other words breaching boundaries through bleeding is more acceptable within the Symbolic order, than merging mother/daughter identities. Later when her friends refer to her as an Earth Mother, I suggest she begins to sense the presence of the abject or semiotic excesses: "...there was something truer, something which had to do with a part of myself which was always frustrating me by remaining hidden despite my conscious attempts to express it. It kept hidden because it was frightened, frightened of its own power...Pregnancy and childbirth had exposed that power, made it impossible for me ever to deny it again" (44).

The maternal language of abjection also appears in The Mother Knot in a number of symbols, images and metaphors to do with boundaries and connection. For example milk, tears and blood, what I see as metaphors of non-speech, also signify the liquidity of boundaries between mother and child. They seem to emerge whenever Lazarre experiences ambivalence about her identity as a mother; when she fears a confusion of boundaries. For example, Lazarre's mother's rejection of motherhood is symbolized by the breast she "never had the leisure to offer" (14), signifying a loss of maternal connection. When she nurses her son, Lazarre feels her "inner self...shrink into a very small knot" and fears she will merge so completely with him that she will disappear. At the women's liberation meeting where she longs for a connection with other mothers she feels her breasts heavy with excesses of milk (41). She cannot escape her connection with her son. I suggest she senses the presence of the abject during pregnancy when she

writes: "You begin crying about one small, or at least concrete, incident and end up weeping about everything in your life, past and present, known and unknown, personal and cosmic" (17). Once again tears signify the breaching of boundaries, this time between all aspects of her life. She is focused on the abject when she becomes fascinated with her sexuality; a power she associates with "dripping blood…swirling madly, unreachable, involved only with myself" (45).

Not surprisingly pregnancy is what brings the issue of boundaries and connection to Lazarre's attention. As Kelly says of Kristeva's contention that mother love is a woman's reunion with her own mother, "What does a mother want, especially in childbirth? She wants her mother" (Reading 66). Lazarre says in the opening chapter when she becomes a mother, "I just wanted my mother" (8). It is the state of pregnancy -- which Kristeva regards as evidence of a woman's existence outside of patriarchal constructs of motherhood ("About" 146) – that causes Lazarre to think back to the maternal that was abjected from her own childhood: "It must be more than New Haven. This isolation. Why do I feel so lonely? What started this cycle of depression? I understand nothing. I just stare" (19). When her mother-in-law – her surrogate mother -- finally leaves Lazarre alone to tend to her newborn the separation is what brings the abject to the surface. She writes, "I was isolated, lonely, the way I had been many years before, long before I had begun to write" (30). Clearly her lack of connection, her isolation, is not something that has just occurred because of her new status as mother. She has felt a pervasive loneliness since her mother died as reflected in her habitual compensation: "As I had done since childhood, I coped with my loneliness by feasting on it, clutching it around me in the mad hope that if it was all there was to life, I could at

least diminish its power by loving it. For to be lonely was at least to be something"(36). I argue she suffers despair because she senses that the connection she needs – the abjected maternal -- is beyond her reach: "she, my own dead, damnably unreachable mother, comes crashing into my head, reminding me that she has left me forever" (49). When her dead mother does appear in the text she is always a dark figure, shrouded in shadows, symbolic of the unknown abject. Just after Lazarre becomes pregnant her mother's face appears to her in darkness. Later she appears as a witch who "seemed to know something I didn't" (9). In the last chapter Lazarre pits her independent, disconnected self – the dark lady in her "who would always be alone, unreachable, invulnerable to friendship or love" (143) -- against her fairer, less dramatic maternal self to argue out this business of connection and its import in the shaping of identity. I see this fantasy as a debate staged between the maternal as a product of the Freudian family romance and the more connected "feminist family romance," a debate designed to help Lazarre shape her identity as mother. As a witness to this conversation between her two selves she contends that the maternal figure is essential to the dark lady's survival.

By all appearances it looks as though Lazarre is able to work out the process Kristeva recommends for shaping a female self outside of the constraints of the Symbolic order. Recall Kristeva's position that women must subversively resist the identities that are produced by the Symbolic order and find their own truth from which to project identity. That truth is based on a more intimate connection with mother, or the abjected maternal ("About" 153). Lazarre uses the memoir form to provide details of her experience as a mother, witnesses that of other mothers and reflects on the historical significance of these experiences. She uncovers the invisible ideologies that produce

mothers and even disidentifies from those ideologies, creating a productive tension that opens the way to change. But I contend her disconnection from her dead mother prevents her from producing new identity patterns. I argue the abject maternal prevents her from utilizing the reflexive aspect of memoir to apply what she learns to the act of self-making. Lazarre makes her mother abject, or ambiguous, in order to separate from her. One minute she is fondly remembering her mother's songs and the next she is criticizing her for leaving her to be cared for by maids: "I wouldn't need the maids she had relied on to bring me up. I would take care of my own child and continue to live my own life too" (14). Lazarre remains a divided self at the close of The Mother Knot. Her identity is divided between that of a mother and what she calls the girlwoman: "who had once been all I needed to know of myself, who I had fought to understand, to love, to free" (28). When she tries to separate the two in a fantasy performance at the end of the book she comes face to face with the abject, with what Kristeva calls the impossibility of autonomy, its only quality "that of being opposed to I" ("Powers" 230).

Such a divided self in a patriarchally constructed world of signs that demands unity has its consequences, usually involving mental and physical breakdown, which in this book is illustrated by a breakdown of symbolic language. As Lazarre writes in her journal: "For weeks sentences exploded out of me tearing through my head like a geyser ripping the earth behind it. But I was never able to achieve the decency of a long, connected paragraph. Even pronouns eluded me" (18). I suggest, as Lazarre approaches the abject she glimpses the invisible borderlines that protect the Symbolic order and has no words to express the relationship. When her identity is defined as that of her husband's wife she realizes how much doubt surrounds her sense of self: "I...was

slithering in and out of the muck of self doubt at a velocity which was steering me toward the rim of hysteria" (32). By chapter five her fragmented subject position manifests itself in the form of a physical breakdown. She rushes to tend to her crying son and feels pains in her shoulders that she recognizes as pains of anger, which cannot be expressed: "Pains which came after fighting with my father and which come now from living with my son" (47). In the end she feels she has to shout loud to be heard because "there is a real danger of losing faith in my existence" (56). But most telling of all are Lazarre's dreams, which I contend demonstrate the impact of this divided psyche. In one dream she finds rooms attached to her apartment that are so disconnected from her day-to-day life that they are falling into a state of disrepair (87). In the next dream her son bleeds and becomes sick from too much crying (symbolic of unspeech). She finds even more unused rooms and senses a maternal presence she feels could help her son, but all she can do is hold him close and look into the room (89). I see the infant and the mother in the dream as one and therefore the baby Lazarre holds as her self, sick from her inability to express herself. The maternal presence is the abjected maternal, which she senses could alleviate her problems with expression, but she is too frightened to explore.

Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness

I argue Lazarre's unresolved subject position leads her to maintain her obsession with connection and boundaries in the hopes of uniting her painfully divided self in her second memoir. In Beyond The Whiteness of Whiteness Lazarre's examination of constructs of race and the history of racism in the United States from the perspective of a white feminist mother of black sons seems to intensify her maternal issues, as evidenced by her focus on the boundary of skin. In order to confront the injunctions through black

history that enforce specific racial interiorities, to point out the inherent blindness of whites to their racist attitudes, she focuses on skin as a boundary between mother and child and white and black races. I assert Lazarre concentrates her work on the maternal and racist themes in the hopes of integrating her self. She uses the experience of motherhood to try to understand "the lifelong tension between the need for clear boundaries and boundless intimacy" (24). As the white, Jewish mother of black sons she finds herself outside the citationality of the typical "I" white, Jewish mother and "I" black mother. She needs to find a way to bring the two together, to integrate her experience in the everyday outside world with the internal, "or the mind splits, even sanity may slip, imbalance threatens" (xvii). Throughout the text she uses the metaphor of skin to stand in for a boundary, its contours serving as an illusionary line that separates and connects. Her sons' skins, the product of a white mother and black father, are representative of the ambiguity of the line, yet her own skin seems to represent a barrier to both nationality and full selfhood. During a discussion with her son Khary about the unjust killing of a 14-year-old black boy she feels " …masked and disguised, trapped by a skin I cannot change, or as if my skin is separate from me. I look at him and talk to him from behind this foreign thing – my skin (no longer perfect and simple protection for tissue, flesh and bone, it is something to be overcome). I want to get out of it so I can be sure he sees me, yet I know I am in it. It is me" (78-9).

I see Lazarre returning to memoir because she believes the form will lead her to the connection she needs to divine her self as reflected in her argument that writing the self is "an act of faith in human connection" (xviii). I suggest that Lazarre's consciousness of memoir as a combination of storytelling, descriptive narrative and

interpretive essay (xviii) reflects the three voices of memoir, which include the witness, participant and reflective/reflexive. These are the voices Buss contends women use to seek a more relational story by "proceeding in a series of incremental scenes of realization that always involve relationships with significant others as well as efforts to achieve autonomy" (Repossessing 13). In fact, Lazarre states in her opening chapter that she is looking for what Woolf seeks in her memoir Moments of Being. Lazarre sees Woolf's moments of being as semi-conscious alterations in perspective, shifts just outside of our awareness "accumulations of small pieces of knowledge instantly 'forgotten' or buried again, each time less fully, so that they surface with increasing frequency" (2). In reading Lazarre's account of Woolf's moves out of ordinary consciousness into an alternative awareness I realize I experience such moments: staring into space in a trance as my favorite black artist sings about listening to your momma. I smell my mother's second hand smoke as if she were across the room from me instead of 3,000 kilometers away in Ontario. I feel like nothing suspended on this island in British Columbia a province away from my children. These moments of being are like tiny puzzle pieces of information that must hover just at the edge of my awareness perhaps because my mind is not quite ready to gently move them into place. If I think of a puzzle piece as the Kristevian abject I see why memoir works so well for authors like Lazarre. Memoir is a faithful diviner that seeks connection even if it is as out of reach as the abjected. I see memoir the way Rich sees poetry, like dreams wherein "you put what you don't know you know" ("Dead Awaken" 21). I know it is the maternal abject that Lazarre seeks because she says writing about motherhood is a central subject in her life's work, "a story

within which I could trace this human dilemma of the boundaries and pathways between self and others" (118).

Clearly, Lazarre sees memoir as a move towards a closer association with the kind of representation featured in the "feminist family romance," wherein Hirsch contends, female characters are shown to seek a more intimate connection with mother and with preoedipal, pre-verbal origins that bring together fragments of the self (138). In the "Prologue" Lazarre argues against the type of autobiographical writing that encourages a split between the individual and historical consciousness because it creates a distorted vision. She contends it is a sign that an autobiography is written from a place of privilege when the ending that is sought involves separation and autonomy: "Indeed, the unnatural split between individual and historical consciousness, where the one seems to emerge and prevail wholly independent of the other, is part of a distorted vision resulting from privilege, part of an ideology of individualism fraught with false stories which are dangerous to personal as well as political life" (xviii). Driven by a need to build a bridge between her solitude and the world (134) she argues for a liberation of self that demands many voices and memories (97).

I argue her efforts are foiled in this second memoir because she continues to shun the abject maternal, her dead mother that haunts the borderlines of her subjectivity. I see Lazarre opting for a role associated with both the "female family romance" -- wherein she bounces between Freudian male identification on the one hand and "imaginative identification…human connectedness at its most intimate" (Hirsch xxi) on the other – and the "feminist family romance." On the one hand she speaks as the daughter of a Jewish, communist father to draw attention to the injustice of a white people's blindness to their

racist attitudes and at the same time ignores her own voice as the daughter of a mother. From Siegel's perspective this strategy is classic Freudian: "While the daughter often describes her affiliation with her father in a tone of rebellious pride, nothing from a Freudian standpoint, could be more traditional" (31). Lazarre says her most treasured childhood memories are her father's survival stories which are "lodged in the deepest layers of my psyche – the way I move, the way I speak at times, even the way I feel" (14). Whenever she thinks of herself as different from her father she remembers his chant, "My blood is coursing through your veins" (116). Her description of her identity leaves out her connection with mother: "I am the distant cousin of Holocaust victims, the child of an immigrant Jew, the daughter-in-law of a woman who remembers her grandmother telling stories of her childhood in slavery, the mother of two Black men" (17). When she becomes pregnant with her first child she substitutes a connection with her own mother with her sons: "I realized – my body and self – was no longer exactly white" (3). As prescribed by the "female family romance" she looks to her sons as a way to seek power. She admits her intellectual curiosity grew out of her personal maternal struggle "to better comprehend the lives of my sons…through them I wanted to know the world beyond their stories, the life that surrounds and alters their lives" (51). Siegel provides a useful explanation for why daughters such as Lazarre avoid connection with their mothers when she argues that daughters writing autobiographies cannot demonstrate their value by having mothers as their role models; "a figure traditionally typifying private, disempowered space" (14). Indeed, Siegel contends, that a daughter who appropriates the story and speaking posture of a man "silences that part of herself that identifies her as a daughter of her mother" (15)[3].

[3] Siegel's source is Smith's Poetics.

Even though Lazarre's role in this book typifies that found in the "female family romance" plot, in that she seeks her voice and power through the male and attempts to make the history of American racism personal, I argue it hybrids itself with the connective aspect of the "feminist family romance" because of the maternal presence that calls to her from the margins of the narrative. The author admits to her deference to a purely Freudian approach when she writes, "As a young mother, it was clear to me very early that if I had to model my life on the image of the great, male genius – selfish, self-involved and steeped always in his own sacred mysteries, unsuited by virtue of his talent to the mundane demands and expectations of ordinary life – then I could be no artist at all" (117). Siegel helps me to see how such a hybrid autobiography can evolve. She argues that a daughter's unsuccessful attempts to silence the mother only makes her even more powerful in a narrative, a power I associate with Kristeva's abject maternal: "Rather than being erased, the daughter's representation of the mother becomes instead a charged space --- a textual abyss – in women's autobiographies" (15). To better understand how the abject functions in Lazarre's text I follow the advice of Siegel who suggests I look beyond the author's surface text to "the underside of her allegory" to explore "its dark continent of conscious and unconscious blindness" (30) Accordingly I choose to look beyond Lazarre's racial text. From this critical perspective I argue Lazarre projects her need for connection on to her sons because she cannot bring the maternal abject, the mother puzzle piece, into her consciousness. So when I look at her title Beyond The Whiteness of Whiteness, I do not see it as encompassing a story about how white people are blind to their prejudices and can only see blacks in relation to themselves. Rather I see a book about a mother who can only see mothering in relation to herself and her sons

and is blind to the connection to her own mother, the abject. Lazarre draws the correlation between racism and the woman question herself in a discussion about hypocrisies towards race: "Like their largely man-made views on 'the woman question' which can now seem so hopelessly naïve...similarly, their views on race were formed by whites who never, it seems, asked Blacks for their analyses or points of view" (28). The word black, the author admits later in the book, represents a great deal more than skin colour, qualities I suggest could just as easily represent the semiotics of the abject maternal: "the shared history and culture, a besieged status in society, and the strengths of collective knowledge hidden from the dominant group, a knowledge communicated in a glance, a touch on the shoulder, a phrase of music or language, a slap of the hand" (62). Just as Lazarre admits that she is naïve to think that race would stop outside the door of her interracial family (xix), I contend the author is naïve to think she can write from a maternal voice without connecting with her own mother. Writes Lazarre: "We do not exist outside of history, our lives uncomplicated by what came before" (8). I suggest that "the dark heart of American [racial] history" (9) she explores can also be looked at as the dark continent of the abject maternal in her book. As Siegel argues, a woman looking to construct identity can model her autobiography after her father – or in Lazarre's case after her black sons -- "but she would still need to confront her relationship to her mother" (14).

So how does this abject maternal manifest itself in Beyond The Whiteness of Whiteness? As she tours the Richmond Museum of the Confederacy Lazarre suddenly realizes "as if never before knowing what I must have known, that a painting about death can also be a painting about yellow and blue" (6). This observation directs the reader to

the allegorical underside of Lazarre's text, to the place where Rich contends, "you put what you don't know you know" (21). Later Lazarre says she writes about how children were forcibly taken from their slave mothers "not because it represents some new knowledge, but because I know we must repeat it and repeat it in order to bring it to the surface of American consciousness. It tends to drown in a sea of repression, denial, and callousness: it tends to sink down" (12). This passage could represent what happens when Lazarre avoids talking about her mother. Indeed, when the author realizes that she may be overidentifying with her sons – "Perhaps even more than most mothers" – and that she cannot be black like her sons, she blames her motherless childhood for her difficulties in letting go and slips into a space of disidentification void of speech:

> I can not find words to express my feelings, or my feelings are too threatening to find easy language. They are minefields lining opposite sides of the road of my motherhood of this beloved son. What is this whiteness that threatens to separate me from my own child? Why haven't I seen it lurking, hunkering down, encircling me in some irresistible fog? (24).

I argue when Lazarre becomes lost with no connection between herself and her mother and now her sons, she experiences the same feelings of abandonment felt when her mother died and struggles with the horror of the abject: "And always, this double truth, as unresolvable as in any other passion, the paradox: she is me/not me; he is mine/not mine" (25). Her description is chillingly similar to Kristeva's writing on the abject in "Powers of Horror":

> A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, which crushes me. On the edge of nonexistence and hallucination, of a reality that, if I acknowledge it, annihilates me (230).

I suggest it is the ambiguities of identity that Lazarre is resisting as reflected in her fear of "the themes of lost and recovered memory, its dangers and salvations…of the overlapping identities of motherhood and daughterhood" (74). As in The Mother Knot Lazarre's repression of the maternal emerges in her unconscious. In a repetitive dream about wandering in Africa a blinding sun keeps her from home. When she changes the word sun to son she realizes that she must separate herself from the complex identities of her sons, to find her self. For her the sun is "a representation of the dangerous loss of self and creative transcendence of self that is the ambivalent heart of motherhood" (22). From my perspective as the critic I see the son/sun as representative of the Symbolic order.

I suggest Lazarre is avoiding the abject maternal in her official surface text for the reasons stated by Chinua Achebe in his essay on truth and fiction quoted in Beyond The Whiteness of Whiteness: "Things are then not merely happening *before* us; they are happening, by the power and force of imaginative identification, *to us*. We not only see; we *suffer* alongside the hero and are branded by the same mark…"(71). Lazarre abjects the maternal because she fears suffering alongside her mother and being subjected to the same sentence: death by breast cancer at a young age. I find her ambivalence towards

identifying with the maternal abject is reflected in her description of her racial status: "I am terribly, visibly, shamefully white" (9). In Kristevian terms Lazarre abjects the maternal because if she identifies with the mother she places herself in a subject position outside the realm of the Symbolic order. In short, she fears death of identity.

Yet according to Siegel the dangers associated with abjecting the maternal are equally formidable. Siegel contends when a daughter differentiates her relationship with mother right out of existence she risks decorporealizing her self in the process: "The daughter may indirectly present a corporeal self through the mother's body but then must dissociate herself from the mother in order to fulfill autobiography's traditional cultural/spiritual trajectory" (30-1). In Kristevian terms a daughter can seek identity in relation to mother, but must eventually dissociate in order to fit the Symbolic order's representation of a woman. I argue Lazarre's denial of the maternal subjects her to a similar decorporealization process in Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness as demonstrated by her struggle to corporealize herself as a black mother to her sons. Lazarre seeks to disidentify with American white racists, largely for the benefit of her black sons. But while she can disconnect from the white American discourses that formulate a racist subjectivity, as her son points out, she cannot be black. When she tells her son she understands him he responds: "I don't think you do, Mom. You can't understand this completely because you are white" (24). Although the author claims she would like to become black for her sons (40) and vacate her white skin it is a "doomed wish" (50) because her memoir – a genre that fosters an awareness of hybrids of genres and consciousness – has led her to a clarity of conscience that "is hard to ignore" (50). The ironic result of writing a memoir that faces up to her ambivalence as a white mother

of black sons is that, "A new kind of silence enters your home" (84). She is the white mother of blacks, which represents a variation on the citationality that governs her "I" identity. By the end of the book her interiority is in massive conflict: "Displaced somewhere between American Blackness and American whiteness, I stop still on the street and for a moment can't remember where I am going" (49). She experiences a confusion of identity that is too paradoxical to endure, such as that she attributes to the famous American General Robert E. Lee, revered for his role in the Civil War, but also a slave owner (5). Her customary consciousness is in ruins. Her assertion of her identity as a non-racist white mother of blacks signals a failure to be any race and a failure to formulate an identity out of the knowledge she has gained from her disidentification. She does not "feel the safety and confidence, the entitlement, of those who know they belong" (94) and suffers the "unending paradox of exile and belonging, one clear place where my individual history and African American life converge" (100). I argue that without the aid of her mother's voice to make a connection her internalized conflict between black and white cancel each other out and leave her with zero in terms of identity, as described through her quote from Houston Baker as a "placeless-place, this spotless-spot...fluid experience" (108).

So while Lazarre has succeeded in making visible previously invisible ideologies that produce her subjectivity in book one and two, I argue she becomes lost in this space of disidentification because she does not connect with the abject maternal that would enable her to create a place for her conflicted subject positions. I turn to Kristeva's notion of the semiotic chora as a mediator between the semiotic and symbolic elements of the Symbolic order ("Revolution" 37) to better understand the consequences of Lazarre's

confused subject position. Kristeva calls the chora a maternal space because it is a space, like the mother's body, where a subject is both generated and negated long before the law of the father comes into play and the subject enters into language. Like the mother, who Chodorow contends serves as a base from which a daughter develops a self, Kristeva argues for the chora as both a harbour and threat to identity ("Revolution" 37). It is therefore the sounds and rhythms of the maternal space, the semiotic chora that maintains the tension between the semiotic and symbolic that produce language, representation and identity ("Revolution" 36). If I apply Kristeva's ideas about the chora to Lazarre's situation I suggest the author is unable to establish a chora in which to house the two elements because of her disconnection from her mother. Without the chora I can see how her identity can become dominated by the symbolic and make it difficult for her to listen to the mother's music that Kristeva contends is necessary to keep the identity making process in motion. I argue Lazarre's inability to establish a chora -- because she banishes the one voice that can help her weave together the threads of her subjectivity – makes it difficult for her to perform identity and forces her into an identity crisis, or nervous breakdown. The memoir form is both responsible for allowing her to see her problem, and ironically partially responsible for her breakdown. The genre leads her through what she calls in her "Prologue" "an incremental journey" that forces her to think and rethink her experience "moving constantly, often accompanied by a psychic vertigo, from the present moment to the past and back into some further extended enlightenment" (xx). Along the journey she gathers the puzzle pieces of knowledge that surface with increasing frequency, the threads of her experience that she attempts to weave into a tapestry of words. But her lack of faith in language to establish a maternal connection,

and therefore shape a self, forces her identity making process into crisis. As she explains at the close of the book this "translation of many impressions into one finally meaningful language" is a search for a pattern that may not exist (135). I argue Lazarre succumbs to the difficulties involved in articulating a daughter's relation to mother using the language of the Symbolic order. When using a genre that fosters unlimited self-revelation and results in unlimited vulnerability Lazarre opens herself up to the problematic relationship between female representation in the Symbolic order and that which she experiences: "I am unable to retrieve into words the story of narrowness or renewed life I am beginning to comprehend. Its shape is still forming in my imagination. Embedded in contrary feelings and undigested realizations, I am nowhere near the end of the wilderness and often feel it is not possible, nor even desirable, to speak" (70). In metaphoric terms she feels pregnant with her new life, but is unable to birth or perform her self: "I kept losing my words, before them my thoughts…I felt blank inside, empty of language, filled with presences that can be called neither thought nor feeling, nothing so exact, but rather a sense of fullness without shape, of being blown up beyond my usual contours with something that feels familiar and important yet unknown and unnamed" (129). I propose that writing memoir leads the author to a connection with the abject maternal, a preoedipal consciousness that has no language, but because she refuses to explore that connection more fully and speak as the daughter of her mother Lazarre continues, like me, to be "a wanderer in most of my dreams, and in none that I can remember have I found my way home" (51). She may lose faith in language, but not necessarily in the maternal, or she would not make another attempt at connection in a third memoir. As she closes her second memoir I find Lazarre continuing to search for way to divine a self in

relation to the maternal as expressed in her wish for her sons: "for a bridge between the transcient, fluid identity I have known and the reliable place of a strong, rooted self" (135).

Wet Earth and Dreams

It isn't until I come to Lazarre's third memoir Wet Earth and Dreams that I fully appreciate why she experiences an identity crisis in Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness. In the process of completing the second memoir and attempting to have it published she suffers through a number of disappointments and tragedies that shake her confidence in her self: the death of a long trusted therapist to breast cancer, the loss of a brother-in-law to AIDS, an economic crisis that leaves her husband without work, a rejection of her book by a trusted woman editor late in the publishing process, and her own diagnosis with breast cancer. It is little wonder then that a woman writer in such a vulnerable position who seeks to "allow contradictory feelings and new insights" to emerge onto the page and allow disparate images, "ideas and feelings only vaguely sensed" to surface "into the mind from some place beyond conscious control" (Wet Earth and Dreams 82) would end up falling into a deep depression. Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness was her last defense against abjection. Lazarre outlines in Wet Earth and Dreams the space of disidentification she occupied when she wrote her second memoir: "In some part of myself I began to subscribe to the dichotomy many of us create between emotional intensity and formal elegance, a dangerous opposition that can make honest expression impossible" (82). She admits when she wrote Beyond the Whiteness of Whiteness, "I was as disciplined as I had ever been in my life…I was in control," but she was also "shutting out my most personal vision of the world" (85). Between the vulnerability created by her

personal circumstances, and her struggle to find a writing style that could accommodate her contradictory subject positions, it is little wonder that Lazarre is drawn towards abjection, an unknown maternal force that both fascinates and worries her. She becomes the kind of split subject described by Kristeva in "Powers of Horror": "Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself" (229).

Through the use of memoir's reflective voice, which allows Lazarre to stand outside of her self, I suggest she begins to see female representations under the Symbolic order as "some theatrical mask or plastic prosstudy intended to support and protect the damaged stump," as "familiar, trusted but still constructed limbs"(18). As a result she becomes more open to the concept of a plot involving bravery that does not require men to occasion the narrative as reflected in this quotation from Jane Hamilton: "I used to think that bravery involved action. It took courage I figured, to move forward, to pursue a dream, to get ahead in the world. Just to get where you were supposed to. I thought having desire took courage. The only thing you really need bravery for is standing still. For standing by"[4] (19). I suggest the use of this quotation indicates a willingness on the part of Lazarre to venture beyond road maps to a female self designed by the patriarchally dominated Symbolic order. Although I suspect Lazarre realizes a more intimate connection with the abject maternal may be terrifying and bring forth the most monstrous monsters and evilest spirits, I contend she also realizes that the horror can be caught in words and the demons contained by form[5]. She writes: "If my fear is that feelings can grow like cancer – chaotic, devouring and deadly – and the safety of the

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[4] Lazarre's source is Hamilton's Map of the World.
[5] Lazarre quotes Amos Oz from "Telling Stories under Siege."

boundary is all that can keep me alive, then it must be a good thing that I have begun this narrative: a search in language for some intuited subtext beneath the ordinary disorder of a life" (19-20). Her conundrum then becomes how to allow herself to experience the horror of Kristeva's abjection, achieved by connecting with her dead mother, without losing her self in the process.

Reading what I have just written about Lazarre's conundrum brings me to the realization that I too have been struggling to find a similar middle ground as a writer. Up until now I have rarely questioned why I abandoned my high school interest in poetry to pursue a career in journalism. I always rationalized that I needed the money. Poets starve. Why did I choose a writing career in journalism, a genre that seeks control and clarity by connecting the dots between who, what, why, when and how; a genre that works at being passionless? It is an objective, witnessing role (though I have always quarreled with those who discount its subjectivity). Additionally, I question why I moved into business journalism? At the newspaper and magazine I could at least pretend a passion for saving the world lay behind my dispassionate writing practice. Enclosed within the walls of corporate Canada my writing, my words became economic modes of exchange, their only goal to strengthen a bottom line. Like Lazarre, did I unwittingly accept the validity of the Freudian line, that passion and order are opposites? Did I adopt sagacity (my high school guidance counselor always admired my level-headedness) as a defense against Kristeva's abjection? Against the lethal ocean that repeatedly threatens to flood my home in my dreams? Against the she I try to kill with order, (my editor always praised my organizational skills), the she which Kristeva insists is me? If I locate my self in the Freudian or even the "female family romance" plots I am required to sever my ties with

my mother. According to Kristeva I must commit matricide to delete the maternal from my psychic and biological reality ("Black Sun" 197). But Ruddick argues in "Maternal Thinking" that maternal practice is governed by the need for preservation of life, growth and acceptability (78). I cannot kill. So to protect my mother, Kristeva argues, I psychically kill my self. I turn the violence in on myself so that my hatred is safe and my matricidal guilt erased: "I make of her an image of Death so as not to be shattered through the hatred I bear against myself when I identify with Her, for that aversion is in principle meant for her as it is an individuating dam against confusional love" ("Black Sun" 197). In the midst of my lethal ocean, Kristeva claims I am the melancholy woman, the dead one that has always been abandoned within myself: "Modest, silent, without verbal or desiring bonds with others, she wastes away by striking moral and physic blows against herself, which, nevertheless, do not give her sufficient pleasures" ("Black Sun" 198). Accordingly I lock up my hatred 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" ("Black Sun" 198). Like Lazarre I have been under the care of a psychotherapist for many years and even turned to antidepressants and sleeping pills to extinguish the sadness that eats away at me as I watch my mother and sister Pauline suffer lung and ovarian cancer and my artist sister Cassie slowly going blind with glaucoma and macular degeneration. When will the consequences of repressing my connection with Kristeva's immoral, sinister, scheming and shady terror of abjection ("Powers" 232) come for me I wonder?

I propose the consequence presents itself to Lazarre in Wet Earth and Dreams in the form of breast cancer; the same illness that killed her mother when Lazarre was a

seven years of age. This illness brings Lazarre face-to-face with the biological and psychic maternal that the Symbolic order insists she jettison. Although well meaning relatives are initially responsible for separating her from the maternal – they send her away rather than including her in her mother's funeral and eliminate every trace of the mother's belongings before Lazarre comes home -- she admits she is constantly haunted by her mother's disappearance: "Where did she go?" (30). With only a child's wisdom to sort things out Lazarre ends up taking on responsibility for her mother's death because of her unspoken wish for her mother's suffering to end (31) and her childish, dark attraction to "desolation and longing"(9). She also feels responsible for her mother remaining dead because she is unable to sustain fantasies of "her ghostly presence" (31). According to Kristeva's theories the only way for her to banish her feelings of guilt is to kill herself ("Black Sun" 197). Accordingly Lazarre describes her own wish to die as "a hypnotic and familiar fatigue that threatens both consciousness and capacity, making me want to stop, give up, relinquish, retreat, a feeling…of wanting to die" (11), a wish she worries may be granted. Consequently, the discovery of her cancer is not unexpected. She admits it is a condition she seems to have been waiting for all of her life (4). Since Lazarre's mother died of cancer I view the cancer as a metaphor for the abject maternal, which the memoirist refers to as "Something at once foreign and part of me devouring myself" (22). Just as Lazarre's immune system cannot fight off the cancer alone, I suggest she cannot deal with abjection without connecting with her mother. But the cure, "the sight of liquid dripping into my vein, its seeping, nauseating, unstoppable penetration," repels her because it forces her to acknowledge the illusiveness of boundaries such as the skin: "I felt completely out of control of my own physical boundaries" (42). I suggest this sense

of being overwhelmed comes from the uncertainty of boundaries associated with the abject, which Kristeva argues "beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire," but which desire eventually turns aside "sickened, it rejects" ("Powers of Horror" 229).

Similarly, in order to save herself from her mother's fate, Lazarre rejects association with her, a feeling she describes as "wanting to be her and thus somehow with her again, but also wanting to be different from her in order to not be dead" (32). But the disidentification does not solve the problem. After struggling to deal with "old, tiresomely repeated themes" and liberate herself from "the anxieties and fears of disaster," Lazarre feels she is "losing the battle for a sense of control and becoming increasingly depressed" a condition she characterizes as "unalleviated, bleak hopelessness, chronic physical fatigue, sadness with seemingly no end, loss of sexual desire, and, at times, the wish to die" (4). She is two women: "the one everyone knew…and *that other one*" (4). The author suffers from panic attacks about the safety of her sons, which she says feels like attacks from outside, "which instantly permeated the deepest recesses of my inner self" (5). I contend her feelings are a result of coming into contact with abjection, which Kristeva argues, "is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady; a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you…" (232). Lazarre's fear is expressed when she says, "I do not want to claim her, yet I am scared she is all I have ever really had…What will I do if she gets out?" (37). A picture in her new therapist's office of archways leading into darker and darker spaces reminds her of the abjection she is afraid of, "the places of extremity I so wanted to leave behind," but that still haunt her in the form of indecipherable sounds and threatening shadows (18).

I see Lazarre's anger towards her mother as a means of separation, an anger that only serves to veil her longing for mother. In Kristevian terms she uses the anger as a defense against abjection, which in metaphoric terms she thinks contains the cancer that poisons her: "The only thing I don't feel angry at – but only theorize abstractly that surely there must be anger and it must be related to all these other angers – is the disease of cancer that has threatened my life" (39). I see the river she describes as a metaphor for abjection when she writes: "a disease that kills by overflowing boundaries and devouring once delineated body parts into itself" (18). Her anger and rage are the banks that contain the abject as long as the two remain parallel, but if they converge "water soaking land, land filling water," she becomes stuck in the mud (51). Her anger can then be likened to the steel wall Lazarre constructs within her self "that comes down suddenly, blocking my view of a beautiful lagoon, protecting my spirit from attack, but also imprisoning, shutting out my most personal view of the world" (85).

Clearly denial and anger are not the means for Lazarre to shape a self. But how can she explore the maternal, which shares such an intimate relationship with her identity as a woman, without risking abandonment of self and insanity? Kristeva provides a useful alternative in the exploration of the unique relationship between mother and daughter outside the law of the father. She argues in "Stabat Mater" for a herethics that "is perhaps no more than that which in life makes bonds, thoughts, and therefore the thought of death, bearable; herethics is undeath…,\love" (185). Kristeva contends the power to imagine this kind of love lies in listening to the mother and her music: "There might doubtless be a way to approach the dark area that motherhood constitutes for a woman; one needs to listen, more carefully than ever, to what mothers are saying today, through

their economic difficulties and beyond the guilt that a too existential feminism handed down, through their discomforts, insomnias, joys, angers, desires, pains and pleasures" ("Stabat" 179). She argues women must listen to the maternal from within the Symbolic order because the Symbolic order guarantees identity and keeps them from falling into psychosis. She suggests women locate their truth: "By listening; by recognizing the unspoken in discourse, however Revolutionary, by emphasizing at each point whatever remains unsatisfied, repressed, new, eccentric, incomprehensible, that which disturbs the mutual understanding of the established powers" ("About" 156). But at the same time women must subversively resist the identities that are produced by the Symbolic order and find their own truth from which to project identity. The way to do this, Kristeva argues, is to change the truth from which the moment of speech is projected to alter identity patterns: "I project not the moment of my fixed, governed word, ruled by a series of inhibitions and prohibitions…but rather the underlying causality that shapes it…and which is capable of blowing up the whole construct" ("About"153).

But surely listening to the mother requires an entirely different set of ears than that provided by the Symbolic order? Indeed, in order to locate the maternal I suggest it may be necessary to pursue what Kristeva refers to as intimate revolt, a psychic revolt that seeks out a counterpoint to certainties and beliefs and puts into question the self, everything and nothingness: "Intimacy is not the new prison. The need for connection might establish another politics, some day. Today, psychical life knows that it will only be saved if it gives itself the time and space of revolt: to break off, remember, refashion" ("Intimate Revolt" 435). It is the universe of women and its sensory intimacy and experience that Kristeva contends are the means for self-reflection and self-questioning,

the necessary precursors to infinite recreation ("Intimate Revolt" 437). She argues it is the culture of words, the narrative and its potential for mediation, which enable the tiny revolts that preserve the life of the mind and the species ("Intimate Revolt" 438).

I argue memoir is the ideal tool to perform the return/turning back /displacement /change that Kristeva calls for in "Intimate Revolt." I suggest traditional autobiography fits into the mode of questioning Kristeva sees as abandoning retrospective questioning, a form of skepticism that merely rejects old values in favour of a cult of new values and thereby suspends thought ("Intimate Revolt" 439). Memoir succeeds where traditional autobiography fails in that it is establishes a productive tension I argue exists within the gap of disidentification and which I see producing the women's truth from which Kristeva argues new representations can be projected. I suggest Lazarre uses memoir as a tool for this kind of intimate revolt in Wet Earth and Dreams. Rather than searching for meaning following family romance road maps, I argue Lazarre uses memoir to follow a more open process that evolves from the tensions inherent in the disidentification process. Recall Nussbaum's contention that disidentification occurs when subjects are held in incompatible subject positions and their ideologies collide. Disidentification, she argues, "makes visible, previously invisible aspects of ideology that produce subjects, and new positions may be made available through which change may be effected" (164). For Lazarre that previously invisible aspect includes the abject, the maternal that pushes her to the brink of death. With memoir I contend she does what Kim Chernin does in Reinventing Eve: Modern Woman in Search of Herself: "I began to admit that I had been drawn out of my house by a wish to disinvent myself as patriarchal female, to give myself back to the nature that was in me, grow profusely, overstep my bounds, step out

of the confined plot which I had been assigned, and finally admit in the most radical possible way, that I as a woman did not exist" (15). It is a journey that enables Lazarre to abandon the impotent mother and rediscover the female power renounced in the turning toward the father, to pursue the union with mother Kristeva and Chodorow argue is necessary to make her a mature woman.

In order to do this Lazarre utilizes an approach I call "divining self," which involves drawing out maternal forces in the form of contradictory subject positions that lead to a continual oscillation in subjectivity and a fluid identity. I see Lazarre pursuing this divining through a process she says is "a search in language for some intuited subtext beneath the ordinary disorder of a life" (19-20). Like Rich, who searches for the mesh of relationships or interconnectedness behind everything in her life to reclaim herself ("Dead Awaken" 24), I contend Lazarre begins to feel that her fragments and scraps might have a common consciousness and a common theme that will enable her "to find the next flat stone that might be wide enough to hold me for awhile" (16). Applying the earlier metaphor of the stream as the abject maternal, I suggest memoir becomes her way of finding the stones that will help her cross the murky waters of abjection. She likens her writing to a "bridge to walk on from here…a structure that is stone, solid, yet flexible…An outline of sorts. A map" (99), a narrative that will save her life (98). I argue memoir suits her purposes because it contains two of the means – poetic language and psychoanalysis – that Kristeva contends have the potential to disrupt the unity of the Symbolic order and keep the self in an ongoing process of identification and disidentification ("Revolution" 47). The analysis is made possible by the third voice of memoir that looks back at the memoirist's witnessing and participation in witnessing to

learn new things about the present. Alterations in subject position are made possible by the reflexive side of the third voice that uses the analysis to make changes. Like the psychoanalytical process, Lazarre sees the rules of the memoir form – its faithful search for connection – as a protection that allows for limitless hope (20): "Only the most personal writing enables me to feel secure, to wait on the roads and stations with some sense of faith that I will reach a destination, a place to lay my head" (103). Yet her memoir writing provides her with "a way of knowing far more certain than mere analysis" (99). I argue the poetic nature of memoir -- manifested in a mix of genres and creative writing techniques -- is capable of loosening the linguistic constraints that repress the semiotic. Through this creative process Lazarre believes "what is broken can, at least sometimes, be repaired" (23), that art represents a "mysterious erotic power to redeem" (40). Memoir as diviner offers her the opportunity to travel through "interior jungles" because the form provides her with "a kind of vision, a seeing into things I cannot ignore" (102). Like the divining rod that seeks out water or hydrocarbons, memoir seeks out connections for Lazarre "as if they were my pulse or breath, [I] see them as clearly as blood drawn from my vein" (104).

In the chapter called "Remake" I find a demonstration of the divining process. The musical example reminds me of Kristeva's suggestion that women should listen to their mother's music in order to construct selves[6]. When Lazarre says, "I write memory instead of melody" (117), I see an analogy between memory, or memoir writing and listening to a mother's melody. In fact, Lazarre describes a state of being while listening to Mozart's Clarinet Quintet in A, which sounds a great deal like Kristeva's semiotic chora. Lazarre writes: "the music suggests a place of belonging – within – and a way to

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[6] See my reference on page 77-8.

get there – writing" (109). Like the chora, which maintains a tension between the symbolic and semiotic elements to produce identity, Lazarre's music creates for her an erotic tension: "Like a dry canyon slowly moistening and filling with water, my sexual feeling intensifies…as though old cells are being healthfully rearranged" (104). The "ecstatic comprehensible instant" when the two instruments overlap, I suggest is the same action that occurs when Kristeva's two elements interact with each other. Just as the two melodies of the violin and clarinet in the Quintet repeatedly move away and return to each other creating "an erotic and sorrowful relation" memories that come together and move apart provide the basis for a new kind of writing and subsequently a different performance of identity. Like memoir, a form of autobiography that does not presuppose an interiority that needs defining, Lazarre's music reaches for unpredictable connections. She says she must allow unclear connections between memories to exist in order to transform her grief and love into writing. This process sounds like Kristeva's concept of rejection, the back and forth movement that originates in the preoedipal phase of human development when the infant learns about accepting and refusing an other at the mother's breast and that is responsible for maintaining the tension between the semiotic and symbolic elements that produce representations ("Revolution" 81). Behind this process of separation and merging Lazarre describes a rhythmic beat, which I see as the maternal space Kristeva says is necessary to maintain an interaction between the two elements. Lazarre likens the beat to the sound of a mother's heart to an unborn infant, which she says reminds her to have faith in life. The faith is required to enable the divining process to lead her to an identity free of disease, a metaphor for disconnection. In other words if she maintains her connection with her mother's love, a focus symbolized by the attentive,

intense gaze of her therapist (104), she can reinvent her self. This faith is required to search beyond the Symbolic order's representations of women as martyrs[7], that infer a woman should not be so self-involved: "Self-preoccupied, even self-absorbed, I am regularly accosted by critical voices reminding me of all the extraordinary troubles in the world and ordinary needs of family and friends. But I have a kind of vision, a seeing into things I cannot ignore"(102). I associate her faith in her mother's love and her self love with Kristeva's notion of herethics, which is an empowering love passed from generation to generation of women and enables Lazarre to provide herself with the type of kindness, attention and respect she needs to be brave: "In this combination lies the humility I believe to be essential upon entering the terrain of another person's interior life, however confident the theory that describes and interprets in a general way" (20). Faith is also what makes forgiveness possible and opens the way to new understandings as she demonstrates through her changed view of the "beggar girl," a part of herself that used to terrify her: "When I see the beggar girl is not me, I glimpse the possibility of safety and well-being. When I see she is me, I find her sad and beautiful, a desperate, harmless child" (105). So her sympathetic stance allows her to see this beggar girl as non-threatening. I argue this is the approach that enables her to confront abjection without fear of insanity; what empowers Lazarre to allow her space of disidentification to become a productive force in the development of self.

Lazarre's book is especially appealing to me as I find myself engaged in a similar search for a productive force, or space of disidentification. I was born into and lived the

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[7] Kristeva argues Christianity, which is the force behind the Symbolic order's construction of representations, only recognizes a woman as a virgin or martyr ("About" 147).

life of a dedicated Catholic up until I moved away from my home church in Hamilton, Ontario. Mother marched us off to St. Patrick's every Sunday, lace doilies pinned to sleepy heads, offerings clutched in sweaty little palms. I endured years of services delivered in Latin under the perceived threats that either mother would hand me over to the nasty looking pod of nuns in the front pew or alternatively I would go to hell. Both fates sounded equally threatening to a child praying under the watchful eye of the Virgin Mary. I did not understand the language spoken at the front of the incense drenched and somber, stain-glassed cavern, but I believed in the power and omniscience of the mysterious presence behind the words. It is that presence that has seen me through foster homes, life in an alcoholic home, lost loves, career disappointments, difficult childbirths, divorce, my children's teenage years, the death and illness of family members, bankruptcy of my husband's company and my children's choice to remain with their father in Calgary, rather than live with me here on this beautiful island. But it has not led me to my self, perhaps because it is the voice of the father. Growing up as a fatherless daughter I have listened to this voice for strength, independence and logic, which likely led me to journalism and away from poetry. But now, like Lazarre I am tired of living with this core of loneliness that pervades my life and the constant irritating nudge of inauthenticity and ambiguity. Yet I wonder how can a faith in life, listening to the mother's rather than the father's voice, lead me to a self beyond grief and loneliness when I am so weighed down by old fears?

My questions help me interrogate how Lazarre resolves her similar sense of loss. Empowered by the notion of guaranteed connection Lazarre ventures into the "dark water where the ocean meets the bay"(107), which I see as symbolizing the semiotic chora. She

has nothing but her stories to keep her afloat; the kind "you recount to a therapist in that space out of ordinary space and time out of ordinary time called a 'session'; the kind you write and rewrite in various formulations, experimenting with various designs; the kind you dream" (22). To open a space that can fill with memories free of old thought patterns Lazarre pursues spontaneous tactics, which she likens to the process of psychotherapy: "I carefully avoid planning what stories I will tell to begin my session. I do not search for insights to bring him [her therapist]. I do not want to present myself, but rather to speak about whatever comes to me at the moment, to feel the relief of getting it all out of my mind" (96). As her therapist advises, it is a method that can only succeed if she allows memories to flow and connections to come to the surface without judging, condemning or even looking for solutions with earnest intention (76). From this description I suggest her therapist is recommending the divining process of memoir that does not seek a preconceived interiority like the autobiographical genre. Following her therapist's advice Lazarre composes a text that wanders from memory to memory in a non-linear fashion, which suggests to me she is searching for a self outside the parameters of the temporal Symbolic order as Kristeva recommends in "About Chinese Women" (156)[8]. For example in "The Self That Self Restrains" Lazarre begins by talking about when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, moves on to panic attacks over her sons' safety, the impact of her mother's death when she was a child and places herself in her dead therapist's office chair collecting memories through artifacts. She then uses a picture on the wall of her new therapist's office to open a discussion about her fear of places of extremity, moves on to her cancer treatments and allows voices of other writers to enter the text to point her in other directions. This wandering style opens the author to associations and

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[8] See page 26.

thought patterns outside those by which she has felt imprisoned for so long and she observes this process, "feels like home" (100). This process is the key to what Kristeva calls a psychical restructuring: "Through a narrative of free association and in the regenerative revolt against the old law…comes the singular autonomy of each, as well as a renewed link with the other" ("Intimate Revolt" 440).

Lazarre's approach, wherein she recounts and studies the details of her memories for patterns, reformulates the patterns in her writing and reflects on her new associations, fits well with memoir's tripartite voice structure. Memoir's three voices enable the author to revisit her witnessing and participation in witnessing, reflect back on both and write about changes she makes as a result of those reflections in the reflexive stance. Lazarre utilizes this process when she examines her attempt to have Beyond The Whiteness of Whiteness published through nine pages of painful detail. She begins by witnessing an editor's comment on a pattern in her work – "structurally chaotic and organizationally coherent" – which Lazarre sees as a damaging blow (87). She descends into depression dreaming of a computer that makes her work disappear and realizes: "Patterns I thought I'd overcome years before close in on me again" (89). She writes about her participation in the witnessing and sees how she allowed her guilt to enclose her (90). In the reflective stance she realizes her behaviour was all about survival: "When I look back now, I am awed by how much was riding on that book for me" (85). When she moves into the reflexive stance she discovers the editor's criticisms are actually strengths to build on: "And now I see that the accusation of structural chaos was key for me, and I recall old memories, forgotten for years" (96).

Lazarre compares the old connections to "immunities built up over the years, immunities I thought were reliable, protective, learned" and realizes that through her writing she can find the fault in this structure: "Broken down like a dam attacked by a hurricane, the structure cracks and breaks and the story pours through" (100). I view the immunities as the symbols constructed by the Symbolic order to protect its boundaries and maintain unity, defenses Lazarre accepted and used to keep her mother silent, or the maternal abjected, for so many years. The fault to which she refers is created when unspeakable maternal forces are drawn out by a genre that seeks relation in the form of contradictory subject positions that allow her to divine a self. Her technique for gaining access to these unspeakable semiotic excesses uses all three of memoir's voices. In the witness and participant stances she continually brings together and separates different combinations of memories – just as Kristeva suggests the semiotic and symbolic interact in the chora -- to look for new identity patterns. In the reflective voice she analyses those patterns to create new associations, which lead to new citationalities of identity and a channel that she senses has always been there; "a place where the deepest connections easily find language." Scrutinizing what she has just written in the reflective voice she makes an even more profound connection. The wall of steel that symbolizes her defense against the abject, makes her feel unworthy – "as if I didn't have the perfect words" – which clouded her vision of what she had to live for, her husband and family (101). I argue, for Lazarre, memoir then becomes a type of semiotic chora that takes her to the channel that leads to self-creation, when layers and sources of feelings transform into alternative forms, to her spirit, or heart (101). She sums up this approach when she writes:

> And here, in these pages, I shape and reshape the structure, the language. On the printed draft I design new connections and more precise descriptions with a dark black pen. Frequently, my newest insights are made in the margins, between the lines, continuing onto the back of the page. Then, on this computer, I work them into the text as if they had always been there. Something shifts inside me. I am saved by form (20).

Clearly connecting with the abject maternal, the very source and inspiration of connection itself, is a tricky business. It is a process Lazarre manages through the use of free association and memoir's creative devices to tap into her unconscious and imagination, such as dreams, revelations gained through psychotherapy, fantasy and attention to the significance of interruptions. Her dreams are filled with images of caves and swimming in salt water, symbolic of the womb and a period of transition preceding birth: "That night I dream I am swimming in a dark, warm lake…I am soothed" (46). Throughout the text she speaks of a recurring dream about her heart buried beneath the earth in a cave. It is her spirit, which she eventually locates and digs up. The dream reveals to her a spirit she has not known before, a concept she explains through her quote that is the basis for the book's title: " – Hands dripping with wet heart/head full of shocking dreams/ O what have you buried all these years/what have you dug up?" (Opening epigraph N. pag.). She uses fantasy, or visualization, as a kind of rehearsal for the performance of an altered subjectivity, such as when she enters the picture of the threatening dark arches hanging on the wall of her therapist's office: "I picture myself walking slowly down the shaded, cool cloisters until I am in a kind of courtyard…The emotions are so extreme they might engulf me and everyone I know. And so I must sit

and stare for some time, allowing the waves of feeling to pass through me...Here is the place I have been trying to find since the long depression began" (19). Then she scrutinizes her performances to again look for patterns: "A distanced critic, I watch the dramas and keep track of all of the themes" (21). Lazarre is sensitive to the significance of interruptions: "I try to see patterns by listening for the crucial interruptions that may suggest a meaning to experience beyond the partial vision of my consciousness" (20). When she is confronted by her great need for love by a friend she pays attention to the fact that her mind is reeling with images, "like some video rewinding, spinning its pictures backward in time" (27). Lazarre also looks for seeming coincidences, signs of inexplicable connections, like the Reubens painting framed in gold in her dead therapist's office, the same portrait she had on her wall as a child "reminding me of the inexplicable connection I felt to this woman" (13).

Reading what I have just written I wonder at my own inexplicable connection to Lazarre's three memoirs and my decision to include them in this study. I am saddened by a potential loss as I near the end of this chapter. It seems life is all about losses these days. My brother and father are dead, my children are an ocean and province away. The desire of my husband and I to settle into life on this island hangs precariously by a thread. And yet my dreams are filled with life, with oceans, whales and dolphins. I find myself immersed in a sea swimming alongside a gray whale that is so enormous I cannot see its end or beginning. I am not cold or in fear of drowning, just fascinated by this sea monster that seems to bring me comfort and keep me from frantically swimming about wasting energy. Perhaps I should think (like Lazarre does) of this sea monster as a 'see monster' that will help me to stop thrashing around and settle into a connection that I know

somehow is home. And as I write I realize that it is the use of this writing to maintain connection, to just be through memoir (rather than becoming through autobiography) that I fear losing. Cassie my artist sister sends me an email in response to a missive from me about my study that talks about how she is attempting to find her self: "For me the soft bellied whisper is that part of me that doesn't identify with any one role. It just is and if I quiet my thoughts and just be with that knowledge I am at peace. It is a comfort zone that I have not known before." Accompanying the email is part of a poem by Oriah Mountain Dreamer:

> Hold tenderly who you are, and let a deeper knowing
> color the shape of your humanness.
>
> There is nowhere to go. What you are looking for is right here.
> Open the fist clenched in wanting and see what you already
> hold in your hand.
>
> There is no waiting for something to happen,
> no point in the future to get to.
> All you have ever longed for is here in this moment, right now.
>
> You are wearing yourself out with this searching.
> Come home and rest. (N. pag.)

Like Lazarre I am trying to understand experiences by how they relate to each other: "Patterns come to me, clusters of memories that seem to belong together, and I cannot,

simply for the sake of ease or sequence, keep them apart" (21). Over the years my sister and I have had an ongoing conflict over my focus on our family's past. I seek identity by way of memoir through memory, reflection and reflexive alterations. She just wants to forget, to just be in the moment. But I cannot stop thinking about my mother sitting in a blue haze in front of her television smoking herself to death, alone, while I am writing about connection half a continent away, alone. I feel an odd sensation, like tectonic plates of the mind slipping sideways, what Lazarre describes as pieces sliding together, "slowly just beneath the surface" (68). I wonder if I continue to avoid connection with my mother and our shared past will I too face the possibility of death by cancer?

I am suddenly aware that I have left the actual description of Lazarre's reinvented subjectivity until the end of this chapter. I am so concerned about the techniques employed to make a connection with her mother, I have neglected to describe the results, the yield of her divining. She discovers her guilt behind her mother's death stems from a childish wish for the mother to die to end her suffering and because of a mistaken notion that her cry in the night forced her mother to fall out of bed and die of a broken back. Of the two relations Kristeva argues women can have with their mothers Lazarre appears to have chosen to carry the abject maternal around as a living corpse: "I developed the idea that if I kept a close enough vigil, thinking of her every minute, I could bring her back" (31). By keeping the maternal dead or abjected, I argue Lazarre finds it impossible to make the connection she needs to divine a self. But once she lets down the defenses that keep the maternal at bay and opens a maternal space – or semiotic chora -- she drops her guilt and stops wishing for death. Empowered by this connection she is able to unveil invisible presences that have led to false beliefs about her self, such as the notion that she

was a bad child, that she and her sister are aligned with separate parents and share nothing in common, and that she is a bad mother. Lazarre's process would seem to be a psychoanalytical analysis and indeed it shares much in common with therapy. But Lazarre realizes it is not enough for her to perform this new self in therapy, she must do so in written words: "I believe I must find the courage to write the story…this cancer journal, must say in words again this piece of self-knowledge I learned almost talmudically…going over it and over it, layering it with interpretations and associations, yet forgot and forget, again and again" (33). I suggest memoir practices help her remember and analyze the unspeakable forces that produce her contradictory subject positions to divine a self. Lazarre admits it is not enough for her to just confess the details of an interior life. By using the borders of words to knit together stories the author finds a way to live with the abject maternal, the ambiguous and slippery business of me and not me.

In conclusion, Lazarre learns to live with the ambiguity in her subject position. While she struggles to find order in chaos, she knows it is the disorder that makes her new consciousness possible. She desires a representation composed of aspects from all of Hirsch's family romance plots, the independence and the connection. Restricting her representation to the autonomy of the Freudian family romance or to the consoling but dangerous female alliances of the "feminist family romance" does not fit her experience. Lazarre chooses a form of writing that enables her to pursue a both/and strategy towards a hybrid representation. Through memoir she becomes so secure in connection that interrelatedness becomes a part of her individuated self. It is a paradoxical logic described by Kristeva in "Intimate Revolt" involving "The permanence of contradiction,

the temporariness of reconciliation, the bringing to the fore of everything that puts the very possibility of unitary meaning to the test" (443). This is the productive tension I suggest can be brought into being when the search for connection with the abject maternal is fulfilled and that can be exploited to divine a self. In the next chapter I explore how another daughter/memoirist cultivates a relationship with the unspeakable forces of the maternal, this time to bring together experience and history, meaning and identity.

# CHAPTER THREE

## A voyage of discontinuity and connection:

## Seeking identity in the maternal chora of Miriam's Kitchen

> Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other – beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival – a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other.
>
> (Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born 220)

Browsing through my journals one day I find a fragment of my unconscious sandwiched between notes on visits with my estranged father:

> *I am on a cruise ship that has strayed off course and is sinking. As a larger vessel starts to tow us to shore I look for mementos. A gentle man, a kind of surrogate father, offers me a remarkable pen that is also a compass, radio, light and nautical calculator. Once I am on shore I mention the pen, but cannot seem to give it up. I sense it is special, though I do not know what to do with it.*

Three years ago when I first recorded this dream I saw it as only one more confirmation of the depression I was sinking into as I attempted to reconnect with a father who simply didn't care whether I was alive or dead for most of my life. Bill Smith Sr. left my mother just after she gave birth to me at Hamilton's Henderson Hospital, before I could form an attachment or an opinion on the matter. As a child I caught only momentary glimpses of

him when he came to pick up my brother Billy for outings. As an adult we occasionally crossed paths during the holidays at my brother's home. Growing up I had so much difficulty with my father's illusiveness, his apparent inability to acknowledge my existence and my Mother's bitterness towards him that I didn't know what to call him. I turned to pronouns: "Was that him on the phone Mom? Where's he taking Billy? Why doesn't he want me?" I learned quickly that Billy was special, a child he was proud to claim because he was a boy. Girls were not so special. Girls were invisible. Still, there I was 49 years after I first met him at the Hamilton Henderson holding his shriveled, trembling hand, wiping his brow and lifting his head for a sip of water. Though I did not understand why at the time, I felt compelled to talk with him as he lay dying of cancer at the same hospital where I was born. My mother seemed almost angry about this painful indulgence. When I came back to her apartment in tears one day after saying what I thought would be my last goodbye to the husband who left her decades ago, the only comfort she offered was "a little rough aye." She took a long drag from her Menthol Light and stared into space from the other end of the 'L' in the rose pink sectional. A wave of nausea suddenly came over me, the kind I used to experience as a child when my brother twisted my swing to make me twirl at high speeds or put me in the middle of the teeter totter between him and my older sister Cassie. The room was spinning. I felt sick, but I couldn't vomit. Nor could I eat the meal my Mother had prepared. I felt as though I had crossed some sort of line, one that rendered me speechless.

From the perspective of Kristeva's theories you could say I am experiencing the type of dialectical tension that both threatens and develops signification and identity. I am attempting to balance the forces of the symbolic and semiotic, elements Kristeva

contends live within our system of language known as the Symbolic order. Indeed, Kristeva argues in "Revolution in Poetic Language" for a theory of identity that negotiates between these two elements (34). The semiotic is linked with bodily drives and affects, what Kristeva calls raw corporeality ("Revolution" 36). These are the drives that are not sublimated at the thetic phase by enunciations (words or sentences) formed to represent subjects and objects ("Revolution" 40). These drives are not identified in language and are considered excesses that depend on the symbolic for articulation ("Revolution" 34). The enunciations formed at the thetic phase are part of the symbolic element that is associated with position and judgment ("Revolution" 39-40) and come into play after the Oedipal phase of human development when Freud contends the subject separates from mother and identifies with father to enter into a language developed under the law of the father ("Revolution" 42). What interests me is the Kristevian notion that these two opposing elements provide an opening for the possibility of new types of discourse, new representations, and new identities. The concept is similar to Nussbaum's idea of disidentification wherein subjects who find themselves living within subject positions that are incompatible open up a space for the possibility of an altered identity. Yet it is different because of Kristeva's contention that neither the semiotic nor the symbolic make sense without the interaction of the two:

> These two modalities [the semiotic and symbolic] are inseparable within the *signifying* process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse…involved; in other words, so-called natural language allows for different modes of articulation of the semiotic and the symbolic. On the other hand, there are nonverbal

> signifying systems that are constructed exclusively on the basis of the semiotic (music, for example). But...this exclusivity is relative, precisely because of the necessary dialectic between the two modalities of the signifying process, which is constitutive of the subject ("Revolution" 34).

Kristeva argues that this symbiotic union is what makes a relationship possible between language and life, signification and experience, body (soma) and soul (psyche). It is relationship -- with others, signification and our own bodies and desires -- that makes meaning possible and subjects fluid. I can surmise then that subjects for whom there is meaning experience an ongoing connection between the symbolic and semiotic, between language and affect. These subjects are also relational and fluid[1].

What is particularly significant for me is that the semiotic is brought into signification in the presence of the maternal. According to Kristevian theory this makes sense because it is the maternal body – what she calls the semiotic chora -- that mediates between the two elements ("Revolution" 37). She calls the chora a maternal space because it is a place, like the mother's body, where a subject is both generated and negated long before the law of the father comes into play and the subject enters into language. Like the mother, who Chodorow contends serves as a base from which a daughter develops a self, Kristeva argues for the chora as both a harbour and threat to identity. Recall from chapter two that birth itself is symbolic of Kristeva's concept of the abject, of the ambiguity of boundaries[2]. The situation where one body is expelled from another serves as a prototype for negation and separation[3]. Kristeva's work details how the maternal functions in the process of signification and subsequent identity making. She

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[1] My source is Oliver "Kristeva's Revolutions" xvii-xviii).
[2] See page 43.
[3] My source is Oliver (Reading 3).

contends the chora maintains a process she calls reversed reactivation of the contradiction between the semiotic and the symbolic. Kristeva argues the semiotic chora is a place where the subject's unity succumbs before the process of semiotic charges and stases that produce him ("Revolution" 37). The process is a reactivation because it continuously triggers the contradiction between the semiotic and symbolic and a reversal because it repeatedly turns back on itself and thus exposes the sham of the unified self. Kristeva contends that before birth:

> Discrete quantities of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body – always already involved in a semiotic process – by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are 'energy' charges as well as 'psychical' marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated…Plato himself leads us to such a process when he calls this receptacle or *chora* nourishing and maternal, not yet unified in an ordered whole because deity is absent from it ("Revolution" 35-36).

It is therefore the sounds and rhythms of the maternal space, the semiotic chora that maintains the tension between the semiotic and symbolic that produce language, representation and identity ("Revolution" 36). Oliver sees the chora as a kind of excess in speech that cannot be said: "There is always something that cannot be said and that is

why we keep talking. That something in excess is the remainder of the semiotic chora in language" (Reading 97).

In the speechless scene with my mother I suggest there is no maternal space within which the semiotic and symbolic can interact. Indeed the nausea suggests -- despite my mother's desire to feed me -- I suffer from an absence of maternal nurturance, which prevents the semiotic and symbolic from interacting. As a result a split occurs between the two elements making it difficult for me to make a conscious connection between experience and language and articulate a position. How can I communicate a drive to know an estranged father? Where is the language to signify a non-maternal mother? It is as if someone has cut the cord between my ability to sense and speak, between drive, affect and language. The eyelid Kristeva contends brings together the two edges of the semiotic and symbolic fissure ("Revolution" 43) cracks to give rise to tears instead of verbal language. The unspeakable excesses that the thetic phase is not able to sublimate seep out not in words or sentences, but in tears and nausea. Building on Kristeva's work, Oliver reminds me that when there is a disruption between the semiotic and symbolic, between language and affect, there is a loss of ability to represent, to identify and to find meaning:

> Without the symbolic element of signification, we have only sounds or delirious babble. But without the semiotic element of signification, signification would be empty and we would not speak, for the semiotic provides the motivation for engaging in signifying practices…The semiotic provides the movement or negativity, and the symbolic provides

> the stasis or stability that keeps signification both dynamic and structured ("Kristeva's Revolutions" xv).

So a split between symbols and affect leads to meaninglessness and stasis in terms of the evolution of identity. While Kristeva does not discern a difference between genders in the operation of the semiotic chora, Chodorow's theories would seem to suggest when the symbolic loses contact with its semiotic roots women's access to semiotic renewal is especially facilitated because of their privileged relationship with mother. So as Kristeva suggests, when symbols are detached from affect, when the meaning of my words are detached from the meaning of life, I search for a way to reconnect soma and psyche, or words and affects.

Enter my dream. If Kristeva is right in suggesting that everybody must experience the dialectic between semiotic and symbol or go insane[4], perhaps my unconscious is searching for a way to re-establish the connection? To remain sane? To find out I seek assistance from a therapist, a caring surrogate mother figure, who sees my reaction to the dream as glum considering the gift I have been given. Under her guidance I begin to see the dream as an unconscious affirmation of my choice to pursue memoir writing. Her focus is not on the sinking ship, but on the found memento. I now see the pen as a light and compass to guide the way, a calculator to help work things out and a radio to take in and transmit messages. My therapist demonstrates a process recommended by Kristeva to diagnose and deal with problems of self-image and identity[5]. She opens a maternal space,

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[4] Oliver describes the Kristevian notion that when a connection between words and affects is broken or never established, borderline psychosis can be the result ("Kristeva's Revolutions" xxii).

[5] Oliver points out that the goal of the analyst is to give meaning to language by reconnecting words and affects and thereby giving meaning to life ("Kristeva's Revolutions" xxiv).

a semiotic chora, which helps me to give rise to the semiotic -- often associated with the unconscious – in the symbolic to reconnect sensation and language. As Kristeva argues "for there to be a transgression of the symbolic, there must be an irruption of the drives in the universal signifying order, that of 'natural' language which binds together the social unit" ("Revolution" 50).

Like Kristeva I suggest this process can also be pursued through writing, more specifically memoir writing, a divining process that moves back and forth between signs and flesh[6]: "textual experience represents one of the most daring explorations the subject can allow himself, one that delves into his constitutive process" ("Revolution" 54). Kristeva argues that poetic language and psychoanalysis are two means of disrupting the unity of the Symbolic order and putting the subject on trial, or keeping the self in an ongoing process of identification and rejection ("Revolution" 47). Memoir writing is an ideal method for reactivating the contradiction between the semiotic and symbolic elements and evolving a self that contains oppositions because it divines the maternal space that seeks relation. It is a genre well suited to women seeking identity in relation to mother because the semiotic is the ordering principle Kristeva claims precedes the Oedipal. That is to say memoir enables women to reconnect with the logic of signification operating in the preoedipal, the phase Chodorow contends they occupy longer than boys and that they use as a base from which to shape identity. I am reminded of Rich's description of the unique exchange that occurs between mother and daughter,

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[6] This phrase is borrowed from Oliver who says Kristeva "maintains that writing is also a process that moves back and forth between signs and flesh," similar to psychoanalysis ("The Subject in Signifying Practice" 26).

what she describes as something "beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival – a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal: the knowledge flowing between two alike bodies, one of which has spent nine months inside the other" (Of Woman Born 220). I know Rich is referring to the preoedipal phase, but I cannot think of a better description for the semiotic chora; the maternal space I contend is emulated by memoir. Consider the dynamic interactions that occur within memoir's tripartite voices. Buss proposes that the memoirist utilizes three narrative voices, which enable the narrator to speak as a witness to and participant in events and reflect on both to learn new things about the present and, most importantly, to reflexively alter her own subject positions (Repossessing 16). I propose this structure enables the memoirist to reactivate the tension between the semiotic and symbolic in the participant and witness stances and stand back and observe the results in the reflective/reflexive questioning and answering mode. In the reflective/reflexive mode she can both refuse and accept aspects of her self-construction. As the observer in this stance the memoirist can reflect on how her identity is constantly being constituted through this process of oscillation between the semiotic and the symbolic, and reach a point where she can apply what she learns to make adjustments to her self. As a subject of infinite analysis the memoirist can unravel the Symbolic order and the unity that it requires. In effect, the memoir form can imitate the semiotic chora's constitutive process to produce new representations and identity. Memoir is the chora that brings together the semiotic and symbolic to drive the narrative forward and divine a self in the process. As Kristeva argues, it is artistic practice, and notably poetic language, that demonstrate the functioning characteristic of the semiotic chora ("Revolution" 44-5). Through the interaction of Buss's tripartite voices the memoirist reactivates the tension

between the semiotic and symbolic to produce contradictory subject positions and reach a thetic phase where she takes up a position[7] and applies what she learns to make adjustments to her subject position. Further, if I apply Kristeva's argument about avant-garde writing to memoir, I see how a memoirist can emulate the maternal rhythms and sounds in poetic language that enable connection with the repressed semiotic. Kristeva parallels philosophy and psychoanalysis to writing because "the practice of writing attains non-sense too by unfolding meaning to the point of sensations and drives, finding its pulse in a realm that is no longer symbolic but semiotic" ("Intimate Revolt" 442). The form can loosen linguistic constraints on the repressed semiotic by utilizing innovative grammars. It can disturb the symbolic through fantasy, dialogue, non-linearity, dreams and poetry to discharge repressed drives and speak the unconscious. The dialectical tension is on display because of the writer's attention to rhythm and words.

Elizabeth Ehrlich's Miriam's Kitchen is a prime example of how memoir can be used in this manner. In this unusual memoir that utilizes a collage of domestic activities such as kosher recipes and kitchen customs as its basic image pattern for shaping self and community, the author confronts a need for self/re/construction. Up until marriage and child rearing bring her more fully into concourse with communal history Ehrlich's identity is largely shaped by parents who sustain a marginal connection with their Jewish culture through basic customs and annual sojourns to visit more conservative relatives in Brooklyn, New York. Although, as a child Ehrlich admits to feeling more at home in Brooklyn, as an adult she continues to undervalue her kosher pedigree because such symbolism is too far removed from the expediencies of everyday life. She questions her decision when she meets her mother-in-law Miriam, a woman who builds a rich and

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[7] My definition of the thetic phase comes from Oliver (Reading 40).

satisfying life through her ties with Judaic tradition after surviving a Nazi death camp. When she marries into this kosher Jewish family and becomes a young mother Ehrlich detects a discontinuity between language and affect: "Work and house and errands and physical fitness and activities and things. The expediencies of every day. This cannot be all there is" (3). Her new life as a mother has shone a spotlight on the contradictions between the way she was parented (kosher style) and the way her in-laws parent (through Jewish tradition and kosher cooking) and she questions how she can "build a floor under my children, something strong and solid" (xii). Ehrlich wonders if an improved connection with a communal history that encompasses Jews who are both Holocaust survivors and kosher practitioners will enable her two young children to construct identities that can weather any storm.

Like Ehrlich I was raised by a mother who put career before family and I married into a family that expected me to put family before career, which created a tidal wave of contradictions I was ill equipped to handle when my first daughter arrived. My journal from my oldest daughter's first year of life resonates with the same angst and search for meaning as the entries that begin each section of Ehrlich's book. September 1981 I return to university in Edmonton and "feel bad about leaving Luci so much." One day, sick with a cold, I tend to tenants at a rental property, research an essay at the library, rush to a dentist appointment, pick up Luci, make dinner, go back out in the evening and finally collapse in bed with a Neo Citran hoping to feel better when I rise at 6:30 a.m. Instead the next day I head out for classes with a fever. When I arrive at my parking lot it is closed and I am out of change for the parking meter. I drive around for 30 minutes before I find a meter and have to beg someone for change. In the afternoon I struggle to complete an

essay while Luci fusses. I give up and wait for my husband to take over only to see him disappear right after he gets home, which leaves me to feed and bathe Luci and start work on my paper a 9:00 p.m. "Why am I going to all this trouble?" I write in my journal. By October my entries reflect a flattened psyche: "I am feeling depressed because I don't have time for all of the things I want to do, like baking bread, sewing Luci's clothes or cleaning out the garage. I spent the whole day studying French and reading for my essay. I didn't even have time to take Luci for a walk out in the sunshine." By November I feel my time at the university is a waste of energy: "What will I have to show for all the sacrifice and money but a couple of credits towards a useless degree?" By Christmas I want to quit university and the established writing career I went there to improve. Entry after entry reflects a split subject unable to bridge the gap between signification and experience. It is only now when I reflectively look back through memoir that I see how I was the one who needed the mother, the maternal space to connect language and life.

I suggest Ehrlich enters the memoir process with the same goal in mind, to reconnect language and affect, to find meaning, to find her self. As she says in the opening "September" journal entry she senses that "Something more is calling" that is "of the heart" but "more diffuse than sentiment" some "dimly remembered, yet remembered for a reason" (3). I propose the something to which Ehrlich refers is the semiotic excess (or unspeakable maternal forces) that is unrepresented in language, an element that will enable her to make a connection with the symbolism of Judaic tradition. I see a woman who seeks connection with semiotic energy as a means of cultivating a relationship with her communal history. She brings together Jewish tradition with everyday activities in a collage of self, which she intends to use as a new reference point

for finding meaning in life and to pass on to her children. Like her father who disrupts Jewish tradition to spend Yom Kippur on a lake instead of in temple, I suggest Ehrlich creates a disturbance in the Symbolic order by bringing the semiotic and symbolic into concourse. Her writing is the disruption; the poetic language that discharges the semiotic chora. Through memoir's tripartite voices – witness, participant and reflective/reflexive -- Ehrlich reactivates the contradictions between the semiotic and symbolic, observes the process, makes visible, previously invisible ideologies that produce her subjectivity, and based on her observations, makes decisions about what she will retrieve and refuse to divine a self. I suggest when she puts herself in the same boat as her father, she puts herself in the same position as the symbolic father that presides over representations produced by the Symbolic order. By positioning herself thus she brings the semiotic and symbolic into concourse and emulates the semiotic chora's constitutive process for producing identity. As she drifts on the lake in the same boat as her father Ehrlich experiences the fluid type of identity produced in the chora; what she describes as "that feeling of suspension between all the past failures and failings and the nascent beginnings to be" (12). She is a subject on trial or in process that reflectively asks and reflexively answers, "who is to know where on the asymptote stretching between spirituality and tradition, a given soul may at a given moment be fixed? My own location is a blur, a point moving through four dimensions" (9).

When the author refers to an ancient religion that "beckons," tantalizes and "will not be denied" (3) I hear the preoedipal logic of signification calling to her. She more or less admits to searching for something that is hidden in the deep well of memory -- in the recesses of the preoedipal consciousness -- when she writes: "I forgot the dignity my

immigrants had, that comes with the connection to something larger than everyday life, even when you are doing nothing more than stirring soup. I had the bequest of my grandmother's details, but I devalued all this for many years, as one does" (xi-xii). As Kristeva argues in "Revolution in Poetic Language," the semiotic chora is a part of everyday life in the sense that all discourse simultaneously depends upon and refuses it and it can be designated and regulated. However, she contends, it can never be definitively posited: "as a result, one can situate the chora and, if necessary, lend it a topology, but one can never give it axiomatic form" (35). I find Ehrlich looking for this elusive chora to retrieve the connection between language and affect, words and meaning, when she describes it as something that is a "collective remembrance far beyond memory's reach" (23), which will reveal itself, like the contents of her grandmother's room, "a tidy jewelbox of kept secrets, which she would reveal in her own good time" (30). I see her as a subject seeking to disrupt the workings of the Symbolic order in an effort to balance the semiotic and symbolic that occurs in the chora. As she says, with a Swiss-cheese-like-soul "of misgiving and hunger and doubt" she longs to "balance the claims of the mind and the soul" (54) and satisfy her hunger for meaning, "her belly's blind indulgent appetites" (54). In the process I suggest this exploration causes Ehrlich to shape an identity that does not comply with either the Freudian or the "feminist family romance" plots; that is neither complete autonomy nor complete assimilation. Recall in chapter one Hirsch's work that studies the various types of representation open to women under these two types of plots. The Freudian family romance plot requires female subjects to separate from mother, identify with father and seek an autonomous identity. Within the "feminist family romance" plot women are represented as attuned to the more

consoling but dangerous female alliances and experience identities that are continually undergoing a process of revision and destabilization. I contend Ehrlich achieves a subject position that includes elements from both family romance plots by bringing the witnessing and participation in the witnessing stances into concourse to delve into self-making and divine an identity in the reflective/reflexive stance. More specifically, when she brings her witnessing and participation in the witnessing of her father and mother's lives into concourse Ehrlich merges the semiotic and symbolic associated with the Jewish culture and in the reflective/reflexive stance decides what she will keep and what she will discard to divine a self.

Ehrlich's father is described as a left wing intellectual who believes so strongly in human connection (as opposed to Freudian autonomy), he does not see a need to strictly adhere to the Torah as demonstrated by his question on the rowboat at Yom Kippur: "So where is God?...Inside a synagogue or out here?" (13). Therefore he shapes a self that adheres to the essence of Judaism, which I associate with the connectivity of semiotics, without being taken over by the symbolism. As Ehrlich writes he "approved of the social life of stoop, street and park. He opposed the inward-turning anomie of TV in the den, of the backyard swing set" (31). He chooses a life that involves "a journey of commitment, thought and reason" (139). On Yom Kippur, "the culmination of a whole long year of trying to meet a standard that can never be met" he chooses to be with God on a lake. He achieves the kind of balance one would require suspended in a rowboat on a lake. Ehrlich then explores her participation in her father's life to find that she also wants this balance. In New York, her "father's playground" of "righteousness and joy" she takes out "a borrower's card at the oak-paneled, cavernous, echoing library in which my father

discovered King Arthur, Huck Finn, and Penrod and Sam" (31). In other words she seeks power through the word of the father, but she also longs for connection. Indeed, she admits she absorbs so much of her father's very connected Jewish childhood that "his childhood seemed more real to me than my own" and that: "Here in my father's old haunts I had footprints to walk in, ghosts to conjure…In New York I belonged to my father" (32). Later in the book I see Ehrlich applying these observations to her struggle to compose an identity based on the semiotics and symbolism of the kosher tradition when she writes in the reflective/reflexive stance: "But oddly enough, and at the same time, trying to be kosher confronts one with the ultimate impossibility of perfection. Finally, you have to live with your accommodations, the limits of being human" (130). In this way I suggest the author constructs a self in relation that maintains a connection between the semiotics and symbolism of kosher culture.

Through the same memoir process of conflating witnessing and participation in witnessing Ehrlich explores her subject position in relation to her mother. Her mother is described as yearning after the power and money that, according to the Freudian family romance, her husband is supposed to want. When the parents of Ehrlich's mother refuse her the college education that would bring the success the Freudian family romance decrees as the definition of maturity, she packs up her bags and heads for Detroit to work, marry and have a family and teaches her daughters that "a mother could have a determined, separate life" (148). But what Ehrlich really learns is that a mother can also balance the semiotics and symbolism of Judaic tradition: "My mother herself had been such a girl, lost in a book with a dustcloth in her hand" (149). Ehrlich's mother seeks the autonomy of the Freudian way, while her woman's existence does not allow her the

rewards of such a search. Even though the mother works full time she manages to return to school, earn a Phi Beta Kappa key, produce hot dinners most nights, keep the bathroom, floors and bed linens clean, decorate the house with fresh flowers and light the candles every Friday for Sabbath. She chooses to live in the U.S. even though her marriage to a left-wing radical keeps her from leaving the country to see her Canadian family for 15 years or attend her father's funeral and she severs her relations with God upon hearing about the Holocaust. She also longs for what Hirsch identifies in women authored fictions of the 1970s and 1980s as the consoling but dangerous female alliances of the "feminist family romance." I find evidence of this longing in her efforts to please her mother-in-law through helping around the house, instead of going on outings when the family visits New York, and her angst about being separated from her Canadian relatives. Like Ehrlich's father, I see the mother as balancing the semiotic and symbolic that divine her self. In her participation voice the author reveals how the roots of her own desire to pursue power in the halls of academia and the business world lie with her mother. Still, she is wary of attempting her mother's juggling act because "I long drew from observant households a metaphor never written in the Book; the symbolic sacrifice not of Isaac but the Mother. The mother who bends the course of life to have everything ready for that Friday night, who brings the Sabbath but never rests" (24). Through Ehrlich's witnessing of her mother's story in relation to her own participation in that witnessing she reveals identities for both that I contend lie somewhere between those prescribed by the two family romances. As the author reflectively comments: "My mother, a child of the New World, sat on the fence" (15). Upon observing this relation to her mother's subject position Ehrlich comes face to face with the difficulty of balancing

the semiotics and symbolism of Judaism. As a subject whose symbolic is detached from her semiotic she seeks a determined, tough (39) and independent persona, which seems to align with the definition of maturity offered by the Freudian family romance. Her admission that she was antimatrimonial, if not anti-cake, in her power years (64) suggests she once sought maturity based on the Freudian family romance need for autonomy. Yet clearly she admires her mother's ability to adhere to a subjectivity that straddles the line between that prescribed by the two family romances. Reflexively Ehrlich comments on that aspect of her mother's subjectivity she would like to occupy: "She enjoyed the perfection of nurturing traditions that meant day and night doing for. Secure within that perfection, she picked and she chose" (149). I contend Ehrlich wants to shape a self like her mother that merges the semiotics and symbolism of kosher tradition in a chora from which she can pick and choose what aspects of identity she will retrieve and refuse.

As Ehrlich moves back and forth between the three voices of memoir, I find she reveals a constantly changing subjectivity; the kind of fluid identity Kristeva contends is the product of the semiotic chora. For example, she lives in Detroit, but calls New York home: "In Detroit I was a misfit, an onion roll amongst cupcakes. In Brooklyn, I was among my own kind, yet almost a cupcake myself" (34). She is proud of her Jewish family's ability to co-exist with the blacks in her Detroit neighborhood and take part in her aunt's Christianized tradition, but fights assimilation. I suggest her fear of assimilation is a fear of separating the symbolic and semiotic: "I was proud to think of my family as bending and blending and being themselves as they also became something new…But time was running out on us, the second generation. Our ecumenical center could not hold. In a few years there would be children with no memory of grandmother's

Passover to balance Selina's Christmas" (103). She longs for a straightforward model of femininity, but rejects the glamorous Freudian model represented by Barbie toys: "I had worked at acquiring my own sort of scorn, which was a mixture of trying to please my father, anger at having to do so, superiority, jealousy, uncertainty, and longing for a straightforward glamorous model of femininity" (267). Her identity is summarized when she calls herself "an atheist raised in ritual" (18). In other words she takes part in a communal history in which she does not believe. She lives the life Kristeva talks about in which there is no relation between symbol and affect. Like me in the speechless scene with my mother Ehrlich experiences a split between symbols and affect that leads to meaninglessness and stasis in terms of the evolution of identity. I contend her identity reaches a phase of stasis because she lacks the maternal space, or semiotic chora, to reactivate the contradiction between the symbolic and semiotic. When she attends temple she says, "I belonged neither there, nor anywhere" (12). As a child she senses Zion is not where she lives, but in a far off city where tradition and ritual are a part of daily life: "New York would solve all my problems…The trips home to Brooklyn only sharpened my yearning. These pilgrimages inflamed, rather than satisfied my soul" (29). I suggest the hefty helpings of kosher tradition served up by her grandmother in New York – that I associate with the semiotic excesses -- inflames her hunger for the maternal space that can reactivate the contradictions between the symbolic and semiotic and the connection between language and experience. When she moves into the reflexive stance, I see her hunger for "the practical, mystical teachings, spiraling back through time, that the grandmothers had once dished out with their soup" (xi), as a hunger for a personal sense of the semiotic chora. I assert she turns to memoir to unveil such invisible presences – the

oppositions and contradictions in identity – that shape her subject position and bring the symbolic and semiotic excesses together in a process that emulates the constitutive process of the semiotic chora. As a new mother I see her as having a need to establish a semiotic chora for herself and her children that cannot be ruled by the symbolic alone, that requires the semiotic to interact with the symbolic to produce the contradictory subject positions that divine self.

I contend the disconnection between the symbolic and semiotic becomes more apparent to Ehrlich when she meets up with her mother-in-law Miriam, "who cooks to recreate a lost world, and to prove that unimaginable loss is not the end of everything" (xii). Ehrlich finds it difficult to maintain her tough independent persona in the face of a Holocaust survivor who has managed to shape a self rich in established meaning – even after losing most of her family to the Nazi ovens and a beloved daughter to illness -- in the sounds and rhythms of the kosher kitchen. On meeting Miriam she says, "my position felt suddenly confused, and I wanted only to please" (25). When she enters Miriam's kitchen she admits, "For years I worked as a magazine reporter. I wore a blue suit, and never was without spiral notebooks and extra pens. But nothing I had done in the big world beyond is of use or relevance here. In Miriam's kitchen, I must reach into her supply of scratch paper" (43). At first Ehrlich seems to succumb to domination by the semiotic. She concedes to an engagement party she does not want: "It killed me. Still, I would try to please everyone" (84). Then she swallows her independence and allows herself to be drawn into a kosher wedding, a concession that sends her "falling, spinning…down the rabbit hole" (86). Pretty soon Miriam is hauling the reluctant new mother out of bed with kosher food that overtakes her body "like an intravenous drug"

(41) and to host a Mazel-tov celebration to name her new daughter only days after a caesarian section. When her first baby arrives she finds her life somehow moves into the kitchen and takes on the rhythm of the "pale, distant, alternative universe" of the Jewish calendar. I suggest she is drawn to Miriam and her kosher ways because she senses the mother-in-law can help her open up the maternal space she needs to bring the symbolic and semiotic into relation. The author needs to tap into the rhythm of life of her mother-in-law's kosher kitchen, where culinary specialties endure even when possessions and certainties do not (26). Like Miriam she wants to be motivated by an "impossible wish to make the world whole" (xii), and to offer that maternal space, "something strong and solid" for her children.

As I write this study I am thinking about the ingredients I need to cook for my two youngest teenagers who are coming for a visit on the 6 p.m. flight from Calgary. I know they probably prefer hamburgers and fries from Wendy's, but like Ehrlich, I feel "roped in by the *ancienne*" (200) when I am in the presence of my children. I want to welcome them with the smells and rhythms of a mother's world, not the products of fast food fathers. I prepare a baked ham the way my mother does and her mother before her. I crisscross the surface diagonally with a knife and insert whole cloves before basting it with a sweet and sour concoction so secret I still haven't written it down for Luci who is now 23 years old. It is a mix of pineapple juice, cider vinegar, brown sugar, dry mustard and ketchup, but don't ask me for the proportions. I go by smell. I whip up fluffy mashed potatoes the way my son Ben "Bear" likes them and make a salad. I cut up melon, cantelope, pineapple, strawberries and grapes into a fruit bowl I know Angell will love. If Luci were here the two of them would demolish it by nightfall. Finally I dig into a drawer

for an apron to wear while making my famous chocolate chip oatmeal cookies, and as I do something drops on the floor. It is the tiny apron Ben used to wear as a toddler when he sat on the stool and helped me pat flour into the measuring cup with his chubby little fingers streaked with melted chocolate chips. When I write this on a nearby notepad a tear drops and blurs the ink. Later this weekend when the cookies are consumed my cool teenagers regress in age and ask if they can help replenish the cookie jar. A friend asked me one day why I bother to bake from scratch. It's the ritual I admit. Ben measures the ingredients, Angell operates the food processor. My husband Bob pats the cookies down on the pan. Like an orchestra conductor I maintain the rhythm and make sure it all comes together, the texture, the smell and the taste. When they come out of the oven the cookies that rise soft and sweet with a touch of brown around the edges are much more than just food to be consumed. They represent the rhythm that ebbs from my mother's kitchen and flows forward in time through Luci, Ben and Angell. As Ehrlich contends, this is how we are what we eat (259). It is how I have access to my mother's voice, that of her grandmothers and through them that of her ancestors, which Rich claims is required to help women find themselves. Rich contends women need "a kind of strength which can only be one woman's gift to another, the bloodstream of our inheritance" and that "Until a strong line of love, confirmation, and example stretches from mother to daughter, from woman to woman across generations, women will still be wandering in the wilderness" (Of Woman Born 246).

Similarly for Ehrlich the kosher kitchen serves as a metaphor for the semiotic chora, a maternal space inhabited by the voices of her mother's mother's mother and in which the semiotic can move through the body and interact with the symbolic to lead her

to new representations that balance the claims of the mind and the soul (54). I suggest the connection between the kosher kitchen and the maternal reveals itself in the author's description of the "steam kitchen catacombs winding beneath a great hotel" (86) that she explored when looking for a kosher caterer for her wedding. I also see the connection in her explanation of kosher as "an encompassing way of life, in which discipline and meaning, the mundane and the spiritual, are inextricably linked" (16). I suggest when the author is drawn into Miriam's kitchen she confronts a need to renew her long-forgotten connection with the excesses in language that Kristeva associates with the semiotic. Within the kosher kitchen history and experience – symbolism and unrepresented semiotic excesses – come together to create tension, a reaction not unlike what happens when Ehrlich makes her grandmother's sweet and sour recipe where "opposites that, thrown together, highlight the essence of each" (59). In a similar way her maternal grandmother, her bubbe, makes her cousins products of a maternal space by keeping their "essential clay pliant and moist" with "her kisses, her cooking, the perfume of her braided hair" (317). It is her bubbe who names her in shul to ensure "that a delicate thread of female connection was worked into the generations' embroidery, on my behalf" (197). I see the kitchen and kosher cooking represented as a kind of other dimension ruled over by matriarchs. Consider the fact that the guide Ehrlich chooses to lead her into the semiotic chora is Miriam, named for the Miriam in the Old Testament who helps Moses and Aaron lead the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Consider also that the author focuses her book on her mother-in-law, displaying the same kind of love and feminist devotion to another woman that feminist critics are now reading into the Book of Ruth, wherein Ruth adopts her mother-in-law's homeland and people and thus a marriage

that makes her the matriarch of a dynasty of kings, including the Messiah (233). When the author's mother-in-law-to-be first cooks for her, Ehrlich is "summoned to dine" at a table presided over by the grandmother, a "silvery matriarch" who "settled regally" at the table (25-6). The grandmother is seen as guarding "culinary specialties in her mind" and cooking is regarded as marking the rhythm of life Miriam now lives (26).

I contend the conflicting elements within this matriarchal kingdom are represented by what Ehrlich calls the male and female versions of the Jewish faith: the Torah and its male-authored kosher rules and the female dominated kitchen where "messy reality vies with surgically sterile rules" (129). I find Ehrlich using memoir as a way to bring these two elements together – similar to how the semiotic chora brings the symbolic and semiotic together -- so she can establish a connection between symbol and affect. For Ehrlich the Torah represents the law of the father, or male religion, which has always been problematic for her: "I am too much of a rationalist to lose myself in prayer. And as a woman, I have always had a problem with public ritual, the religion of synagogue" (342). She sees the Torah as symbolic of "historical relics pieced together with no literal meaning for our different time" (340). She feels uncomfortable with the symbolic because it lacks corporeality. She thinks of Yom Kippur, for example, as a symbolic "cleansing of corporeal concerns" (11) and pokes fun at the ruling that Jews must not wear skins of once-living creatures on the holiday. She struggles with the Torah requirement that meat and milk be kept apart and the separation of men from women at shul with a mekhitza because it keeps "the Torah from female pollution" (82). Ehrlich sees the Torah requirements as a humiliation to women, like the slap she receives from her grandmother when she announces her menses (205). I suggest she senses the male

authored Torah refuses semiotic excesses, like the "impersonal exclusion" of her daughter who wants to read a psalm at shul, which Ehrlich says, "arrives like a slap" (344). She is uncomfortable with the traditional style of shul that separates men from women, "separate but not equal" (340) and wonders why it is "men, men, men," the Rabbis who fashion the oral law, who oversee the rules of kosher cooking when they "will never be housewives" (129). I suggest these reflective observations clearly describe the angst experienced by a subject who cannot make a connection between symbols and affect. Once again she seeks identity in relation when she looks at how her father deals with the dilemma. Ehrlich refers to her father as a kind of Shaman who found his way out of symbolic domination through science via his father's pharmacy: "It was a kind of religion, this. My grandfather was a modern man, his days were full of chemistry. This produced in my father a worshipping love for science, and science, I think, came to replace religion in my father's life" (279). She agrees with her father that what husbands do in the synagogue "always seemed somewhat beside the point" (342).

Just as her father turns to the scientific laboratory, Ehrlich turns to the kosher kitchen for a way to make a connection between symbols and affect. I suggest the kosher kitchen represents a maternal space in which the unheard semiotic excesses can be brought into relation with the symbolic. Consider, for example, how Ehrlich represents the food preparations and products in the kinds of terms Kristeva associates with the semiotic; with the drives signified in language. Food is described as "elemental" (235) and Miriam is said to cook through a forgotten repertoire (6), which suggests a repertoire derived from the preoedipal semiotic. The taste of egg salad is described as coming from "a moment lost, a moment recovered, a moment in time" (8). Miriam doesn't just hold a

bowl; she cradles it, "as my mother does, as her mother did" (7). Honey cake and coffee at sundown on Yom Kippur are said "to give the heart a lift – as my mother's mother, Bubbe Malke, used to say" (11). Emotion and substance are served on a dairy plate (17). The preoedipal is represented when Ehrlich says that family cooking marks the rhythm of the life Miriam lives (26) and that the day's rhythm and coherence is derived from the work of Miriam's stiff, pearly hands (40). She even emulates the rhythm by describing Miriam's cookie making: "Catch, cut, gentle, fall, lift, catch, cut, gentle, fall, lift, dozens and dozens" (156). Kosher cooking is not about dishes, or law, or a way of life says Ehrlich, but "only a way of feeling" (127). The feeling is clearly linked to the preoedipal semiotic, something that moves Miriam through the lunar months (125), suggesting a woman's monthly menstruation cycles. Miriam is said to bake "every week, according to a fine internal clockwork" (153). The feeling is so intangible that when Miriam, the queen of kosher loses her sense of taste and smell to a stroke – "the senses essential to Miriam's understanding of life" (44) – she "healed to cook again, to create the world again, by memory" (44). Ehrlich's mother went "for the essence, the feeling, the soul" of kosher food and in the process preserved some traditions outside of her awareness as demonstrated by this dialogue between Elizabeth and her mother:

> "I'm writing about the way you kept the flame alive," I say to my mother.
>
> "I wasn't trying to keep the flame alive," she says to me.
>
> I look at the page in my hand and wonder.
>
> "You children had to eat something, and I did what I knew how to do" (151).

Even though the mother disclaims her kosher heritage, she practices it enough, or maintains the connection necessary to allow the daughter to rejuvenate it later. Ehrlich's two grandmothers survived without mothers by tapping into this feeling: "they cooked the foods they remembered. Motherless, they learned to be mothers" (48). This is the feeling Ehrlich says is responsible for the "strange impulses" she gets to make her child's baby food (123) and causes the "wicked need for liver and onions" when she is pregnant (124). It is a kind of language that connects with ancestors through the ages, like when she was a child and tried the bitter herb green-sprouted horseradish pieces at Passover. She yelped, gulped water and fanned her mouth but: "The physic worked. They [her parents] taught their children to remember" (207). I contend kosher cooking functions as Ehrlich's chora, which she says serves as a daily reaffirmation of "identity, purpose and rhythm" (54). The preparations, admits Ehrlich, are insane. "They get under your skin" (213), but "Without the meal and the commotion, the tradition of remembering the Exodus would certainly have died" (231). I find the author describing the semiotic as an "a kind of knowledge, an irrational, not particularly welcome, but irresistible knowledge," an awareness she likens to "some third eye" that is always alert (125). It is an awareness that even follows her and her family to a non-kosher restaurant, which I suggest symbolizes a space within which drives are brought forward. Her daughter's singing of the Jewish after meal grace on the way home from the Sabbath Chinese dinner becomes a method of bringing the semiotic into relation with the symbolic to shape a self: "The form is hers, and the form holds content" (359).

The same can be said about Ehrlich's use of memoir. She uses memoir, as do the women studied by Buss, to perform a self that is not quite as required by her idea of what

is normal, and in doing so she finds other possibilities for identity (Repossessing 64-65). In Ehrlich's case I suggest she writes outside the box of the journalistic genre through which she has thus far defined her identity to locate those other possibilities. Like women memoir authors studied by Smith, Ehrlich creates her own autobiographical stance by "fashioning her own voice within and against the voices of others" and subversively rearranging "the dominant discourse and the dominant ideology of gender, seizing the language and its powers to turn cultural fictions into her very own story" ("Poetics" 175). Instead of performing the usual journalistic role, wherein she objectively investigates the motivations and stories of others, and prepares a linear, rational text, Ehrlich does the opposite. She seeks her identity through the voices, stories and memorabilia of real life others, which is a function unique to memoir. Indeed, Ehrlich admits she takes the voices, photos, recipes, versions of arguments and events of others and makes them into what she calls a collage, "a way of life" (xiii). This collage of contradictions becomes a religion that she uses as a reference point from which to make decisions and divine a self and it is a religion she plans to pass on to her children. Buss reminds me that collage is a good way to recognize the individual as constituted by various systems of power, oppression and exploitation. Memoir narrators use this technique to step back from their participant and witness roles and observe the holds of these various forces (Repossessing 68-69). From a Kristevian standpoint I suggest Ehrlich's collage – a collection of both symbolism and semiotic excesses – serves as a semiotic chora from which to divine identity. This collage serves as a new base from which to determine associations between certain words and sentences with certain objects and subjects, a new base from which to shape identity.

But how is memoir used to construct this collage? I contend Ehrlich's strategy is to allow semiotic disruptions -- or what Kristeva calls charges -- to disrupt the stasis of symbolic language. She then observes the reaction, or tension produced, to reach conclusions, much the same way I imagine an artist stands back to observe the affect of additions to a collage. For example, Ehrlich is a feminist journalist who chooses to search for her subjectivity in the kitchen, a locale usually associated with the non-feminist woman. She is a Jewish woman who sets up a dialectic between the Torah and kosher, a role typically fulfilled by a male Rabbi. She also chooses to experience the faith according to Miriam, not a Rabbi, to develop a "sinkside, stoveside, personal perspective, not a rabbinical one" (xii). Her choice to enter Judaism through her mother-in-law's kitchen represents a refusal of the paternally sanctioned path through the Torah and temple. I see this choice as a refusal to enter identity by way of the paternally dominated Symbolic order; as a preference for another path that begins in the preoedipal and weaves its way in and out of episodes involving other people and events. I contend Ehrlich is using memoir to seek a female identity that is not totally defined by the Symbolic order, similar to the way Kristeva suggests in "About Chinese Women." Kristeva recommends "A constant alternation between time and its 'truth', identity and its loss, history and that which produces it: that which remains extra-phenomenal, outside the sign, beyond time. An impossible dialectic of two terms, a permanent alternation: never one without the other" ("About" 156). Memoir then is a form in which Ehrlich can "hold both reason and awe" and allow "ancient values, insights, questions, and doubts" (351) to interact and it is a form in which she finds identity and meaning.

I see Ehrlich's narrative structure as an example of how she seeks identity through this Kristevian process. Although the chapters are arranged in a linear fashion by months of the year – linearity being typical of traditional autobiography -- the author composes stories that wander back and forth in time within that linearity. In the chapter "Miriam's Kitchen" she begins in the present in her mother-in-law's kitchen learning how to cook liver, returns to when she came home with her first newborn child, returns again to the present, moves into the time period when Miriam suffered a stroke, comes back to the present, recalls Miriam's story of meeting Jacob at a concentration camp and the suffering of Miriam's mother, and then ends in the present. It is memoir that enables her to wander; to move back and forth discovering semiotic materials to add to her collage as a way of bringing them into the symbolic.

Similarly in a chapter entitled "Cake" -- symbolizing a fusion of ingredients that produce a product – Ehrlich embeds her mother-in-law's remembrances of the Holocaust into the routine of Miriam's cycle of baking and an ongoing dialogue between herself and Miriam. It is as though she is feeding her hunger for meaning and identity by blending stories from the Holocaust with the semiotics of Miriam's baking. In the symbolic world there are murdered children and men, a lost leg, starvation, cholera, insult, looting, life in a crowded typhus infested ghetto, a lost childhood, death camps, mass shootings, beatings, the disappearance of a cousin and the loss of a father to Buchenwald. While from Miriam's semiotic chora comes a "predictable measured grace" (153) filled with creations that satisfy semiotic drives such as the butter cake the way her mother used to make it, "doggie biscuits" for her daughter, a pineapple chocolate-chip cake from her sister-in-law, noodle puddings and dumplings filled with blueberries and cheese, sweet

and potato pancakes, fruit compotes, fruit salad, apple cake for Rosh Hashanah, moist honey cake for Yom Kippur and Hanukkah sugar cookies. Ehrlich traces the source of Miriam's hunger for meaning back to the symbolic and finds her satisfaction of that hunger in the semiotics of her baking. I suggest the back and forth movement between Miriam's witnessing of one of the most destructive periods in history with Ehrlich's participation in the creative semiotics of Miriam's kosher baking, creates contradictory forces that lead to the divining of new identity patterns. I contend the oppositions presented in "Cake" cause Ehrlich to divine an altered self. When she reflectively questions why she gave up fighting with her mother-in-law about offering her children sweets years ago, she alters her self-perception to allow for the excesses of the semiotic:

> Thinking of teeth, calories, lifelong habits, I handed down a no-sugar, no-cake ukase. Those were the early days. I gave up years ago. I blush now to think of Miriam, waking from nightmares, sleepless at dawn, with nothing to turn her hands to, and then no sweets to offer her only grandchildren. Her hungry heart must have wrung itself inside out (163).

In other words without her life in the semiotic chora of the kitchen, Ehrlich realizes Miriam would not be able to find meaning. Ehrlich now attaches more meaning to Miriam's grandmotherly offerings than to her original arbitrary no sugar ukase. In the "March" journal entry that follows this chapter Ehrlich sums up the change in her own self-perception when she says she is no longer an exile from her Jewish culture. I suggest she decides that resistance to assimilation is a negative identity because it denies the need for an interaction between the symbolism and semiotics of Jewish tradition.

I contend another method Ehrlich uses to alter the rhythm of her life narrative and allow the semiotic expression into the symbolic is the inclusion of the actual recipes gleaned from her time with Miriam. The fact that there is a lot of play given to the elements and proportions of ingredients used in the recipes confirms the instability of the identity making process. Although Miriam claims that each of her written recipes must be followed to the letter and contain complete instructions, Ehrlich continually finds instances where some ingredients are not recorded on the recipe card. For example, in the story of "Mandel brot" Miriam prepares a version with chocolate chips, which is not in the recipe. Ehrlich's cousin Dora makes a honey cake exactly to her late mother's written recipe, but unlike her mother's creation it goes moldy after two weeks. There is obviously something about the honey cake that is not written down for Dora. I suggest these examples foreground the need for both symbolism and unrepresented excesses to produce meaning, just as the recipes require excess ingredients not represented in the text to produce products. These ambiguous recipes provide Ehrlich and the reader with an opening, a maternal space, within which they can make choices and improvise. The sandwiching of recipes between stories of family and tradition and her vivid descriptions of the sounds, smells, tastes and feel experienced in Miriam's kitchen, provides the reader with a semiotic chora, or maternal space, within which to participate. I suggest the mingling of recipes in this manner confirms what Ehrlich intuits about Miriam's kitchen at the beginning of the book: "I should be there, drinking an instant coffee beside her. I should be there to measure and stir and see for myself, before that particular salt is gone. I should be in Miriam's kitchen" (8). In other words awareness of the semiotic chora is not enough. She needs to immerse herself in it. I see Ehrlich's comment affirming the

need for the ongoing interaction of the witnessing and participation voices -- of the symbolic and semiotic elements -- to create the contradictions and tension that divine identity. She writes, “The doing is part of it. It brings back all I saw and felt and knew. It is not the same without the doing.” As Miriam tells her when adding indeterminate amounts of flour to an “Apple Cake” recipe: “It’s better this way. You work it through” (67).

I see Ehrlich’s organization of the book according to a calendar that begins and ends in September and aligns with Miriam’s kosher cooking cycle, as another technique used to alter the rhythms of her life narrative to encompass both the symbolic and the semiotic. I am reminded by the author that through Miriam’s kitchen the year “ebbs and flows, Miriam’s cakes work, form, swell, and subside, and the universe is good to us; another cake already on horizon’s rim” (155). Ehrlich maps the contradictions in her evolving subject position, and interrupts the history of her struggle to find meaning by opening each chapter with a personal reflection or journal entry, which features italicized text to indicate a different voice. As she says in her opening “Introduction,” learning Miriam’s recipes involves “a voyage of discontinuity and connection,” a cadence that “evolves for me now as I seek to bring tradition home” (xii). Kristeva’s theories point to the same type of journey towards identity. In “Revolution in Poetic Language” Kristeva contends that “the very practice of art necessitates reinvesting the maternal *chora* so that it transgresses the symbolic order; and, as a result, this practice easily lends itself to so-called perverse subjective structures” (52). I contend the reflective questioning voice of memoir enables Ehrlich to use questions in her journal entries to disrupt the Symbolic order and bring the semiotic and symbolic into concourse. When she answers them, either

in the journal, or in the body of the chapter, she makes decisions about her conflicted self based on the reversed reactivation between the two elements. As she writes in the "July" entry: "*Like a mad escapee from an unknown century, I explain myself to myself, hoping for the right answer*" (293). This process is reflected in the memoir by constant indecision, by what I see as Kristeva's subjectivity in process.

To demonstrate this point I will track Ehrlich's self-making journey, especially as it progresses through her italicized observations. In September she asks herself why she hungers in the direction of rituals she has so long ignored. By October this questioning makes her mixed up in her mind and she wonders if kosher rules are for her who has been "*raised to pick and choose, raised without God?*" She claims she is concerned about being consumed by such an obsession (24), but I suggest she is really afraid of Kristeva's abject maternal[8], what Kristeva describes as "a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate" ("Powers" 234). Ehrlich worries if she embraces ambiguous boundaries she will lose herself and discover "*my location is a point of no return*" (24). By November she is teetering "*on some intermediate balancing point. On one side there is* kashrut, *on the other, citizenship in the regular world*" (53). She compares her subject position to that of an individual teetering on an unstable "*pivoting plank*" because she is not sure she wants to practice kosher. Still she does not turn away because she is "*not sure I can bear to finally cut the string connecting those lives to those of my children*" (53). Yet she does not know if she can live with such ambivalence: "*I fear a statement of difference in a world that needs to see itself as one*" (54). She is accustomed to the requirements of a symbolic element that refuses disruption, but sees how kosher can "*reaffirm identity, purpose, and rhythm*" on a daily basis (54). As she

[8] See page 14.

explains in the "Stuffed Cabbage" section of "November" she realizes it is up to her to develop her own identity: "I had better cook it myself" (62). She is no longer doing kosher just for her children, but also for herself (104). In the new year she recognizes that she cannot live separate from Jewish tradition: "*Lapse, turn hostile, disconnect, convert, be named pope, what have you – you are still inescapably of the people*" 113). In other words she cannot find an identity without merging the symbolic and semiotics of her culture or from outside the Symbolic order.

Her struggle for identity reaches a climax in the "Too Busy" section of the "January" chapter. I contend her immersion in kosher cooking confronts her with the identity issue with which she has always struggled; how to allow the semiotic that haunts the borderlines of her identity expression into the symbolic without it becoming overtaken by the symbolic: "*I watched my mother-in-law live by the Jewish calendar, and the exigencies of the rhythm troubled me*" (125). In the reflective voice Ehrlich considers how kitchen work within our system of language represents oppression of identity, rather than expression: "Have I consented to my own oppression? (129). She tells her husband "I don't want to be kosher," yet in the next paragraph she asserts "But it's when you begin to think of your kitchen as unkosher, however definitely, that the roller-coaster ride begins" (126). When she enters the space I see as the semiotic chora, or her kitchen, the reversed reactivation of the contradictions between the semiotic and symbolic put her into a life rhythm that feels as wild as a roller coaster ride, into a world of signs that Kristeva sees as "outside the sign, beyond time" ("About" 156). In this imaginative space she sees steak knives come to life and recoil at the sight of cheese and pots and pans assume limits (125). As she moves towards women's religion she witnesses "a kind of

transubstantiation" wherein: "Inanimate vessels were becoming their contents, the essence of the living spirits that had become food on a plate…Plates looked at me and demanded reckoning" (130). In the end she crosses "some sort of line" and begins to veer towards kosherness: "Finally you have to live with your accommodations, the limits of being human" (130). In "April," after her daughter's naming ceremony, I suggest Ehrlich begins to sense a truth outside of that represented in the Symbolic order when she says, "But there is always more to truth than this, and it's often a woman in the kitchen" (204).

As Kristeva suggests the contradiction between symbolic and semiotic is an ongoing process, which involves advances and reversals. So in "February" we find the author already backtracking on a decision she seems to have made in January, typical of most New Year's resolutions. She claims she is only interested in the symbolism, but cannot ignore the call for kosher that seems to come from her "actual molecules" (143), suggesting the preoedipal semiotic: "it's not the same anymore, the object carries a projected burden, projected by me, if not by actual molecules" (143). I suggest when she turns to questions, or the reflective voice, as a useful tool for sorting things out she seizes the language the Jewish men use to negotiate their way through the symbolic Torah to develop identity: "*Questions are not such a bad way of life. Maybe questions are the point of it all*" (171). For example, in the previous chapter she asks in the reflective voice: "What is a woman? What is a woman supposed to be?" Her reflexive answer is: "Nothing was going to be easy" (147). I contend the reflective questioning voice is the device that brings the symbolic and semiotic into concourse and makes Ehrlich feel "moved and confused, one of those cosmic states of confusion that set chains of events in motion" (203). In attempting to build a floor under her children Ehrlich finds herself caught up in

the same paradox of self as Lazarre[9]. Writes Ehrlich: "*Connection to their tradition may lead to dissociation: a paradox. Plug in here, disconnect there*" (228). She realizes she too must live on the floor that she is building. In "June" she achieves some semblance of balance by setting up a kosher kitchen, which she sees as "*my way of bundling up all the broken twigs that belong together*" (261). I suggest the back and forth movement between the reflective and reflexive voices is how Ehrlich negotiates the two elements – the semiotic and symbolic -- that give rise to the contradictory forces which divine identity: "*I make choices based on my view of myself on the planet, and in the end I become the expression of those choices*" (259). In the end I contend she decides in favour of a kosher kitchen to provide a maternal space in which she and her family can maintain this dynamic equilibrium. She seeks to "*create a home of rightness and wholeness*" and "*to establish the percussion beat of work and Sabbath, Sabbath and work,*" (291), a type of rhythm I associate with a maternal space like Kristeva's semiotic chora. For, as Ehrlich writes, the Sabbath does not begin until "*mother is ready*" (292).

By the end of the year I see Ehrlich as finding a secure place in the preoedipal semiotic chora within which she can "bounce between renunciation and the search for my place" (342). Indeed, by "August" I find she is ready to assume a more connected identity attuned to the "feminist family romance" plot when she changes pronouns – from "I" and "her" to "we" (347). Now into the "September" of her next year, she provides the reflexive answer she has been looking for: "Drawn to ritual, I may perhaps draw nearer to meaning" (351), and I add, to a connection between language and affect. She recognizes that within the semiotic chora she will always sit "on the metaphoric fence" where a "subjective mental construct collapses" on a continual basis when symbolic and semiotic

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[9] See page 68.

meet: "The place where we live, dynamic equilibrium, is inherently unstable. Without consciousness, effort, restraint, everything tends toward chaos" (353). Like the ancient Jewish funeral tradition where mourners shriek and tear garments as the body is set in the ground -- "that paradoxical means by which one may begin to again grow whole" (319) that her "*bubbe* knew, in a way that is beyond knowing" (319) -- the evolution of identity requires the tension produced by the interaction of the symbolic and semiotic.

It is a process that is within her control as demonstrated in the final "Sponges" chapter. When she comes home late from work one night and enters her kitchen I see Ehrlich confronting a battle between semiotic and symbolic elements for her attention, for her to choose one over the other. In this maternal space, this dairy kitchen, the semiotic element is represented by her hunger, the smell of rancid milk, the glare of the lights, the "something nameless" that sticks to her sock (360). Indeed, she longs for the taste of chicken soup, the quintessential mother's brew. But the symbolic kosher rules, the many shoulds listed on page 361, require her to put off satisfying her hunger until she has separated the dairy from the meat elements in her kitchen. In essence, at the end of her story I find she must decide between a symbolic or semiotic identification with Jewish ritual, or between the virile, independent identity associated with the Freudian family romance and the more consoling but dangerous liaisons of the "feminist family romance." Does she comply with the requirement for autonomy, for her to separate the two elements before satisfying her hunger? Or will she allow for connection? I suggest she does what the women writers of the 1970s and 80s studied by Hirsch do when confronted with the choice between the opposing roles prescribed by the two family romance plots. She chooses a hybrid solution. When the dialectical tension between the

semiotic and symbolic opens a space within which she can develop her identity, she chooses to let the two elements *just be* in her kosher kitchen. She heats up her chicken soup, dims the lights and eats standing at the counter away from the messy dairy kitchen, but fully connected to it nonetheless. "It is as good as any soup I ever have had," she says (361). I contend this scene demonstrates how she satisfies her hunger for meaning by finding a connection between language and affect. It is an acknowledgement that she is her choices and her choice is to bring practicality to bear on kosher law. Like her mother-in-law and her female ancestors before her, I suggest she fashions her own kosher kitchen (or semiotic chora), a solid maternal floor on which her children can bring together the two elements and construct selves that can weather any storm. On the menu will be what her grandmothers offered: "history, tradition, community connection, anger, humor, and just about anything else worth conveying" (17). Like the recipes it is a menu that allows the semiotic expression through the symbolic.

My writing about Elizabeth Ehrlich's year of months ends in November, just a month before my favorite time of the year. Perhaps it is my favorite because my mother always managed to bring a certain magic to Christmas when I was a child. One in particular that comes to mind happened when I was about ten years old. We were living in the last house to be torn down before the City of Hamilton constructed what is now Confederation Park on Van Wagner's Beach on Lake Ontario. My stepfather was unemployed again. Both of my parents were into the sauce. We had no running water and the furnace was barely working. But it was Christmas Eve and my two sisters and I huddled together on the living room sofa in expectant bliss. We heard a noise on the roof just outside our bedroom window. We scrambled up the stairs, crawling over each other

like a litter of pups. There were snowy reindeer footprints on the windowsill and chocolates wrapped in holiday foil scattered across the floor. We ate it up. Next came the gift-wrapping extravaganza. My parents disappeared behind the bedroom door, and after what seemed like hours of listening to the sounds of ruffled paper, ripping tape and the odd giggle, out they came. There were huge bows, long tubes with animal heads, big fat foil bodies topped with curly ribboned heads. We knew there was nothing really special inside the paper. That didn't matter. It was art and we ate that up too. Now I am a mother of three and I too enjoy the fun and art of Christmas. My front door usually bears a wreath made for us by family friends. I make my own giant silver ribbons to decorate the boughs on the stairs. My mantel is usually covered in pine and candles. I have a jolly penguin doorknob cover that sings jingle bells to startled guests when they close the door to the guest bathroom. I do not have a perfect theme Christmas tree. Rather I cover it with an odd assortment of ornaments received as gifts, made by the children over the years and gathered from wherever the family went for vacation each year.

But all of this will remain tucked away in the basement this Christmas. When I learn that my ex husband Dale has decided to take my two youngest teenagers to Mexico for Christmas and that my oldest daughter cannot come to visit something breaks inside. My husband Bob tries to consol me, but he does not come from the house on the beach with the paper bows and ribbon heads under the tree. Bob is happy to spend the holidays with just me. But his autonomy is not for me. I crave connection the way I crave the sweet bread Christmas trees my mother used to make that age no longer allows her to remember. The way I crave memories that elude me. I feel a need to feed an obsession with connection as if my life depends upon it. Without connection the bows, tinsel,

boughs, candles and ornaments that speak Christmas will remain on the shelves in the basement this year. They will be mute. There is no meaning to the symbol of Christmas when I cannot connect it with semiotic elements. Ehrlich has helped me to understand that.

I also realize why authors like Ehrlich choose memoir to divine identity. As I argued in the last chapter, memoir is a faithful diviner that seeks connection. In this case the connection memoir searches for is between the symbolic and the semiotic. Memoir offers the freedom to develop a structure that can reconnect with a logic of signification operating in the preoedipal, the phase Chodorow claims girls occupy longer than boys and is the base from which women seek identity. I argue Ehrlich chooses the memoir form for the same reasons as she searches for self through Miriam's kitchen. The author can experiment with a new logic of signification within the safety of memoir's flexible boundaries. Memoir becomes a type of chora in which Ehrlich can bring the symbolic and semiotic together to evolve identity and find meaning. As she writes:

> I turn over old stories in my mind and collect new ones. I choose my own history, deciding which snapshots, decades, recipes, versions of arguments and events are to be discarded, and which will stand for the whole. That history is my own little temple where I measure my life against a reliable standard. Increasingly, I find meaning there (xii-xiii).

Memoir becomes the maternal space within which she explores the semiotic logic of signification that has been long forgotten, buried in the deep well of preoedipal memory. Like my therapist who opened a maternal space to help the semiotic rise into language and thus into my conscious life, Ehrlich's memoir gives the semiotic expression in the

symbolic. I contend memoir divines identity by imitating the chora's constitutive process. Ehrlich picks up the treasured pen I found in my dream, uses it to reactivate the tension between language and affect, and in the process divines her identity. Memoir as diviner becomes the light and compass to show the way, the calculator to work things through and the radio to send and receive messages. In the next chapter I will explore the work of another memoirist who makes subversive use of this tension to divine identity.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Free women with their own tongues:

## Relational technology and subversive identity in The Woman Warrior

> Adult personality, embedded in connectedness, offers a picture of continued mother-daughter entanglement. The result is a theory of language founded not on lack, but on a form of plentitude, a myth of a mother-tongue which affirms, or at least suggests, the existence or the possibility of constructing something outside the name-of-the-father.
>
> (Hirsch, The Mother Daughter Plot 132)

When I was a child my mother always told me I could do anything with enough determination. In the evening, after she had endured a two-hour bus ride home from her bookkeeping job at the trucking company, she would settle at our red chrome kitchen table with a pack of Big Tens and as she smoked she would tell me how the world had changed since she was young. From behind a hazy blue cloud she would remind me of how her dreams of becoming a journalist were dashed by a stepmother who insisted she stay home and look after her younger stepsiblings. She rebelled by running away to the big city where she ended up pregnant and married at 18 years of age and alone with four children before she turned 25. "You have a world of opportunities open to you," she would tell me, "go after your dreams."

I always felt somewhat uneasy during these discussions. Perhaps because of how she used to sing me to sleep with the words: "What will be will be" in both French and

English. Of course, I joined in: "Que sera, sera/Whatever will be will be/The future is not ours to see/Que sera, sera," without even thinking about the lack of choice the words offered. Or maybe the discomfort was generated by the discontinuity between my mother's words and actions. She preached freedom of choice, yet selected for herself an unhappy relationship in which she was the only reliable breadwinner. Day after day I watched her drag herself out of bed early in the morning -- hacking away with a smoker's cough – to board a trolley bus that took her to the east end of Hamilton where she trudged through mud in spring and snow drifts in winter to reach a tedious job that insulted her intelligence. From when I was about eight years old my two older sisters and me were pressed into service to cook, clean, wash, iron and grocery shop under the direction of our loud and lazy stepfather, but with the unspoken approval of our mother, who was expected to live up to the nickname he gave her of "mouse."

To a child raised in the 1950s middle class, Catholic tradition it looked as though my mother promoted freedom and choice on the one hand, but chose to live a silent and apparently powerless alternative. But today, as an adult interested in the theories of Kristeva, I see her story more as an example of how a monotheistic capitalist culture can put a woman in a double bind when it comes to representation and identity. In "About Chinese Women" Kristeva contends women are placed in a powerless position by a system of language that defines sexual difference in relation to a Symbolic order which privileges the paternal: "The economy of this system requires that women be excluded from the single true and legislating principle, namely the Word, as well as from the (always paternal) element that gives procreation a social value: they are excluded from knowledge and power" (143). Kristeva argues the paternal is set up as the temporal

reference point against which everything else is measured and the unity of this one law is maintained by containing bodily desire in an other kept outside of the Symbolic order; that other is woman ("About" 151). The woman who is excluded from having a position in this economy of production then becomes the waste or sacrifice of the system. Indeed, Kristeva argues women are required to participate in their own repression because the very survival of the paternal word is dependent on a fight "between the orgasmic maternal body and the symbolic prohibition" ("About" 147). She contends women's only access to the Symbolic order is to participate in this endless struggle because if the underlying causality[1] that shapes the fixed, governed word is projected it could blow up the whole construct ("About" 153). In other words women cannot seize phallic power – or challenge their unrepresented status in language -- without effecting the very foundation of society. If women do this they lose the only power they have as the mysterious unrepresentable and further their double bind ("About" 155). In addition, a woman must turn away from the maternal and identify with the paternal to be represented, which forces her to become a supporter of the very patriarchal order that represses her identity as a woman ("About" 155). Therefore a woman may have difficulty finding the relational identity Chodorow claims she seeks as the daughter of a mother[2] from within the Symbolic order. Kristeva contends, "For a woman who has not easily repressed her relationship with her mother, participation in the Symbolic order as Christianity defines it can only be masochistic" ("About" 147).

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[1] Kristeva defines underlying causality as "a figure of speech that alludes to the social contradictions that a given society can provisionally subdue in order to constitute itself" ("About" 153).

[2] See page 10.

According to Kristeva the Symbolic order's double bind condemns a woman to two extremes subject positions, which I align with the two poles of representation posed by Hirsch in The Mother/Daughter Plot. Kristeva contends at one extreme a woman can passionately support the Symbolic order, identify with her father and wage war against her preoedipal dependence on the mother ("About" 149). This subject position, which I associate with representations produced by the Freudian family romance, prevents her from discovering her body as other to a man's and leads to repression of drives and a virile identity Kristeva calls "playing at being supermen" (155). At the other extreme a woman more tuned into the mother and unconscious drives marked by rhythms, intonations and gestures can refuse this role in the Symbolic order by holding back from speaking or writing. I associate this extreme with the subject position that seeks the more consoling but dangerous female alliances of Hirsch's "feminist family romance" because it leads to a type of fragmentation Kristeva describes as "a permanent state of expectation, occasionally punctuated by some kind of outburst; a cry, a refusal, 'hysterical symptoms'" ("About" 155). It becomes apparent to me that women have two choices when confronted with a Symbolic order that places the paternal in the seat of power according to Kristeva: they can enter and identify as men or withdraw into their silent bodies as hysterics. Applying this notion to my mother's case I see her being offered the choice between being a man or a "mouse." In my mother's situation I suggest she refused these two extremes and sought a third alternative. As I remember:

> Mom's hands were everywhere.
>
> There they were at Holy Communion shoulder,
>
> tucking sis and me into iron bed,

wrapped round knitting needles,

poised over ledgers and crossword puzzles,

flattened out under sewing machine,

stroking fever and forehead,

smacking bottoms

and punching out our family's daily bread.

Mom's hands were everywhere.[3]

The contradiction and conflict between her representations as a working mother and home maker -- much more pronounced in the 1950s than they would be today -- are indicative of the subversive strategy Kristeva contends is needed to release the Symbolic order's stranglehold on representation, deconstruct existing significations of authority and power and introduce alternatives that lead to the construction of new forms of subjectivity. Kristeva suggests women who wish to gain access to knowledge and power refuse the two extremes laid out for them by the Symbolic order. She contends women should act on the socio-politico-historical stage as the negative of the capable and virile woman and refuse all roles to summon a "'truth' situated outside time...that cannot be fitted in to the order of speech and social symbolism" ("About" 156).

Kristeva recognizes the contradictions in her recommendation. How can women refuse the two extreme representations and still remain part of the paternal system of identification? An all out assault on the Symbolic order and a return to the preoedipal link with the unrepresented silent mother forces women to take up the position of repressed other and risks psychosis or suicide ("About" 157). Writes Kristeva:

[3] Taken from my memoir piece entitled "Gliding on melting" October 2000, page 1.

> For a woman, the call of the mother is not only a call from beyond time, or beyond the socio-political battle. With family and history at an impasse, this call troubles the word: it generates hallucinations, voices, 'madness'. After the superego, the ego founders and sinks. It is a fragile envelope, incapable of staving off the irruption of this conflict, of this love which had bound the little girl to her mother, and which then, like black lava, had lain in wait for her all along the path of her desperate attempts to identify with the symbolic paternal order ("About" 156-7).

My mother certainly wasn't immune to such a danger. She drank excessively. She cried alone behind the closed doors of dark bedrooms. She hung out with an alcoholic, violent and abusive man. We had our share of late night visits from the local police. And one time I am sure I saw my stepfather deliberately crack my mother's false teeth, leaving her speechless for a week. As Kristeva suggests, in order to seek representation I was forced to flee from identification with my mother. I was conditioned to see her the way her family and community did, as a black sheep and a powerless outcast. I see now how our patriarchally dominated culture owned and directed my judgments in those days. I feared I would also be doomed to live in isolation if I picked up where my mother left off. Yet as Kristeva suggests, I put myself in a double bind when I shunned connection with her and took up the position allocated to me by the Symbolic order as unrepresented other. I wonder whether this unconscious choice is what is behind my nagging feeling of powerlessness, and self-doubt? Is it the purpose for my search in academic and memoir writing for a potentially subversive path to creating new both/and identity patterns? Is it the motivation for my decision to prepare this study focusing on mother/daughter

memoirs? As Kristeva suggests it is difficult to heed the maternal call from beyond time because it troubles the word ("About" 156-7). Even now as I disrupt an academic conversation on contemporary mother/daughter memoirs with stories about my relationship with my mother I imagine the cold stare of the paternally defined academy. In response my words/thoughts easily reshuffle into prescribed shapes and patterns like a well-used book that closes itself. I find myself sitting on a garden bench struggling to find the words to describe who exists in this space. I feel liquid like the morning dew that pauses on the edge of a leaf before dripping into the folds of an awaiting tulip. I am over fifty years old. I thought I knew who I was, but here helpless as dew I tremble on a leaf's edge. How can I possibly find a place to stand on this thin and slippery precipice? How do I articulate the fluid self Kristeva argues is not representable within the Symbolic order? And without going mad? Kristeva is correct when she proposes that the character who lives in this space is intolerable to normative consciousness: "his is the wisdom of artifice which has no interiority and is constant rejection"…"Only the 'clever' one who has mastered the technique of saying can achieve this 'poetic' wisdom…'art'" ("Revolution" 82).

In her analysis of "About Chinese Women" Oliver contends Kristeva's notion of mastering the technique of "saying" involves seeking a stronger identification with mother to rejoice in the discharge of drives in language as a means of undermining "constructions of identity and difference that repress the feminine and maternal" (Reading 112). In other words Kristeva is arguing for subversively working within the system to change women's status as other through stronger identification with the mother. Women must listen to the maternal from within the Symbolic order because the

Symbolic order guarantees identity and keeps them from falling into psychosis. She suggests women locate their truth: "By listening; by recognizing the unspoken in discourse, however Revolutionary, by emphasizing at each point whatever remains unsatisfied, repressed, new, eccentric, incomprehensible, that which disturbs the mutual understanding of the established powers" ("About" 156). But at the same time she argues women must subversively resist the identities that are produced by the Symbolic order and find their own truth from which to project identity. This means changing the truth from which the moment of speech is projected to alter identity patterns: "I project not the moment of my fixed, governed word, ruled by a series of inhibitions and prohibitions…but rather the underlying causality that shapes it…and which is capable of blowing up the whole construct" ("About" 153). In effect she encourages women to embrace the Symbolic order and make it their own to locate what she describes as: "A curious truth; outside time, with neither a before nor an after, neither true nor false; subterranean, it neither judges nor postulates, but refuses, displaces and breaks the symbolic order before it can re-establish itself" ("About" 153). But how does listening to the mother translate into actual strategies that can be applied to women's self making? Kristeva suggests, "A constant alteration between time and its 'truth', identity and its loss, history and that which produces it: that which remains extra-phenomenal, outside the sign, beyond time" ("About" 156).

With this in mind I return to my mother's story. Confronted with a master script composed by the paternal Symbolic order that requires her to submit to a mute representation as "mouse" she uses the power of that silence as a base from which to project an identity that does not fit with the master script. Though she does not achieve

her dream of making her stories public as a journalist, privately she continues to tuck, wrap, flatten, stroke, smack and punch out a subversive discourse. While it is true she slips into a more silent mode of operation when my stepfather arrives on the scene, she continues to alternate between teaching me everything I need to know about home making, demonstrating a mastery of language through daily crossword puzzles (she is an expert at the word game Scrabble) and working as the predominant family breadwinner long before it becomes socially acceptable. Like me she is fascinated by words, with a pencil in one hand, a dictionary in the other, and some kind of language puzzle in between. In the space of disidentification produced by these alternations I realize what the paternal master script saw as bad mothering in the 1950s was actually a mother unconsciously role modeling the kind of subversive activity Kristeva contends is required to survive as a woman. Like the women of colour in Patricia Hill Collins' article "Shifting The Center: Race, Class, And Feminist Theorizing About Motherhood" my mother practiced a "motherwork" that taught me how to appear submissive, while at the same time challenging the Symbolic order that created that representation. My mother's behavior aligned with that of the mother of historian Elsa Barkley Brown, who Brown claims demonstrated the "need to teach me to live my life one way and, at the same time, to provide all the tools I would need to live it quite differently" (qtd. Collins 59).

This very insight into the development of my identity is made possible by pursuing a way of knowing that begins with the mother in the preoedipal phase of human development. As discussed in the introduction the way the Symbolic order is set up to produce representations requires the continual interaction of the symbolic and semiotic elements. The symbolic is associated with position and judgment and the semiotic drives

forces that are not identified in language, are considered excesses and are associated with the maternally dominated preoedipal phase that is seen as a major influence in women's shaping of identity. In order to explore how my mother developed a representation counter to that prescribed by the Symbolic order – a kind of hybrid of the virile and silent woman – I move back and forth between the master script and that composed by my mother. As Ruth Jenkins suggests, I challenge tradition and gender roles by resurrecting my mother's silenced story and in so doing explore the tension between silence and voice that divined her subjectivity (62). In so doing I reveal the invisible presences -- the tucking, wrapping, flattening, stroking, smacking and punching out – that make it possible for my mother to put her own spin on the master script. According to Kristeva this way of knowing -- this back and forth movement that originates in the preoedipal phase of human development when the infant learns about accepting and refusing an other through breastfeeding – is how rejection functions in language to produce representations. Kristeva argues rejection – a process that refuses and accepts, refuses and accepts -- reconstitutes real objects, creates new ones, reinvents the real and resymbolizes it ("Revolution" 81). Of the two modalities that keep rejection in motion -- oralization and homosexual phratry[4] ("Revolution" 79) – I am most interested in oralization, the modality that restrains the aggression of the rejection process through an attempted fusion with the mother's body, what Kristeva calls a devouring fusion ("Revolution" 80). I suggest it is this modality that causes the extreme form of disidentification for women that Nussbaum contends occurs "when subjects are held in subject positions that are

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[4] Kristeva describes homosexual phratry as a reunion with the bodies of brothers and the modality that seeks to impose the one rule, the one signified ("Revolution" 79).

incompatible, and the ideologies are brought into contestation" (164) because its operation is based on fusion and separation, the type of action that can both formulate and destroy identity.

I propose when Kristeva contends that women should heed the call of the mother ("About" 156) to challenge their representations she is suggesting they tap into this preoedipal way of knowing to use the paternal constructions behind language for their own purposes. She contends this is how to reinforce the rejection process and produce "new cultural and social formations which are innovative and subversive"("Revolution" 87). I contend women function as subversive agents in this respect because in reinforcing rejection they overthrow representations it produces and create new ones. As suggested by the OED definitions of "to subvert," they disturb, overturn and overthrow a condition, order of things or principle. Smith, in writing on women's autobiography, refers to two interactive agents she calls the "double helix of the imagination," which she associates with "the voices of man and woman" that "vie with one another, displace one another, subvert one another in the constant play of uneasy appropriation or reconciliation and daring rejection" (Poetics 51). Smith contends this is how women suspend themselves between paternal and maternal narratives in an attempt to write in a purely female language (Poetics 19).

Although Smith writes of autobiography in general, I propose the memoir form of autobiography is women's ally in this respect because it offers them a set of practices that they can use to reinforce rejection and subvert the process through which the Symbolic order develops representation to divine identity. Indeed, Francis Russell Hart in his 1979 article "History Talking to Itself: Public Personality in Recent Memoir" suggests memoir

is the best autobiographical form to use in times of survival (195). In this regard Buss argues that memoir's acts of survival are "restoration, reformation, and reinvention," (Repossessing 34), which is similar to the way Kristeva describes the acts of rejection: as reconstituting real objects, creating new ones, reinventing the real and resymbolizing ("Revolution" 81). Indeed, I propose that each of these critics is describing a version of Kristeva's rejection process that produces identity. They, like Quinby, see memoir as an ideal subversive tool for allowing subjugated femininity to erupt against linguistic and literary exclusion (300). Quinby points out that the very inclusion of memoir in the autobiographical category demonstrates a continuing attempt at discursive colonization by the normalizing subjectivity that dominates the West (298-9). I suggest a writer's choice of the memoir form indicates both her desire to oppose such colonization and to pursue a subversive identity. As Quinby explains the formation of identity depends on choice of discourse because "the technologies of power within which they operate as self-constituting practices" (298) lead to genre constructed subjectivity.

Like Quinby I see memoir as constructing a subversive identity because it utilizes practices outside those designed to normalize subjectivity (299), what I call "relational technology" because it involves the alternation action Kristeva suggests "disturbs the mutual understanding of the established powers" ("About" 156). For example, Quinby argues, unlike autobiography, memoir does not promote an assumed interiority, which is unitary and continuous over time. Rather memoir divines "a subjectivity that is multiple and discontinuous" through the eyes and voices of others (299). She argues that autobiographical practices serve to render an empirical record of events and individuals, while memoir practices are associated with Woolf's famous phrase 'invisible presences',

or the influence of others on an author's continually changing self-perception (300-1). This encourages the memoirist to divine identity by bringing the personal and public into relation with each other. Quinby proposes that memoir "rejects the discursive unity that constructs subjectivity as simultaneously individualized and totalized" simply because of the way it brings together seemingly opposed discursive practices. She backs up her argument with the following OED definitions of memoir: the note, memorandum, record, autobiographical record, biography, essay, dissertation, memento or memorial (300). Buss expands on Quinby's argument to say that memoir initiates a process whereby these various generic discourses "clash with, inquire into, and blend into one another, in order to promote new forms of subjectivity" (Repossessing 31). Building on the work of Billson Buss argues that the confrontation between fiction and nonfiction in memoir – between the memoirist's experienced past and imagination – also contributes to the development of new patterns of identity (Repossessing 32). Memoir encourages the writer to artistically compose a story of self by picking and choosing what reports and utterances to include and in what order. Because memoir is not as concerned with linear and historical correctness the form allows the writer to express her imagination through such devices as poetry, recipes, dreams, dialogue and fantasies to draw out a story or expand on some aspect of self. In summary I propose memoir's "relational technology" makes it possible for the writer to explore her subjectivity through alternations or her relationship to the following, all of which draw out contradictory subject positions that divines self:

a) public written reports or history and private oral accounts;

b) the individuals and events that have impacted her life;

c) fiction and nonfiction;

d) various discursive practices from poetry to recipes;

e) the memoirist and herself at various stages in her life

f) and the memoir form.

Much of this relational exploration is made possible by the tripartite voice structure. Useful here is Buss's proposal that the memoirist utilizes three narrative voices, which enable the narrator to speak as a witness to and participant in events and reflect on both to learn new things about the present and, most importantly, to reflexively alter her own subject positions. I proposed in chapter three that this structure enables the author to reactivate the tension between the semiotic and symbolic elements of the Symbolic order in the participant and witness stances and stand back and observe the results in the reflective/reflexive questioning and answering mode. In this chapter I argue that the voices provide the means to alternate between time and truth, identity and its loss, history and that which it produces. The reflective/reflexive stance draws out the movement of the rejection process enabling the memoirist to unfold the very mechanics by which representations are produced while operating from within the Symbolic order. I suggest this memoir practice offers the author the knowledge and the power Kristeva contends women need to refuse what they are not and project identity patterns outside those prescribed by technologies that move on a patriarchal axis of power. From a Kristevian perspective the powerful alternation between poetic language and psychoanalysis (the analysis of self in relation to events and others) disrupts the unity of the Symbolic order and puts the subject on trial/in process. Further, I see such alternations as drawing out the

unspeakable forces associated with the maternal in the form of contradictory subject positions to enable memoirists to divine selves.

I see the operation of what I named in my first chapter, "relational technologies," as similar to what Butler and de Certeau describe as reiterative performances which open the way to new subversive subjectivities[5]. By keeping Kristeva's rejection process in motion through the various relational technologies she chooses the memoirist continues to fail as a deep, unified coherent, autonomous self and opens the way for the performance of new identity patterns. Recall from my introduction Butler's comment that such a failure signals the possibility of a variation on the repetition of "the rules than govern intelligible identity," which can lead to a new series of repeated citations of norms that animate and constrain the subject (qtd. Smith "Performativity" 110). Recall also Pratt's description of the speech act as a kind of cooperation between language and subject to create a new subject position (64). When I consider these notions along with Quinby's suggestion that the characteristics of discursive practices become part of the subject, I come to the conclusion that women who utilize memoir's subversive practices perform subversive identities. As Siegel points out there is a good argument for both men and women using carefully chosen narrative strategies to position themselves in autobiography because the genre is performative for both genders (25). I see memoir as a narrative strategy of choice for women because it utilizes a relational technology that reinforces rejection as an agent in the formation of identities and opens up an enlightened space to produce new subjectivities. When women heed the call of mother I suggest they can use this relational technology to subvert the rejection process and identities that position them as the unrepresented other. I agree with Buss that women deliberately seek

[5] See page 25-6.

these types of alternate performances in memoir as a way to "resist, experiment and change our performance of self by acts of deliberate reiteration that can then act incrementally to establish identity" (Repossessing 65). But I contend that the alternate roles performed are the contradictory subject positions divined in relation to mother. I see the woman memoir writer the way Kristeva views the true dissident who ruthlessly and irreverently dismantles "the workings of discourse, thought, and existence" and requires "ceaseless analysis, vigilance and will to subversion" ("The Dissident" 299). I propose such women memoirists are capable of the playful language of Kristeva's dissident who overturns, violates and pluralizes to experiment with the limits of identity ("The Dissident" 295).

Maxine Hong Kingston is a classic example of a woman memoirist who deliberately chooses the memoir form as a way to heed the call of the mother and divine a subversive identity in The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts. In a "Personal Statement" published in Approaches to Teaching Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* Kingston admits she begins the search for identity by connecting with what I name memoir's relational technology: "'I' am nothing but who 'I' am in relation to other people. In *The Woman Warrior* 'I' begin the quest for self by understanding the archetypal mother" (23). Although she does not expand on the meaning of archetypal mother I see her as exploring the rejection process that originates in the preoedipal phase to divine a self. I base this claim on Kingston's comments about orality, which Kristeva reminds me is symbolic of a reunion with the mother's body and one of the two modalities that maintain the survival of the rejection process ("Revolution" 79). Debra Shostak reports how Kingston frowns on the treatment of oral history as sacred and how

she prefers to see oral history as raw material, which she empowers on the page through ambiguous writing (55). Shostak argues Kingston is looking for a way to recapture the fluidity of oral transmission in writing: "Memory for Kingston is both bearer and transformer of culture, and it is precisely at the point of ambiguity, where it seems possible that words are changing on the page to reflect contradictory memories, that transformation begins" (55). From a Kristevian perspective I propose that Kingston's oral history is representative of the oralization modality that keeps rejection's logic of renewal in motion and undergoes a transformation on Kingston's memoir page to create fluid and ambiguous identity patterns. Kingston admits in an interview with Arturo Islas that it bothers her when a printed story does not change and that she prefers the oral tradition because it "has the impact of command, of directly influencing action" (qtd. Shostak 55). When Kingston says she empowers words on the page through ambiguous writing, I see it as her use of relational technology that creates ambiguity in her memoir and empowers her words to subvert old subjectivities and create new identity patterns. I suggest the memoir form suits her purposes because it encourages her to explore relation to revolutionize identity. I see Kingston the way Joan Lidoff does as exploring in ever expanding circles "the self as part of a group system in which an individual's inner world is shaped by family mythology, which is formed by cultural systems of thought" (118).

I find Kingston confirms her use of memoir as a subversive tool when she approvingly quotes a reviewer who says she does so because it is "a form which…can neither [be] dismiss[ed] as fiction nor quarrel[ed] with as fact" ("Cultural Mis-readings"102). She also approves of the definition of her book as "a series of stories or anecdotes to illuminate the times rather than be autobiographical" (102). In an interview

Kingston admits to using memoir because of its unique -- and I contend subversive -- practices such as walking the line between fiction and nonfiction and including the stories, myths and dreams of others: "if I was going to write a true biography or autobiography I would have to take into consideration the stories that people tell. I tell the dreams that they have and then when I do that, that border becomes so wide that it contains fiction and nonfiction and both going toward truth" ("Conversation" 35). But perhaps the most telling of all Kingston's statements on her subversiveness is her response to critics who disparaged her for changing the gender of the mythological Ngak Fei from a man to a woman in "White Tigers." When she says, "I mean to take his power for women" ("Personal Statement" 24) she reveals the subversive intentions behind The Woman Warrior. Kingston's response to the critic shares much in common with Smith's description of how a woman creates her autobiographical stance: "Subversively, she rearranges the dominant discourse and the dominant ideology of gender, seizing the language and its powers to turn cultural fictions into her very own story" ("Poetics" 175).

Like Quinby, in the close reading of aspects of Kingston's five chapters that follows, I am interested in the ways The Woman Warrior subjects modern power formations to the scrutiny of one who has been subjected by them (298). Reading Kingston in this text as a woman who refuses to be subjected by the totalizing individuality of the modern power structures laid out by Michel Foucault, Quinby contends Kingston places the emphasis on her relationship with her mother because the mother figure in her American Chinese culture lies at the intersection of two patriarchal technologies of power: the deployment of alliance (Kingston's Chinese heritage) and the

deployment of sexuality (hegemonic American culture)[6], which operate in interlocking ways in the American nuclear family" (301-2). In her reading of the text Quinby contends memoir's unique characteristics enable Kingston to negotiate a confrontation between the two patriarchal technologies of power and construct a new form of subjectivity: "*The Woman Warrior* constructs a new form of subjectivity, what I call an *ideographic selfhood.* This new subjectivity refuses the particular forms of selfhood, knowledge, and artistry that the systems of power of the modern era (including the discourses of autobiography) have made dominant" (298). Unlike Quinby, I intend to focus my analysis of The Woman Warrior on how the Symbolic order subjects the author to what Kristeva calls a double bind when it comes to representation. I propose Kingston utilizes the memoir form as a subversive tool to find her way out of this double bind by heeding the call of the mother and utilizing the relational technology to produce contradictory subject positions that divine identity. In this way she not only reveals the hidden influences that power rejection and produce subjectivities, but also intervenes in the process and shapes a self. This is how the author means to take Ngak Fei's power for women (24). Kingston seeks to answer her own question: "Chinese-Americans, when you

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[6] Quinby explains in the article: "Foucault argues that the deployment of alliance – the 'mechanisms of constraint' that operate through 'a system of marriage, of fixation and development of kinship ties, of transmission of names and possessions' – predominated in the West prior to the eighteenth century. With the decline of monarchial rule and the emergence of modern nation-states, a second technology of power – the deployment of sexuality – came to be superimposed on this system. Rather than operating through constraint and law, this technology functions by 'proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating, and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way" (301-2).

try to understand what things in you that are Chinese, how do you separate what is peculiar to childhood, to poverty, insanities, one family, your mother who marked your growing with stories, from what is Chinese?" (5-6). I agree with those who suggest the title, The Woman Warrior, refers to a woman's need to become a word warrior to disrupt the Symbolic order and unveil the invisible presences that have created her representation as suggested by the subtitle: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts. But I also propose memoir's relational technology enables her to seize the power of the rejection process -- the very device within the Symbolic order that develops identity in the first place -- to overthrow those representations and divine new ones. Through an ongoing process of refusal and projection she overthrows the well-oiled order of communication or descent by projecting the social contradictions underlying the Symbolic order's significations. Indeed, Kingston's use of the two titles can be viewed as elements that refuse and renew in Kristeva's ongoing process of rejection. As Kristeva argues, "Every return of rejection and of the erotic pleasure it produces...disturbs this symbolic capacity and the acquisition of language that fulfills it" ("Revolution" 79).

I see Kingston's choice of the memoir form as a refusal of the Symbolic order's concept of time and truth and as an affirmation that she intends to pursue an alternate method for inquiring into the self. She refutes the Symbolic order's concept of time when she refuses the autobiographical form that requires her to record an entire life in a linear fashion. Instead she brings together a series of inter-related episodic stories into a memoir. In this way I find she also declines the Freudian family romance representation of maturity as marked by linear time and independence by a return to the mother as the starting point of each episode. She counters the Symbolic order's concept of truth when

she brings together fiction and nonfiction in her text, a tactic she learns from her mother: "Whenever she had to warn us about life, my mother told stories that ran like this one, a story to grow up on. She tested our strength to establish realities" (5). As Ruth Jenkins proposes this is how Kingston transforms traditions and represents what Kristeva calls "women's time": "In contrast to the linear, temporal histories recorded by Western, patriarchal narratives, this monumental time measures cyclical experience…in monumental time a generation is more a 'signifying space, a both corporeal and desiring mental space' than a chronology" (68). Through her use of episodic stories and a mix of fiction and nonfiction I argue Kingston intervenes in the action of rejection, disturbs the Symbolic order's concepts of truth and time and opens a conflicted space within which she can subvert stereotypical female subjectivities. She proves that women can transform identity. In line with Kristeva's recommendations for women seeking their own truth in "About Chinese Women," I propose memoir provides Kingston with a way to refuse representations and project new ones and thus allows her the means to connect with her mother tongue without being devoured by the patriarchal symbolism behind it. As Quinby states, Kingston's choice of memoir refuses "alignment with phallic conceptualizations of art that ignore the mother's role as a teacher of language, define the mother tongue as crude in relation to the fatherly text, or see artistry as a symbolic playing out of the oedipal conflict between father and son" (313). I define this as Kingston's strategy for weaving together a corporeal and desiring women's subjectivity within the Symbolic order.

This women's subjectivity employs means that break up the linearity of the signifying chain and pursues alternatives. Quinby argues the subjectivity that emerges

from Kingston's memoir is "interdependent and interrelational, a self that acknowledges separation and difference from others even while cultivating intimacy and interconnection" (306). Through five inter-connected memoirs that draw out the author's identity in relation to various women Kingston writes her self into many possible subject positions that add up in the final chapter. As Buss proposes it is the memoir form that enables Kingston to find her own self-performance through the exploration of the biographies of significant others (Repossessing 35). Building on the work of Buss, who sees the purpose of these relational explorations as a method for de-colonizing the author's past (Repossessing 43), I contend Kingston utilizes a relational technology that functions in the same manner as Kristeva's notion of rejection. I propose she employs this strategy when she oscillates back and forth between the stories of others and her own in a logic of renewal that prevents the stasis of one meaning and one identity. This is how she puts her subjectivity on trial and keeps from being devoured by the Symbolic order in the process.

Kingston's opening chapter, "No Name Woman," is an illustration of Kristeva's theories relative to women's position in the language of the Symbolic order. The chapter title, Kingston's frequent reference to girls as waste and her aunt's story graphically demonstrate women's unrepresented status. On the eve of the start of Maxine's menses her mother issues a warning to her daughter not to transgress the law of the father by way of disclosing a story of an aunt who becomes pregnant out of wedlock in China, is raided and shunned by her village, and subsequently drowns herself and her newborn in the community well. The narrator suggests that to be a woman and have a daughter in starvation time is a waste (6) and that the aunt's in-laws have the power to sell, mortgage

or stone her (8). She notes how her father is frowned upon because he was once traded for a girl (11) and suggests there is only forgiveness for boys (15). In an attempt to understand her aunt's demise Kingston offers embellished descriptions over and above what her mother provides, which I suggest show her aunt as seeking a subjectivity outside the mysterious other prescribed by the Symbolic order. While "Brothers and sisters, newly men and women, had to efface their sexual color and present plain miens" (11), Kingston writes, "At the mirror my aunt combed individuality into her bob"(9) and "used a secret voice, a separate attentiveness" (11). The frightened villagers, representative of a society that sets its life in order according to the law of the Symbolic order, punish the aunt because she causes a "break" in that order (13): "my aunt crossed boundaries not delineated in space" (8). As Kristeva suggests, human symbolism born under monotheism represents the paternal function which centralizes eroticism in the procreative function ("About" 142). Because Kingston projects the aunt as seeking eroticism for purposes other than procreation – "she often worked herself in the mirror, guessing at the colors and shapes that would interest him" (9) – the aunt ends up an outcast and her pregnancy and childbirth are unrecognized by those who live by the Symbolic order. Kristeva argues: "It [human symbolism] is thus caught up in the grip of an abstract symbolic authority which refuses to recognize the growth of the child in the mother's body" (142). In the same way Kingston, finds women's desire cannot be represented: "The work of preservation demands that feelings playing about in one's guts not be turned into action" (8). The aunt, therefore, gives silent birth to her illegitimate child, a metaphor for illegitimate representation. The mother warns against this type of transgression and against telling the aunt's tale on pain that Maxine will be forgotten, and

therefore, in Kristevian terms, unrepresented. The mother's telling of the tale demonstrates how women are pressured into participating in their own repression as Kingston suggests with this quotation: "But there is more to this silence: they want me to participate in her punishment and I have" (16). Clearly, women hold the power to overthrow the system of human symbolism set up by the paternal to foster continuation of the species as demonstrated by the villager's fear, their violent response to the aunt's transgression and the consequent demise of the aunt and her newborn child. The aunt ends her ancestral line with suicide and the drowning of her child. When Kingston interprets the aunt's action as a "spite suicide" (16), I see her comment as a statement about what happens when women are forced into the kind of representations set up by the Symbolic order. I propose the aunt's story demonstrates Kristeva's double bind. The "No Name Woman" is not represented in the Symbolic order and when the aunt does seek representation through eroticism – which she is coerced into by a man -- she loses her power as the unrepresented other. The story demonstrates Kristeva's contention that women are forced into a struggle between the orgasmic body and symbolic prohibition in seeking identity. Of the two extreme subjectivities Kristeva contends are made possible by this double bind, the aunt is presented as the silent underwater hysteric: "her wet hair hanging and skin bloated, waits silently by the water to pull down a substitute" (16).

I propose Kingston employs relational technology to probe into her own subjectivity in "No Name Woman," not only by bringing her life into relation with her dead aunt, but by combining fiction and nonfiction narratives and oral and written components. The juxtaposition of these fluid and fixed discourses makes it possible to reveal the double bind that pushes an aunt to suicide and infanticide. While the aunt is an

invisible presence that haunts Maxine and does not mean her well (16) she is also the place to begin to renew her own subjectivity. In relation to her aunt's adulterous example Kingston seems to imply that any attempt she makes to pursue a subjectivity outside the lines prescribed by the Symbolic order -- in other words to desire -- is a waste of energy. For example, she recalls paying in guilt as a child for such extravagant desires as carnival rides. I assert the author chooses to escape such a repressive identity by seeking the very desire she is forbidden through the use of imagination and oralization. I see the daughter's imaginative fictional embellishments of a mother's oral report -- designed to bring the daughter in line – as Kingston's method for refusing compliance with the aunt's subject position as defined by the Symbolic order and opening the way for an alternate identity for the aunt and Kingston. In addition, I suggest the author seizes control of the rejection process through the use of the modality of oralization to imagine a different story using conditional phrases that imitate the oral such as: "Perhaps she had encountered him" and "Perhaps he worked at an adjoining field," "It could very well have been," (8) and "She may have been" (10). Kingston expresses desire through imagination and a return to the oral and glottal pleasure Kristeva contends combats linear language ("Revolution" 80). I see imagination and orality working hand in hand to spin a heroic story of an aunt who is caught in Kristeva's double bind and kills herself and her child to make a statement about the representations women are forced into by the Symbolic order. Kristeva comments on how imagination and orality work to put the subject on trial/in process when she writes, "Although psychoanalysis may speak of fantasies in literature, it never mentions the economy of the subject bound up with those fantasies that dissolves the symbolic and language" ("Revolution" 76-77).

I also propose Kingston uses memoir's tripartite voice structure as a relational technology to disrupt the signifying process in this chapter. She moves back and forth between her mother's witnessing and her own creative participation opening the way for contradictions, which results in a story that both reinforces the Symbolic order's notion of woman as unrepresented other and at the same time subverts that notion through the telling of the forbidden. Consider that the mother's warning is intended as a cautionary tale to prevent Maxine from a similar transgression that would rob her of her identity like her no name aunt. Yet according to Kristeva women do not have identities as such because they are considered the unrepresented other within the Symbolic order. Therefore I propose that the mother's witnessing of the tale, and Kingston's participatory embellishments in her memoir, serve to accomplish the opposite of the mother's stated mission: "You must not tell anyone" (3). The combination of oral and written transmission creates an unspoken pact between the mother and daughter. They both ensure the aunt will never be forgotten, the mother by telling the details of the story and Kingston by refusing to clean the family name by dismissing the aunt's identity. In so doing the author divines a new representation. She is a woman who will not participate in her aunt's punishment and will allow her to be remembered and to have identity.

In the second memoir episode, "White Tigers," I propose that Kingston's mother introduces the young Maxine to the two choices of identity – silent and powerless and virile superman – which Kristeva contends are open to women under the Symbolic order: "She said I would grow up a wife and a slave, but she taught me the song of the warrior woman, Fa Mu Lan. I would have to grow up a warrior woman" (20). I find the narrator heeds the call of the mother that Kristeva describes as "a call from beyond time" that

"troubles the word" and generates hallucinations, voices, madness ("About" 156-7) as a way to refuse these grim choices and take control of the master narrative for her own purposes as symbolized by the male armor she dons to go into battle. Just as Kristeva suggests women may use poetic language, Maxine listens to her mother's music in the form of a childhood chant about the woman warrior Fa Mu Lan: "I remembered that as a child I had followed my mother about the house, the two of us singing about how Fa Mu Lan fought gloriously and returned alive from war to settle in the village" (20). This chant introduces her to an imaginative power symbolized by a bird, which according to Jung represents a supernatural aid, thoughts and flights of fancy (Cirlot 26-27). By choosing to pursue an alternate subject position introduced by her mother, the oral Fa Mu Lan woman warrior chant, the narrator ventures into a world of symbols outside of time as suggested by this passage: "I am watching the centuries pass in moments because suddenly I understand time, which is spinning and fixed like the North Star" (27). I see her in a world outside of that prescribed by the Symbolic order and associated with the preoedipal phase of human development when identity is tied with the mother because of the fluid imagery – river, waterfall, misty clouds -- used to describe her journey to the home of her new parents/trainers. In this other dimension Maxine's surrogate, or idealized mother, encourages her to be quiet and listen (23) and to allow the natural eroticism associated with her womanhood to flow: "'Let it run.' ('Let it walk' in Chinese)" (31). She teaches herself a new signifying system: "I learned to move my fingers, hands, feet, head and entire body in circles" (23). At the age of 14 years -- an age normally associated with a girl's entry into womanhood -- the now teenage Maxine undergoes a trial of survival in the land of the white tigers. She finds herself walking in

circles "lost from my village" (26), which is suggestive of the more circular notion of women's time alluded to earlier by Jenkins[7]. In this alter universe Maxine's maturity is not measured by the principle of autonomy, or an ability to separate according to what the Symbolic order prescribes. Her success lies in her ability to talk story like her mother, to become a citizen of dragon land and use a language that combines history with imagination to render a truth outside of symbolic time that is so immense she will never see it in its entirety (28). She passes the test when she embellishes on her experience with the white tigers. Although Maxine only "heard the white tigers prowling on the other side of the fire" and "could not distinguish them from the snow patches" (24), in her talk story she says the white tigers stalked her and she "fought them off with burning branches" (27). She does the same with the rabbit, which she says taught her "about self-immolation and how to speed up transmigration" (28), when in her earlier account the rabbit jumps into the fire to offer her a source of food. Once the narrator passes this test she is summoned into the land of the dragon where she has to make her mind large, "as the universe is large, so that there is room for paradoxes" (29), such as the dragon which lives everywhere and is sometimes one or many. The way of knowing that exists in the land of the dragon aligns with Kristeva's suggestion about how women can develop an identity outside that prescribed by the Symbolic order. Maxine can copy the bloodthirsty tigers (symbolic of the phallocentrism of the Symbolic order), but she needs adult wisdom to know dragons, a much larger and illusive truth associated with the maternal.

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[7] See page 156.

In effect, the fantasized woman warrior reaches for the subjectivity that Kristeva contends is intolerable. According to the rules of the Symbolic order a woman cannot occupy a subject position that is both disconnected (like that prescribed by the Freudian family romance) and connected (like that under the "feminist family romance"). Kristeva argues, "The 'character' who becomes the place of this process is one that normative consciousness finds intolerable. For this 'character's' polymorphism is one that knows every perversion and adheres to none, one that moves through every vice without taking up any of them. Unidentical and inauthentic, his is the wisdom of artifice which has no interiority and is constant rejection" ("Revolution" 82). Kingston reminds me of the dangers of this subject position in both fantasy and her real life: "Chinese executed women who disguised themselves as soldiers or students, no matter how bravely they fought or how high they scored on examinations" (39). Within the Symbolic order to pursue an identity that has no interiority is constant rejection and means the decorporealization of self and death. For this reason I see the narrator giving up control over the master narrative. Just as the woman warrior returns to her husband and son to don her black embroidered wedding coat and subject herself to the roles of farm wife, homemaker and mother (45) prescribed by the Chinese culture, Kingston returns to the reality of her American life as a slave within the Symbolic order: "I am useless, one more girl who couldn't be sold" (52). The oscillation between the woman warrior fiction and the narrator's nonfiction experiences in attempting to seek an American identity within a Chinese system of signification emphasizes Kristeva's double bind. Perfect filiality, perfect relation, is not possible in fantasy or real life as the narrator discovers when she reflects on her life: "My American life has been such a disappointment" (45). Maxine

reaches for the greatest symbols of achievements in her American homeland in the form of high marks, but these symbols are not recognized by the economy of production in her motherland of China: "In China there were solutions for what to do with little girls who ate up food and threw tantrums" (46). Though she marches at Berkeley in the sixties to change the world she admits, "I did not turn into a boy" (47). Maxine cannot figure out what is her village (45), what is her basis for identity. She is caught in Kristeva's double bind. If she seeks representation outside of that offered by her Chinese culture, she does not exist. If she challenges female identity as defined by her Chinese culture the best she can hope for is the perverse pride of "bad": "Isn't a bad girl almost a boy?" (47). As Kingston suggests, the Chinese break women with their own tongues (47). Finally Kingston admits, "I had to learn about dying if I wanted to become a swordswoman" (52). In other words she would have to cease to exist according to the terms of subjectivity laid out for women under the Chinese culture: "I refuse to shy my way anymore through our Chinatown, which tasks me with the old sayings and the stories" (53). I propose the representations available to women under the Symbolic order are the burden that Kingston and her fantasy woman warrior have in common, "the words at our backs"(53). This is why Kingston has "so many words – 'chink' words and 'gook' words too – that they do not fit on my skin" (53).

Kristeva clearly outlines the dangers associated with heeding the call of the mother: "Once the moorings of the word, the ego, the superego, begin to slip, life itself can't hang on: death quietly moves in" ("About" 157). According to Kristeva a man can lean on the all-powerful semiotic connection with the mother, which though insignificant in the symbolic, can guide him through the social labyrinth and legitimize his position as

defined within the Symbolic order. A woman cannot do the same because language depends on her link with the father: "For a woman as soon as the father is not calling the tune and language is being torn apart by rhythm, no mother can serve as an axis for the sacred or for farce" ("About" 158). When Kingston reflects on the disparity between her fantasized and real self she writes, "Nobody supports me at the expense of his own adventure…I am not loved enough to be supported" (48). Kristeva contends if a woman tries to provide an axis herself, the result is so-called female homosexuality, identification with male virility…And if no paternal legitimation comes along to dam up the inexhaustible non-symbolized drive, she collapses into psychosis or suicide" ("About" 158). As Kingston writes, "Even now China wraps double binds around my feet" (48). According to Kristeva it is the invasion of a woman's speech by the excesses that originate in the preoedipal and keep the rejection process in motion that, in turn, destroy her symbolic armor ("About" 150). I suggest this is demonstrated in "White Tigers" by how the woman warrior is distracted from battle by "any high cry," which makes milk spill from her breasts and subsequently places her at the mercy of the enemy (41).

Kingston utilizes a relational technology to bring together fantasy and memoir and reveal how the Symbolic order breaks women with their own tongues in "White Tigers": "There is a Chinese word for the female I – which is 'slave.' Break the women with their own tongues" (47). Indeed, the author admits she marries the legends of the female Fa Mu Lan, who took up her father's sword to avenge her family, and that of Ngak Fei the male Patriot, to produce a new myth that would take Ngak Fei's power for women ("Personal Statement" 24). Therefore, Kingston's method resembles the rejection process as described by Kristeva. Recall Kristeva's argument that the rejection process

survives thanks to two modalities – oralization and homosexual phratry – which represent the forces that encourage fluid and fixed subjectivities. By bringing the oral Fa Mu Lan childhood chant taught by her mother that pursues a fluid identity into concourse with the paternally authored Ngak Fei myth that seeks a unified self she reveals the workings of the Symbolic order: "The reporting is the vengeance – not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words" (53).

In "Shaman" and "At The Western Palace" Kingston explores her identity in relation to her mother Brave Orchid and aunt Moon Orchid who I see as symbolizing the two extreme representations – virile and silent psychotic – which Kristeva contends are prescribed for women by the Symbolic order. Kingston also defines the identities of the sisters in relation to each other as indicated by her observation that they are "two old women with faces like mirrors" (118). Kingston goes on to contrast the differences between the women that I see as Kristeva's two extreme representations. Brave Orchid, who appears to adhere to the more virile representation prescribed for women under the Freudian family romance because she pursued education and career in China during her husband's absence in America, is fat like the fat baron the woman warrior confronts (43) and the fat sitting ghost the mother overcomes during her pursuit of education in "Shaman." She is the kind of woman who does not wear ornamental decoration in the way of rings because they get in the way of her work (127) and is "flat and direct" like the inland route she chooses to follow on her journey to Los Angeles to confront the sister's husband who has taken an American wife. She is portrayed as heroic, as one who follows the way of the woman warrior, sees fear as an illness (155) and sees others as the weak ones she must baby (146). In contrast Moon Orchid, who wears rings and is

described as skinny, pale and dainty, seems to comply with female characters that seek the consoling but dangerous female alliances of Hirsch's "feminist family romance." She is portrayed as child-like and weak; as a woman who only plays with paper images of heroines such as Fa Mu Lan (120). Moon Orchid is not very bright (130), wishy washy (126), frightened (125) and basically the "lovely useless type" (128). She has patiently waited in Hong Kong while her husband lived his American life. In contrast to Brave Orchid and her power for talk story, Moon Orchid has not mastered the power of saying that Kristeva contends must occur for women to survive within the Symbolic order.

By bringing these two extremes together I find Kingston demonstrates the invisible presences that have had a hand in the development of the two sisters' contradictory subject positions, Brave Orchid's tough, independent persona and Moon Orchid's more pleasant, but weak and frightened identity. For example, both the sisters approach separation from their husbands in different ways. As Kristeva suggests for women who want to project identities outside those prescribed by the Symbolic order, Brave Orchid uses the time to become knowledgeable in the ways of the scientific, direct language of the Symbolic order so that she can exploit it for use in developing an alternate subjectivity. Moon Orchid lives a life of wealth and leisure in Hong Kong attending to the kind of unconscious drives associated with the maternal and refuses to speak to her estranged American husband who sends her the money she needs to maintain what Kristeva would describe as "a permanent state of expectation" ("About" 155). Brave Orchid believes Moon Orchid will not survive in America unless she detaches from this obsession with satisfying unconscious drives and becomes a master talker like her. When Moon Orchid says she cannot talk boldly to her estranged husband, and by my

reading, take over the master narrative, Brave Orchid responds, "Of course you can. I'II teach you" (126). With this commitment I see Brave Orchid attempting to teach her sister the ways to perform identity, rather than comply with the silent and weak stereotype prescribed by the Symbolic order through talk story. She uses oralization to project a bolder identity for her sister: "We'll make him recognize you. Ha. Won't it be fun to see his face? You'll go to his house. And when his second wife answers the door, you say, 'I want to speak to my husband,' and you name his personal name. 'Tell him I'II be sitting in the family room.' Walk past her as if she were a servant. She'll scold him when he comes home from work, and it'll serve him right. You yell at him too" (125). But without the medical training -- and its implied masculine power over language -- Brave Orchid pursued in "Shaman," Moon Orchid is ill equipped to make the change. Moon Orchid, who is described as speaking in a whisper, shivering and small in the corner of the seat, admits, "Oh, I'm so scared. I can't move. I can't do that in front of all those people – like a stage show. I won't be able to talk" (150). When Brave Orchid tricks her sister's husband to leave his medical office to attend to victims of an automobile accident he confronts Moon Orchid's shaky new subject position: "It's a mistake for you to be here. You can't belong. You don't have the hardness for this country...You can't talk to them [Americans]. You can barely talk to me" (153). The husband, who I see as representative of the law of the father, takes over the narrative and banishes the two sisters to their place within the Symbolic order as the unrepresented other, to "the land of ghosts, and they became ghosts" (153). The subject position constructed by Brave Orchid for her sister crumbles under the husband's cold stare. I suggest Brave Orchid's talk story – a subjectivity constructed of oral maternal as well as paternal symbolism -- is a

contradiction her sister cannot handle. So when Moon Orchid returns to her preoccupation with her unconscious drives as a means of survival, I see her as being metaphorically devoured by the maternal. Unable to negotiate the complex process of rejection that Brave Orchid has mastered, Moon Orchid succumbs to the paranoia of hearing voices and loses her self as suggested by this description: "Her [Moon Orchid] sister's skin hung loose, like a hollowed frog's, as if she had shrunken inside it" (155). "Moon Orchid had misplaced herself, her spirit," writes Kingston, which Brave Orchid sees as lack of attention to self (157). Just as Kristeva predicts about women who fall into psychosis, Moon Orchid ceases to exist and dies in an asylum.

Like anyone who is worried about her sanity, Kingston looks for an outside view of herself in this chapter by utilizing a third-person omniscient narrator. She chooses to have the narrator only speak from a witness stance and not through a participant or reflective voice to provide the reader with an objective report on the impact of the two extreme representations that inform her subject position. Her relational technology enables the narrator to alternate her reports on Brave Orchid and Moon Orchid and thereby show the contradictions and tension created by the Chinese and American traditions. From the perspective of her Chinese aunt Maxine is seen as absent-minded, messy and smeared with ink (131). Brave Orchid sees her children as lazy and thoughtless, but proudly displays their trophy accomplishments (129). From the position of a detached onlooker the narrator is able to make light of the social organism and its paranoid reality that influences her subjectivity by allowing the events and people to speak for themselves. For example, when Brave Orchid insinuates that her children can

never support themselves or get married the sister notices "some of them seemed to have a husband or wife who found them bearable" (132).

Brave Orchid explains the key difference between her and Moon Orchid's subject positions characteristically through talk story: "The difference between mad people and sane people…is that sane people have variety when they talk-story. Mad people have only one story that they talk over and over" (159). In Kristevian terms Brave Orchid sees her sister as being stuck in one story, in stasis. Moon Orchid is unable to evolve a subject position because the rejection process, or the production of contradictory subject positions that divine identity, has come to a halt. When Moon Orchid withdraws from the battle of words to the position of unrepresented and silent other she assumes a position of stasis. She cannot make herself real in a culture that excludes her identity. Brave Orchid succeeds where her sister fails because she seeks to grow an identity in a both/and way, rather than in the either/or way as prescribed by the Symbolic order to, in her words, "make him recognize you" (124). She does not limit her identity to the virile superman. Nor does she sink into oblivion by succumbing to the silent other. Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos argues "Brave Orchid's character demonstrates how women can be more complex than most men because they grow in a nonanalytical 'both/and' way that defies and exceeds perfection" (199). Brave Orchid is able to achieve this subjectivity because she locates herself at the nexus of paternal disconnection and maternal connection, which Maxine finds confusing and at times terrifying. Marilyn Yalom contends Maxine's mother occupies a contradictory self-image because she "is the link between Chinese and American culture, the transmitter of myth, the storyteller, the shuttle between dream and reality" (111). Indeed, argues Demetrakopoulos, Brave Orchid

becomes a more powerful figure because of her ambiguity, "her ruthless life force and almost terrifying energy" (201).

In "Shaman" Kingston attempts to draw out her own identity by tracing the outline of her mother's subjectivity through a process that I associate with the renewal and rejection action of Kristeva's rejection process. I assert it is a complex process of identification and disidentification made possible by memoir. In this chapter I suggest Kingston looks for a way to negotiate the Kristevian double bind which requires her to repress the mother to adhere to a paternally designed autobiographical structure, while at the same time connecting with mother to formulate identity. I find her solution is to put her mother at the core of the book and seek connection through her imaginative eroticization of the oral while disconnecting with the mother's representation as prescribed by the Symbolic order. I see this as her way of de-mysticizing the excesses that drive the rejection process and revealing the invisible presences, or ghosts, that have had a role to play in the development of the mother's identity. The "Shaman" title alone suggests a negotiation of the two elements: the symbolic or scientific, and excesses driven by the semiotic, or unspoken forces from the spiritual realm.

I propose the narrator traces her mother's outline by utilizing the same subversive relational technology Brave Orchid employs to divine her self. Kingston continually subverts the mother's subjectivity as built by paternal symbolism with that constructed by the oral maternal and vice versa to corporealize an ambiguous figure that does not have an identity according to the Symbolic order. For example, Brave Orchid's subject position as a medical doctor in China is supported by scrolls and seals that are associated with the official Symbolic order, yet the wording on the diploma calls for both an oral

and written proficiency (57) and lists her mother's age as 27 when Brave Orchid tells Maxine she is 37 (58). In Kingston's portrayal of the mother and her medical classmates they wear women's dresses, but they are "cut as if women did not have breasts" (59). As well, it is not entirely clear if Brave Orchid's training qualifies her as a midwife only or a doctor as well. She certainly claims to have practiced a full range of medical activities. Her medical training and medical practice in China make it possible for Brave Orchid to align herself with phallocentric symbolism, which Kristeva describes as a logical, simple, positive and scientific form of communication striped of rhythmic and poetic ambiguities ("About" 151). Yet Brave Orchid thinks she cannot adhere to such methods tied to the phallocentric way of knowing: "She [Brave Orchid] suspected she did not have the right kind of brains either, my father the one who can recite whole poems" (64). So Brave Orchid pursues another way of knowing that I find puts as much store in oral knowledge that adheres to a time and truth that lies outside of the Symbolic order: "I'd chant symptoms, and those few words would start a whole chapter of cures tumbling out" (64). Even though it is the sweat of hard work that makes her succeed in medical school, Brave Orchid prefers to position herself as brilliant in the eyes of her classmates by hiding her effort for superstitious reasons that lie outside of a scientific sensibility: "It is much more graceful to appear favored by the gods" (64). Her scientific training is said to make her too practical to invent stories. Yet Brave Orchid becomes a champion storyteller and is able to make people believe because of the intricate and believable details she garners from her studies and marries with her imagination in her oralizations. For example, in order to fight the sitting ghost in the haunted room at the school dormitory Brave Orchid takes a textbook with her (67). She succeeds in banishing the sitting ghost (suggestive of

the fat baron who confronted the woman word warrior in "White Tigers") by criticizing its ability to corporealize itself, refusing its existence and chanting her lessons (71). Through this oscillation – similar to rejection which refuses and accepts, refuses and accepts -- Brave Orchid is able to manipulate time and truth. As a result her fight with the sitting ghost takes 12 years, but only represents a year in the dormitory. Her imaginative witnessing of a mountain wind with a sound so high it could drive a person crazy draws her listeners in to become participants. Yes, the classmates say, they heard (73). Then Kingston draws us back into the present to show how the mother's talk story even draws Maxine into participating when she suggests: "I think my mother said that under the foot of the bed the students found a piece of wood dripping with blood" (75). I propose it becomes clear to the narrator at the end of this episode that women can change rituals by subverting the rejection process that produces identity to "build a path from scraps" which they can follow to new subjectivities. Writes Kingston: "The calling out of her [Brave Orchid's] real descent line would have led her to the wrong place, the village…They pieced together new directions, and my mother's spirit followed them instead of the old footprints" (75-6). In short, I find Brave Orchid's uniquely female medical school experience takes the typical representation of woman offered by the Symbolic order and makes her extraordinary: "She had gone away ordinary and came back miraculous, like the ancient magicians who came down from the mountains" (76). I propose Brave Orchid becomes a powerful presence because, as Kristeva suggests women do, she refuses the purely symbolic representations of her female self as either virile or silent. By bringing the symbolic into concourse with eroticization of the word through talk story she takes on the power of the rejection process and subverts these

extreme identities. Just as she does as a midwife, Brave Orchid combines her scientific know-how with her knowledge of unspeakable excesses to bring life into the world. Indeed, Brave Orchid is compared to the illusive and paradoxical dragon that the woman word warrior could not locate in "White Tigers": "My mother may have been afraid, but she would be a dragoness…She could make herself not weak. During danger she fanned out her dragon claws and riffled her red sequin scales and unfolded her coiling green stripes…Like the dragons living in temple eaves, my mother looked down on plain people who were lonely and afraid" (67). She also writes, "My mother would sometimes be a large animal, barely real in the dark" (101) and calls her a "mysterious masked mother, nose and mouth veiled" (105). Predictably the lives Brave Orchid midwifes into reality do not always comply with the Symbolic order's significations, whether it is a slave girl she mentors into nursing or the ghosts, were-people and apes she abjects from cervixes: "My mother was a midwife to whatever spewed forth…She was not squeamish, though, and deftly caught spewings that were sometimes babies, sometimes monsters" (85).

I propose that in the portion of the text in which Maxine suffers a severe depression the daughter's sense of self unravels because she attempts to heed the call of a mother who defines herself outside of the Symbolic order. To succeed at defining her identity in relation to Brave Orchid would make the narrator the same as the mother, what Kristeva calls a specialist in the unconscious or a witch, as indicated by this comment: "I am really a Dragon, as she is a Dragon, both of us born in dragon years" (109). Kingston has already confirmed in "White Tigers" that dragons are by nature paradoxical. Siegel reminds me that savvy daughters know too close an identification with mother puts their

cultural value at risk (6). Yet Collins contends that women of colour's motherwork involves reconciling just these kinds of contradictory needs concerning identity: "Thus a second dimension of the mothering tradition involves equipping children with skills to confront this contradiction and to challenge systems of racial oppression" (58). According to Collins what appears to be crazy making ambiguity is actually a mother attempting to transmit sophisticated skills to her children, "enabling them to appear submissive while at the same time to be able to challenge inequality" (59). Demetrakopoulos contends that Brave Orchid fulfills this role by constantly keeping Kingston unsettled through stories that she gives and retracts, such as the story about the two children who were born and died in China and her claim that she cut Maxine's frenum (201). The narrator laments, "I don't want to listen to any more of your stories; they have no logic. They scramble me up. You lie with stories" (202) and Brave Orchid answers, "That's what Chinese say. We like to say the opposite" (203).

As Kristeva warns, heeding the call of the mother from beyond the Symbolic order troubles the word ("About" 157). I suggest that trouble manifests itself in Maxine's life through her inability to speak in her early years at school and then her 18-month illness in "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe." Like Moon Orchid, who is really a woman stuck in her childhood, Maxine the child is too young to know how to apply her mother's lessons in contradiction. While Brave Orchid says she cut her daughter's frenum so that she would not be tongue-tied and be able to move in any language (164), what she ends up doing in the short run is disabling Maxine's ability to speak at all. The narrator claims her mother's tampering with her speech makes it hard to talk: "When I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent. A dumbness – a

shame – still cracks my voice in two" (165). Maxine does not speak in school for three years, which I contend represses her ability to perform/project a self, as symbolized by her school paintings covered in black paint that she likens to a stage curtain: "so black and full of possibilities" (165). The corporealization of Maxine's identity is repressed by her inability to express herself. Rather than having a voice that projects a self, the narrator's voice is described as crippled and making sounds like splinters, "bones rubbing jagged against one another" (169). Maxine's mouth is "permanently crooked with effort" (171) because she has "so many secrets to hold in" (182), secrets I propose are symbolic of the underlying causality Kristeva says shape the word and maintain the unity of the Symbolic order ("About" 153). These uncorporealized invisible presences are the ghosts that both terrify and intrigue Maxine. Quinby argues that Maxine's problem is centered on her inability to understand and pronounce the word 'I': "the first person pronoun 'I' is not all simple; nor is it as unified as the 'I' of autobiography implies" (304). According to Quinby the American 'I' "denies its multiplicity and interconnectedness, masquerading as self-contained, independent subjectivity and imposing its will on others," (305) which I suggest is a good description of the power of the symbolic element. Quinby contends Maxine also struggles with the Chinese female 'I' because it is an ideograph that graphically represents women as slaves (305). Because Maxine is forced to confront these ghostly forces that impact on her identity before she knows how to be a master talker like her mother she ends up not talking at all or reading in the barest whisper. This silence nets her a zero IQ from the American school that rates performance based on a student's ability to speak English (183) and the disapproval of her mother for having an ugly duck quacking voice (192). Not surprisingly the narrator begins to have trouble with

the word 'here', "no strong consonant to hang on to" (167) and fears for her sanity: "I thought talking and not talking made the difference between sanity and insanity. Insane people were the ones who couldn't explain themselves" (186). As a witness to the many cases of Chinese immigrant women who are not able to locate their identities in the gap of disidentification created by the contradictions between American and Chinese culture Maxine fears escalate: "I thought every house had to have its crazy woman or crazy girl, every village its idiot. Who would be It at our house? Probably me" (189). I see Maxine's gap of disidentification as caused by her inability to link her identity with solid America (the symbolic) or the invisible world her mother builds around her childhood (the unspoken semiotic excesses that shape the word and identity) as confirmed in her reflection as an adult: "Those of us in the first American generations have had to figure out how the invisible world the emigrants build around our childhoods fits in solid America" (5).

Kingston's use of relational technology demonstrates what Kristeva contends can happen when a daughter heeds the call of the mother and attempts to assume power over the rejection process. The young narrator tries out Brave Orchid's strategy of bullying Moon Orchid into voicing a subject position when Maxine confronts a silent Chinese classmate in the school washroom. The narrator corners the girl "who could not speak up even in Chinese school" (172) in an attempt to free herself from oppression. In other words Maxine attempts to define herself in relation to the other girl: "Her sobs and my sobs bouncing wildly off the tile, sometimes together, sometimes alternative" (181). She thinks if she can redefine the silent girl she can locate her own subjectivity. Her intention to reshape subjectivity comes across in the descriptions of her alter ego as having "baby

soft" cheeks that could be worked as "dough" (176). I suggest she assumes the power over the rejection process by taking on a tough virile persona similar to the subject position Kristeva calls the virile superman: "I wanted tough skin, hard brown skin" (176). Like her mother who slaps the inside of her sister's arm in an attempt to toughen Moon Orchid's persona before confronting her estranged husband, Maxine squeezes the silent classmate's cheeks and tries to get her to form a fist in an attempt to get her to project an identity (177). Maxine's efforts to intervene in the system of signification that defines her classmate as silent do not work because her brutal tactics match those employed by the Symbolic order to repress and deny female representation. At the end of the incident her warning sounds like that issued by her mother in "No Name Woman": "I'm doing this for your own good...Don't dare tell anyone I've been bad to you" (181). I propose Maxine has not mastered her mother's power of saying and therefore does not have the oralization skills she needs to defend her self when the aggressiveness of rejection initiated by her attack on the silent classmate comes back to devour her subjectivity. Like the women artists listed in Kristeva's "About Chinese Women" who committed suicide (157) when they heeded the call of the mother, Maxine metaphorically kills her self. She seeks to free her self from the word and just not be and therefore enters a period of 18 months of nothingness: "It was the best year and a half of my life. Nothing happened" (182).

In order for Maxine to re-build her flattened subjectivity, to corporealize her self, she has to "figure out again how to talk" (182), or how to articulate an identity that is founded on a rejection process that both refuses and projects selves. I propose that Kingston demonstrates how this is done in "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe." As Buss

states the only way to end psycho-social cycles of abuse is to discursively perform them: "We must enact the narrative to see how it enslaves us, so that we may narrate our way out of enslavement and repossess our own stories and the culture of which they are a part" (Repossessing 55). Buss argues Kingston does this by telling the mother's history along with the daughter's experience of that history and showing how the daughter participates in that life's effect (Repossessing 55). I propose an alternate Kristevian view of this model that suggests a need for the author to discursively act out the relationship between the fluid modality of oralization and the fixed modality of homosexual phratry to reveal the subdued social contradictions that have been put in place to allow the divining of identity. Once this soft underbelly of the Symbolic order is revealed I see the author taking on the power of the rejection process, which refuses and projects subject positions, and keeps the identity making process fluid and relational.

In "A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe" Kingston achieves this by avoiding the stasis caused by her brother's short, factual recounting of events (or the homosexual phratry) and becoming an oral performer like her mother who tells outlaw tales "twisted into designs" (163). Quinby argues, "By knotting together her life experiences, even when it means tying a 'cruel knot' of blinding truth, Kingston becomes an 'outlaw knotmaker,' a not-maker or negator of patriarchal law and normalizing power" (316). I would add that when Kingston becomes a "not-maker" she also produces new knots of signification, or contradictory subject positions, that divine new identity patterns. Kingston starts this process by undermining the story of Moon Orchid's trip to meet her estranged husband: "In fact, it wasn't me my brother told about going to Los Angeles; one of my sisters told me what he'd told her" (164). She then elaborates and interrupts

this story with the tale of the ancient knot-makers from Chinese tradition and switches to the story about her mother cutting her frenum. The effect of this process is to cancel out the truth from the previous chapter and produce a new identity for herself as an outlaw storyteller. She then cancels out that truth with her mother's claim that she cut the frenum to avoid knot-making, "so that you would not be tongue-tied" (164). Just as Kristeva's rejection process does, she refuses a subject position, reveals what lies behind it and produces a new identity. Memoir enables her to bring history (or significations developed under the Symbolic order) together with her oral witnessing and participation to produce new identity patterns in her reflective/reflexive voice. In another example she witnesses how Chinese girls are judged by the disciplinary pedagogical regime of the modern era as unintelligent because they cannot speak English, the language of their oppressors: "I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl…Our voices were too soft or nonexistent" (166-7). She then opposes that subject position with her participatory tale of chanting at Chinese school: "The girls were not mute. They screamed and yelled during recess, when there were no rules; they had fist fights" (167). She opposes that subject position in a participation stance by telling about the difficulties she and her sister have finding their voices in American school and then opposes her judgment that the American system is to blame: "You can't entrust your voice to the Chinese, either; they want to capture your voice for their own use" (169). How does she keep this bargaining-like process in motion?: "Talk the Sales Ghosts down. Make them take a loss" (169). In other words it is the continual oscillation between a fixed subject position/judgment and the fluid oral projection. Memoir has the voices to accommodate this oscillation through the witness, participant and reflective/reflexive modes. Indeed, the very fact that these

stances are called voices provides an author like Kingston with an opening to intervene in the rejection process that makes and breaks identities.

According to Amy Ling the narrator has learned well from her mother how to handle the contradictions that I see as products of the rejection process. She proposes that Brave Orchid's stories, though confusing and frightening to Maxine as a child, now serve as a legacy that provide the adult writer Maxine with colour, texture and substance: "Although the daughter/narrator states a preference for the clean, the illuminated, and the plastic, she weaves her actual text from the monstrous, the frightening, the powerful – her mother's stories. The words say one thing; the text does another" (177). I find through emulating her mother's subversive process -- that builds subjectivity according to the Symbolic order and destroys it with maternal oralization and vice versa – Kingston is able to corporealize the ambiguous figure that is her mother and divine a self. This is the same process Brave Orchid uses to raise Maxine and bring her home to a truth and time that exists outside of the Symbolic order. As Kristeva suggests women do, Maxine listens to her mother's music to learn how to transform the sounds of captivity into beautiful music as the poetess Ts'ai Yen does in the final chapter. Kingston says of her talk-story of Ts'ai Yen: "The beginning is hers [Brave Orchid's], the ending mine." Like her mother, Kingston is able to translate the unspeakable – songs from the savage lands, or semiotic excesses – through her own relational instrument of memoir to divine a representable identity that is neither masculine virile, nor silently dying.

Reading Kingston's memoir through Kristeva's theories I find an identity making process that can be accessed by those who are not recognized by the Symbolic order. I see the memoir process -- that enables connection with the unspeakable semiotics

associated with the maternal -- as a means to draw out the contradictions that divine selves. In my final chapter I apply this process to my own memoir writing.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## The great unwritten story:

## Divining the daughter of Eve

This is the New Eve. The Woman Who Is Not Yet

(Kim Chernin, Reinventing Eve xiii)

My mother's name is Evelyn, Eve for short, though I rarely hear her respond to the shorter version. She has not discussed her preference for Evelyn with me, but my imagination suggests, as a good Catholic she wanted to shed the association with original sin. She may have shunned the title, but my mother lived the life of Eve, which branded her the "black sheep" of her family of eight siblings. She searched for joy. She desired. She acted on her desire. Kristeva argues these are the reasons why women are excluded from the power of the word. You could say my mother's story is indicative of the genealogy that led to women's status as unrepresentable other within the Symbolic order. It is Eve's desire that has placed women in the stream in which Woolf says she is a deflected, but stationary fish. The stream Woolf cannot describe (80). The stream in which Woolf took her life, loading her pockets with rocks so that she could sink into oblivion. The place that finally forced her to just not be.

I see this stream as the home of Kristeva's troubled word. As representative of the fluidity of life first experienced by the daughter in a mother's womb that Kristeva argues the Symbolic order does not recognize. The fluidity of identity lost at the Oedipal phase when the daughter is ushered into the Symbolic order and its laws of representation. The

paternal laws that rip her away from the flow of energy enjoyed in relation to her mother in the preoedipal phase. A cathexis Rich says is the "great unwritten story" (Of Woman Born 225). It is a story with which I seem to be obsessed, perhaps because I remember the little girl with short cropped brown hair, pleated gray jumper and white cardigan who looks lost and out of place in her kindergarten class picture. Sharon is the only one wearing glasses and a somber expression. Perhaps she is thinking about that night when her mother disappeared into the blackness. When her mother pried Sharon's tiny arms from her to close the door on the car of the children's aid worker. What must Sharon have been thinking at less than a year of age when the only person to substantiate her existence willingly gave her up to an institution designed by men? Betrayal and abandonment are all adult terms for a baby's pain. I must remember. There is the sensation of falling. Arms flailing. No solid ground to stand on. Sweat and tears. Gasping for air. Steam. Motion. Nausea. A darkness closing in. So thick, so thick I cannot breathe. There is nothing but darkness and strange hands and smells. Soaked with my own sweat and urine I am curled up in a fetal position in a wooden cage, sucking my thumb and staring at nothing. I am unplugged.

I wonder, is there a connection between my absent mother and my claustrophobia. Between my fear of the darkness that threatens to close me? I am reminded of a dream in which:

> *I am at a wedding where a young woman is happily preparing for a ceremony that involves her death. Once she is married she is ceremoniously wrapped in a sheet and placed in a casket where she will be buried alive. The authorities in charge have not wrapped her properly*

> *and continue to rewrap her as she struggles to smile, red faced and terrified. I can feel her agony, but I cannot help her because I am bound by the same order that prescribes her doom. Later that day I realize she is in a tomb suffocating and have trouble catching my breath.*

The young woman is me, but not me. I need to identify with her to fight my way out of a doomed life. But if I become her I will die. I hate her for the ease of her compliance. For her self repression, her silence.

Having read Lazarre's three memoirs in which she searches for the abject maternal, I see that I too may be looking for the maternal in writing. I seek the maternal force that inspired my mother Eve to desire. It is not an easy journey for Woolf and me to swim against the current within which our mothers have lived to procreate our selves. But we cannot survive outside of the Symbolic order, the way a fish cannot survive out of water. We must find a way. I stretch out my hand to Woolf, but she is weighted down. I see that hopeless sadness in her eyes that she describes: "as if I were passive under some sledge-hammer blow; exposed to a whole avalanche of meaning that had heaped itself up and discharged itself upon me, unprotected, with nothing to ward it off" (Moments Of Being 78). She drops to the bottom leaving only swirls of air and water. It is these kinds of patterns that I now explore to divine a self in my own work, as Lazarre has done in her three memoirs. Rather than going with the temporal flow of autobiography, I look for a truth that lies somewhere between my past, present and future, between my mother and me, between my conscious and unconscious self and between language and me. To find the truth that lies outside of the father's time I must break with the force in the stream that keeps me in stasis. With a wave of my arms I temporarily separate from the current of the

father's order. I dare to pursue the kind of subjectivity associated with Hirsch's "feminist family romance," to long for the consoling but dangerous female alliances, but without losing my sense of self to the dark abject maternal. I risk swimming upstream to witness my mother's past and my participation in my infancy and float downstream to apply that knowledge to my present. I dare to imagine and dream many dimensions. My unconscious overflows. I allow myself to drift with the stream until we become one in a way never before experienced. The reason I am willing to risk contact with the abject maternal in this writing is because I have faith that memoir will always seek connection and that I will not get lost. This is the faith that makes it possible for me to practice Rich's re-vision, "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" ("Dead Awaken" 18).

From this fresh perspective I now see that he who names my mother Eve as sinful and evil is afraid of her power to create. It is his way of establishing and institutionalizing attitudes that keep desiring women like her under his control and thus contain his own desires. This is how order is maintained. The mother is sacrificed to keep the word of the father. As Ehrlich comments, "I long drew from observant households a metaphor never written in the Book: the symbolic sacrifice not of Isaac but the Mother" (24). But when I abject my mother from my history, when I discourage the memories we share I lose a part of her and a part of my self in the process. Like Sandra Scofield, who wrote Occasions of Sin, I realize so much was suppressed about my mother's life that the only way I could carry her around inside of me was to shape a story of sin and abandonment (19). I suspect this sad story has kept me from remembering the moments of joy shared with my mother. Perhaps I associated those moments with sin as well. I imagine these are the reasons why

I have not been able to bring passion into my work as a writer until now. Scofield argues that the more bewildered and ashamed you are, the more you avoid reflection and the more you lash out at processes or people who encourage self-awareness (19). In my work as a memoirist I attempt to do the opposite, to embrace reflection, but I struggle uncomfortably with the fit. It is as if I am trying on some new subject position or role.

Like Lazarre I am still searching for self late in life. It has taken me this long to see that my denial of Eve and/or anger towards her representation as sinful, suffering and silent are the means that have prevented me from connecting with the maternal force that divines my identity. Like Lazarre I look to memoir as a divining tool. I see it as a more open process than that offered by autobiography, which seeks to construct a narrative that justifies a predetermined interiority. I am interested in a process that evolves from the tensions created by inconsistencies in my subject positions. I am the daughter of Eve, but I am also the daughter of the father. I wish to exploit the tension inherent in that gap of disidentification to divine my self. But Hirsch's work tells me there are no literary or cultural road maps. I must intuit my own way.

I begin by reaching back through Eve to her mother Eveline, a French Canadian schoolteacher who died when Eve was only five years old. What must it have been like that frigid winter day in 1932 when five-year-old Eve Fortier was dragged away from her mother's cold, dead body in Sault Ste. Marie shrieking and crying "Mama, Mama"? Hauled away by a father who did not know or care about the impact of the separation on Eve's subjectivity as a woman? This musing leads me to an emerging pattern. Perhaps I am interested in Lazarre's series of memoirs because both she and Eve lost their mothers to cancer at a very young age and were encouraged to forget them and because I

temporarily lost my mother as a child. No wonder I feel drawn to the writings of Rich who encourages the continuation of the energy flow between mother and daughter (Of Woman Born 225) and to Kristeva who recommends a herethics that assumes love is what powers that energy. Can it be purely coincidental that Eveline named her youngest daughter Eve(lyn), who gave birth to me, who named my firstborn Evelyn Luci long before I heard of Kristeva's herethics? Such reflection made possible by memoir's reflective/reflexive voice moves a puzzle piece just outside of my awareness into place. Perhaps these are the reasons behind my interest in the unspeakable forces that flow between mother and daughter and the role they play in divining the female self? I am intrigued by the altered thought patterns resulting from these new associations and by the potential for identity making.

This is quite a change in subjectivity for me because I have been running from these kinds of unspeakable forces all my life. Kristeva contends all women avoid connection with such unspeakable forces because it leads to contradictory subject positions, which are untenable in a society ruled by a patriarchally constructed Symbolic order that demands unity. I certainly did my best to avoid connection with such forces. As a child I turned inward suffering every illness imaginable from scarlet fever, and measles, to whooping cough and petit mal epilepsy. Today as an adult these unspeakable forces call to me in night terrors and nightmares that blur the line between reality and dream. They take me on long treks through the doorway of my soul under the hush of night. I stand solitary on frigid shorelines bounded by glaciers and icebergs, on beaches surrounded by oceans, lakes and rivers, in cave dwellings and high rise buildings with no exits and on mountains, skyscrapers and elevators that overlook everything, but lead

nowhere. From such dreams I have found windows to the nameless force that I sense keeps a certain truth imprisoned, but still no doorways out. I recall one dream in particular in which a blue robed entity with a transparent face and eyes like oceans leads me to an immense precipice overlooking what I think is a starry sky. "Look closer my child," it says pointing to one of a billion white spirals." I respond, "My God, they are universes."

When I first wrote about my confrontations with these frightening forces in a memoir writing class four years ago I said it felt as if the delicate mental barriers that separate sense and nonsense were imploding and exploding all at once. If it is true that we are never given more than we can handle, I asked, why am I being given so much? Today as a graduate student in memoir writing I can answer my own question. I see the unspeakable forces as representative of the semiotic element Kristeva contends must come into relation with the symbolic element to produce representations in language. I was experiencing the effects of semiotic drive forces associated with the maternal that I didn't want to acknowledge. The more interested I became in the force that would help me divine identity in relation to the maternal, the more confused my subject position became. Lazarre's identity crisis in her second book (which is resolved in her third book) demonstrates the psychological dangers associated with a semiotic and symbolic interaction that occurs independent of the maternal chora that Kristeva argues is necessary to shape identity. Ehrlich's book helps me to see how this interactive process can be put to work to help me divine identity in memoir. Within memoir, what I now regard as a type of semiotic chora, Ehrlich brings the semiotics linked to the traditions and kosher ways of her Jewish faith into relation with the symbols that seem to lack

meaning in her everyday life. I am being given what I see as "so much" in the way of semiotic drive force because that is the "mother's music" I need to listen to in order to construct identity in memoir. Now when I read women's memoirs and construct my own I listen for the unspoken, repressed, new, eccentric, incomprehensible, that which Kristeva says "disturbs the mutual understanding of the established powers" ("About" 156).

In an autocritical essay I wrote three years ago I imagine my mother as a two headed dragon. I see her curled up in front of the patriarchal stronghold, her long, perfectly manicured and painted claws are a stark contrast to her pink tissue paper thin skin, infused with drab gray spots from a lifetime of smoking. She has her glasses on one head (this is the short sighted one, a trait she passes on to her daughters) and has one limb poised ready to pounce on whatever daughter attempts to attack the imperial patriarchal palace. Part of me understands this sad monster. She thinks her very existence depends on maintaining this posture. But another part of me sees how toxic her presence is in the lives of my sisters and me. For that reason I call my dragon mother's stories a form of "talk-sick," a play on toxic and a concept I align with the orality of Kingston's mother's talk story. Throughout our growing up my sisters and I were fired upon by repetitive and confusing "talk-sick" messages. Mother promoted the wife as slave stereotype Kingston talks about in her book by accepting the nickname "mouse" from my stepfather and not uttering a word in our defense when he physically abused her and us[1]. But there is another dragonhead, which has a strong chin and clear eyes that stare longingly at the

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[1] Excerpts taken from my essay "Mothers, Daughters and Dragons – An Autocritical Reading of The Woman Warrior" written April 12, 2001: 5-7.

horizon. This dragon wanted to write. But when my father left her alone with four kids to support she was forced to become a bookkeeper, pushing pens, adding machines and typewriters all day and cooking over a hot stove, pumping a sewing machine and twisting wool into sweaters and scarves at night. This mother dragon worked every day of her life for forty years, sick or well, and earned the respect and admiration of her co-workers who honoured her with a retirement celebration. Now, well into her 70s, she lives on her own and supports herself with her pension. Her story no longer requires a man to occasion the narrative. A few years ago she came to my undergraduate graduation and encouraged me to pursue the same kind of role when she whispered: "You see, you can do anything you want if you put your mind to it"[2].

To divine my identity in memoir I see how I will need to explore the gap of disidentification created by the unspeakable forces associated with my mother's "talk-sick." Building on Smith's concept of the actress called to many subject positions, I now see myself as such a performer torn between the choice of two roles Kristeva says women are allowed under the Symbolic order: that of silent, hysteric/victim or virile superman. In my analysis of Kingston's work using Kristevian rejection theory I learn how to use the tools of the Symbolic order to build a female self outside of these two extremes, without dismantling the father's house. I see how I can make the alternation Kristeva recommends, between time and its truth, identity and loss, history and that which produces it ("About" 156), through the use of what I call memoir's relational technologies. I can emulate the rejection process Kristeva contends produces representation and identity through this back and forth motion between: the public and

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[2] Ibid: 8-9.

the private; nonfiction and creative forms such as poetry and dreams; my past, present and future; my relations with significant people and events; and memoir's three voices.

I find it interesting that this autocritical study has led me back to a concept I did not know how to articulate when I first started to investigate memoir writing four years ago. I began to write a memoir entitled Not Another Word and dwelled on the topics of truth and voice. Though I had no idea at the time what was behind the title or the obsessions with truth and voice, I insisted I was "born shut," that forces which imprisoned the breath of my soul were at work before I was born and that when I emerged from my mother's womb those forces broke my infant spirit. I suggest I was instinctually aware of invisible presences influencing my subjectivity, but I did not know how to give them voice. I had the opposite problem Lazarre had in her second book. While Lazarre could not personalize her experience as a daughter of a mother, I was so wrapped up in the personal I could not see the broader issues associated with women's representation in language. I discovered an alternation between the two helped me to emulate the conflict between the symbols and the unspeakable forces of language to create the contradictory forces that divine identity. As I worked my way through this autocritical study -- weaving my personal story and reflections in and out of my theoretical analyses and close readings and formulating positions in relation to other women authors and members of my family -- the unknown forces that shaped my original subjectivity became more visible. I began to see my absent mother as the maternal force Chodorow argues must be part of every daughter's self-making process and her "talk sick" as a type of semiotic excess Kristeva contends must be part of the Symbolic order's

mechanisms for developing representations. Each chapter became a new way into my self, a road map into an undiscovered matriarchal dimension as reflected in this dream:

> *I am in a kayak being propelled forward by an unknown force on a very cold body of water into a series of caves. I have entered the cavern wearing some sort of mask that is making it difficult for me to breathe. In one very dim grotto I look up to dark gray stone, but on closer examination realize the walls are engraved with words. Not just a few words, but billions of words, etched one on top of the other and overlapping. As I come closer I see there are tunnels in between each word. I am unsure whether the cave means life or death for me, but one thing is certain. There is no easy way out. I remove the mask and search for an opening.*

I use this study as an opening, or a way into writing my own memoir about my relationship with a maternal force that has troubled my words for over fifty years. Like the ancient mariners who feared dragons beyond the edge of the known world, I tremble at the possibility that a journey beyond the known map of the female self will bring me face-to-face with a two-headed monster of my own making that I cannot bear to live with. Even now as I write this conclusion I struggle to hold back the tears that blur the map's boundaries. But it is a risk I am willing to take if it means I can begin to lighten the weight of the words that sunk Woolf into oblivion and that suppress Eve's desire for self. I am the daughter of the new Eve. The woman who is not yet.

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