THE MATERNAL METAPHOR

A STUDY OF 'THE MOTHER' IN THE NOVELS OF ELIZABETH JOLLEY.

by

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ABSTRACT

THE MATERNAL METAPHOR: A STUDY OF 'THE MOTHER' IN THE NOVELS OF ELIZABETH JOLLEY.

Julia Kristeva's work on maternity suggests the possibility of constructing a maternal metaphor which positions the mother at a pivotal site as a thoroughfare between 'nature' and 'culture' in a process that unsettles patriarchal constructions of subjectivity, representation and meaning. Kristeva describes language as a birthing process, creating a split symbolization on the threshold of symbolic structures and bodily drives. The maternal body functions as a representation of the postmodern construction of the splitting process of signification and the split and fragmentary subject. The split subjectivity that the mother represents interrogates traditional structures of language and society and offers a multiplicity of perspectives and positions for women's writing.

Kristeva suggests that the maternal body functions as a threshold, maintaining and yet threatening socio-symbolic structures; as a filter for the repressed maternal or semiotic aspects of language and society; and as a thoroughfare which links the semiotic and symbolic. The maternal metaphor thus offers a linguistic model in which the process of subject formation and literary production are enacted in relation to the mother's body and the maternal metaphor allows for a recognition of the semiotic in language and the maternal in society.

The writing of Elizabeth Jolley lends itself to an analysis that uses the maternal metaphor. The mother occupies an interesting, ambivalent position in Jolley's novels. The mother figure in her texts often disrupts bodily and social constraints and her marginalized position functions to decentre narrative and linguistic structures. Jolley's writing reveals the social and linguistic conflict of woman as mother: the need to 'write the mother,' to confront the mother, to reclaim repressed maternal elements; but also the need to 'write out the mother,' to establish boundaries between self and mother, yet to acknowledge the porous nature of these boundaries.

The maternal metaphor effects a linguistic rupture which breaches the 'master narrative' and positions woman in the maternal thoroughfare, where multiple narratives fold and unfold. This thesis examines Jolley's writing to reveal the often hidden pathways of the maternal thoroughfare, which, through the use of carnivalesque narrative techniques, articulate the semiotic in the symbolic, in a process which reclaims the mother through language.
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This thesis is a study of 'the Mother' in Elizabeth Jolley's works. Originally I wrote on all of Jolley's books, but, because of the length of the thesis, drastic editing was required. A decision was made to confine the study to Jolley's novels, which meant excluding the short stories, with their very interesting cleaning woman figure, and the more personal comments in *Central Mischief*. Elizabeth Jolley herself further complicated matters by releasing another novel, *The Georges' Wife*, after this thesis was written. She very generously allowed me to read her manuscript copy but, because of the constraints of length, I have not been able to include a discussion of the novel.

My referencing format is based on the MLA Style Manual, 1985 edition, using endnotes, with the exception of Jolley's works which are referenced in the body of the thesis, with the following abbreviations. The list indicates the editions I have used:

- **CF** *Cabin Fever* (Ringwood: Viking-Penguin, 1990)
- **CM** *Central Mischief*, ed. Caroline Lurie (Ringwood: Viking-Penguin, 1992)
- **F** *Foxybaby* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1985)
- **MH** *Milk and Honey* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1984)
- **MPI** *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1983)
- **Mr SR** *Mr. Scobie's Riddle* (Ringwood, Penguin, 1983)
- **N** *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1981)
- **P** *Palomino* (St Lucia: Queensland University Press, 1984)
- **SM** *The Sugar Mother* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1988)
- **Well** *The Well* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1987)
- **WL** *Woman in a Lampshade* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1983)
Chapter 1: The Maternal Metaphor

The mother's body has been used as the site of competing discourses, at the intersection of biological and cultural constructions. Traditionally, mothering has been aligned with nature and the body rather than with cultural production, yet childbirth has been appropriated as a metaphor of creativity for male cultural production and maternity has become an objectified icon of that production. Could mothering be refigured? Is it possible to use reproduction as a basis for constituting woman as speaking subject or will it trap her in the traditional discourse on motherhood, spoken for and by patriarchal models? Would different metaphors for motherhood effect changes in women's social situation?

Maternity is, potentially, the site for a creative transformation of alternative speaking positions and social and linguistic models of subjectivity and signification. Contemporary critical thought suggests that social meaning and individual consciousness are produced within language, constructed by language, rather than being reflected by language. A shift in consciousness and rhetoric, from a belief in an intrinsic nature of being to one which recognizes the contingency of language, suggests the possibility of constructing new models of subjectivity and meaning, which has interesting implications for the social construction of women as reproducers and as cultural producers. In this thesis, I use Julia Kristeva's work on maternity to construct a maternal metaphor which demonstrates how the mother may be represented as a pivotal site, functioning as a thoroughfare between 'nature' and 'culture' in a process that unsettles patriarchal concepts of subjectivity, representation and meaning.

Julia Kristeva, in 'A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident,' claims that in the contemporary fragmentation of social and linguistic structures woman occupies an unique position as a dissident because, as woman, she is positioned as outside the Law, yet, as mother, she is the means of its continuation. Because pregnancy mediates the biological and social function, it offers a revolutionary basis for a dissident challenge to the paternal control of Law and language. The pregnant body represents the place of splitting, the site of self and other, and the threshold, the means of entry into social structures. Woman thus becomes the pivotal point through which natural and cultural processes are enacted:

If pregnancy is a threshold between nature and culture, maternity is a bridge between singularity and ethics. Through the events of her life, a woman thus finds herself at the pivot of sociality – she is at once the guarantee and a threat to its stability.

Woman as mother is at this threshold, the thoroughfare between semiotic drives and
desires of the body and the symbolic encoding of language and culture, and therefore a
significant site for constructions of knowledge and being.

A linguistic model of pregnancy and maternity may be used to allow women to
claim a speaking position and to challenge phallogocentric representations of being and
knowing. Pregnancy, as a linguistic model, at the intersection of biological and cultural
constructs, can be used to represent a reclaiming of the material reality of women's
experience, enacted in a variety of specific practices which site women as both working
with and opposing socio-symbolic structures. Pregnancy represents a strategic position
in maternal and paternal traditions of knowledge. For women, pregnancy represents a
model of being within patriarchy and outside it, since, both sexually and socially,
pregnancy represents woman at the point of greatest collusion with man and the point of
greatest difference. Pregnancy is the site of desire, instincts and drives, while it is also
the point of entry into the patriarchal constructs of family and society. The pregnant
woman, or the maternal body thus represents a 'crisis' or unsettling of meaning and
relationships within the symbolic order.

In this thesis I consider how the mother's body may be read in order to give
woman a speaking position within social, psychoanalytic and literary theories that are
still based on masculinist models. If women's specific constructions of knowledge and
language, in so far as they differ from men's, are not incorporated into the rhetoric and
tropes of linguistic structures, then women are excluded by language, as Lacan claims:

There is woman only as excluded by the nature of things which is the
nature of words.4

If, as Lacan suggests, words determine the way things are, if linguistic practice can be
said to constitute social practice, then change is necessary in the structure of
signification and meaning in order to effect social change. Despite Lacan's insistence on
the signifying system, his representation of woman's lack in the symbolic order is based
on his 'speculation' on the biological representation of woman as castrated, revealing
how bodily morphology is incorporated into linguistic structures.5

There is an integral relationship between the body and language. Gender/power
distinctions are incorporated in the structure of language. Language has become the site
of competing discourses, competing ways of giving meaning to the world. Luce
Irigaray, in Speculum of the Other Woman,6 claims that in discourse woman's place is to
have no place, but to be a reflecting surface that enables man's speculation. Woman
functions as a site of negativity into which man gazes in order to have his reflection
given back to him by woman. In her analysis Irigaray reveals the 'blind spot' of the
master's discourse, the absence that is woman in philosophical and psychoanalytic
discourse is woman's sexual difference which is represented in phallogocentric discourse
as lack or castration. Irigaray claims that the dominant phallogocentric images of philosophical discourse have produced 'hard,' rigorous speculation of a theoretical, rational nature, which prioritizes the visual and logical. An alternative female sexual imagery enables the construction of a signifying practice that has the potential to be fluid, multiple, diffuse. According to Irigaray, just as a 'woman has sex organs more or less everywhere,' so a female based language is constantly weaving, embracing, tactile, touching other meanings. The body Irigaray writes about is not an essential, biological one, but a socio-linguistic construction, which enables the mother's body to be used as a model for alternative representations of subjectivity and language. Thus the maternal metaphor can be used to represent a disruptive, ambiguous, heterogeneous signifying process with which to deconstruct and challenge phallomorphic language and patriarchal structures, to question male thought with its assumption of unitary logic and truth and to subvert structure, argument and metaphors. New linguistic forms and metaphors offer the possibility of creating new worlds with words.

Men's cultural production is traditionally represented as transcending biological reproduction by women, yet the fantasy of male desire for reproduction is suggested by the proliferation of metaphors of literary maternity, such as Freud's 'prolonged mental labor' that he felt was necessary to give birth to his theories. Derrida also desires to give birth, even if the child so produced is a monster:

> Here there is a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose conception, formation, gestation, and labor we are only catching a glimpse of today. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operations of childbearing – but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity. [italics are Derrida's]

The mother is silenced in these representations. Hélène Cixous claims that the model of male maternity/paternity is built on a silenced binary opposition, which has denied the creative power of women: 'it is the father, then, who acts the part, who is the mother.' Western civilization's story has come to be represented by the Oedipal father/son myth which incorporates a dream of male creation, the desire to be 'god the mother,' as Cixous suggests when she writes:

> And dreams of filiation
that is masculine, dream
of God the father
issuing from himself
The Father/son dream of origin and omnipotence is, according to Cixous, based on the silenced mother.

Adrienne Rich's birthing metaphor with which she concludes *Of Woman Born*, suggests it is necessary for women to reclaim the linguistic power of their reproductive and productive potential:

The repossession by women of our bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers. The female body has been both territory and machine, virgin wilderness to be exploited and assembly-line turning out life. We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world women will truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose) but the visions, and the thinking, necessary to sustain, console, and alter human existence - a new relationship to the universe. Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, motherhood, work, community, intimacy will develop new meanings; thinking itself will be transformed.

This is where we have to begin.

Rich urges women to *think through the body* as a way of uniting nature and culture, mind and body, linguistic and social structures, in order to use the creative maternal capacity as a basis for knowledge and power.

A fear of being labelled 'essentialist' has made such claims unfashionable. However, Foucault's analysis of power relations suggests that it is possible to analyse the body as a site of struggles for power and resistance without being tied to biological or essentialist concepts. I am not arguing for an essentialist positing of the maternal as a fixed category, but rather for a restructuring of linguistic forms in order to incorporate woman's relation to the mother as a site of subjectivity rather than as one of negativity. Subjectivity is grounded in historically specific conditions of language use, ideological processes and cultural practice. To deny the specificities of women's experience allows woman to be spoken for within masculinist discourse.

Currently, literary criticism recognizes that the discourse of Western civilization has been based on a linguistic fiction; the construction of a sovereign subject, an idealised 'huMAN' who has been enthroned as the autonomous self, subject of literature and culture. A masculine perspective, assumed to be universal, has been the focus of knowledge and history. It is 'His' story that has been told in what Lyotard has termed the 'grand narrative' of history, philosophy, religion, science and literature. This 'master narrative' speaks with authority, claiming origin, truth and unity in the Name-
of-the-Father. The term 'phallogocentrism' indicates how the discursive, rational and masculine focus of Western civilization which is based on an external, unitary form of knowledge, such as Plato's Forms, the Logos, or Lacan's transcendent signifier, can come to be represented by the phallus, symbol of male power, which becomes the basis for the exclusion of women, the writing out of women as negativity or lack.

However, once the unified subject is problematized and the notion of 'Man' as the foundation of Western concepts of reason and being is deconstructed, new subject positions become possible. As postmodernist discourse shifts boundaries and opens up spaces, terms such as 'woman,' 'feminine' and 'mother' can ideally fold and unfold to allow a free play of difference, a multiplicity of speaking positions and perspectives which can unsettle patriarchally constructed hierarchies. In Derrida's critique of Western phallogocentrism 'the feminine' represents the rupture in discourse, a site of resistance and negativity. Derrida's 'hinge' words suggest a site of undecideability, an area of free play where absence and presence, sameness and difference coexist.

Deconstructionist discourse appears to provide a speaking position for women, but it may become a male strategy, which valorizes 'the feminine' in male artistic production, as Kristeva's analysis of male artists demonstrates. In 'Displacement and the Discourse of Woman' Spivak asks: 'Can Derrida's critique provide us a network of concept–metaphors that does not appropriate or displace the figure of woman?' In her analysis of Derrida's metaphors she claims that woman is doubly displaced: 'Woman will be my subject' says Derrida, speaking for her, making her the object with which he appropriates the subject position. Derrida uses the metaphor of the 'invaginated text' and the hymen to describes the locus of rupture, but his valorization of the feminine positions woman as 'non–identity' and he becomes the master of discourse, dreaming of rupturing and inseminating the text: 'writing [hymen] prepares to receive the seminal spurt' or choosing not to, but rather preferring to spill his seed on the ground in a process of dissemination. Derrida's dissemination and his birthing of monsters does not appear to be very productive for women.

Spivak suggests that the body of woman as mother might be a possible locus of woman's claim for a site of resistance, as the embodiment of the site of the other, but, also, as the site of 'law;' for as mother, woman embodies a legitimacy because she knows the child is hers:

In this narrow but "effective" and "real" sense, in the body of the woman as mother, the opposition between displacement and logocentrism might itself be deconstructed. Not merely as the undecidable crease of the hymen or envied place of the fetish, but also as the repressed place of production can the woman stand as a limit to deconstruction.

Men's knowledge of paternity can only be speculative, thus it must be claimed through
Law and the device of the 'Name-of-the-Father,' which has become the basis of phallogocentric linguistic and social structures. Women's knowledge of maternity, grounded in their body, but situated within cultural practices, suggests an alternative, possibly more valid site for representations of cultural reproduction. Childbirth can be said to represent a situated site of knowledge,30 grounded in specific knowledges of birthing and enacted through the interplay of 'nature' and 'culture.'

Western culture has contained and constrained the discourse of maternity, possibly because of its potential to unsettle linguistic and social structures. Patriarchal metaphors have represented the mother as either a phallic mother, to be feared and resisted, or as a virgin mother, and the dominant relationship has been the mother/son one. The pregnant body can, however, represent the 'becoming-to-be' of a site for new constructions of language, subjectivity and social forms.

The pregnant body can be used to represent the postmodern construction of the splitting process of signification and the split and diverse subject, which Kristeva refers to as a 'subject-in-process.' The pregnant body challenges the liberal humanist construction of the autonomous self, and the binary opposition of self and other. Pregnancy represents the embodiment of the co-existence and differentiation of self and other, the self growing another self, the one that is two and the two that are one, the centre which stretches to become the margins, the margin which is contained within the centre. Pregnancy is the site of difference, the deferral of meaning, through the subject-in-process in the womb and the social subject 'woman' in the process of becoming 'mother.' Mother and child are intimately related to one another, yet distinct, being same yet different. The pregnant body functions as a deferral of meaning which enables the construction of a model of self that is multiple and fluid. Kristeva's formulation of the 'subject-in-process,' which draws on the association of the child separating from the mother, offers a linguistic model that challenges phallogocentric models of the unified subject, and offers instead a model in which subjectivity and meaning are constantly reproduced through discursive strategies, and which thus offers the possibility of heterogeneous speaking sites for the separating subject and the woman as mother and 'other-than-mother.'

Deleuze and Guattari talk of a disjunctive that remains disjunctive, is nonrestrictive and affirmative:

A disjunction that remains disjunctive, and that still affirms the disjoined terms, that affirms them throughout their entire distance, without restricting one by the other or excluding the other from the one, is perhaps the greatest paradox. "Either . . . or . . . or," instead of "either/or." [italics in original]
The maternal metaphor functions as a multiple disjunctive that exceeds the excluding nature of binary oppositions and allows for the construction of heterogeneity and fluidity in reading and writing strategies and the reformulation of linguistic and social models.

I use the term 'metaphor' because the maternal metaphor offers a variety of association, making it an open-ended and diverse model. A metaphorical model, perhaps more so than a metonymic one, recognizes the linguistic construction of the mother's body and dissociates any particular mother from an 'essentialist' positing of her body. Metaphor functions by associating a diversity of coupled and uncoupled differences, through linking disjointed terms, in a sliding and folding between like/unlike, same/different. Metaphor functions on the burgeoning of difference, while maintaining the link of similarity. However, the maternal metaphor can also functions metonymically, incorporating women's fluid, contiguous relations with one another, or allowing for a variety of material, contextual inscriptions of difference within/among women. Metaphor allows for the linguistic substitution of the mother's body, however this involves the metonymic displacement and deferral of desire. It might be necessary to construct a maternal metaphor which functions as a metaphor for metonymy. Diana Fuss suggests this of Irigaray's model of the 'two lips,' thus deconstructing the metaphor/metonymy binarism.

Kristeva uses the maternal body as a metaphor for writing. In 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini,' Kristeva describes the formation of poetic language as being like the birthing process, creating a split symbolization on the threshold of language and instinctual drives, created out of and partaking of both the symbolic and the semiotic. She represents the maternal body as acting as a thoroughfare between the semiotic and symbolic, terms she uses to refer to the linguistic equivalent of the pre-Oedipal and Oedipal stages of the child's development. The semiotic refers to pre-verbal, pre-Oedipal instincts, drives and desires which are represented in language as irruptions of the linguistic system by carnivalesque challenges to meaning and unity which function to 'connect and orient the body to the mother.' The symbolic refers to the rational discourse of the social and signifying system. In 'Revolution in Poetic Language,' Kristeva argues that the signifying process and the speaking subject are constituted by a dialectical process between the semiotic and the symbolic:

Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he[sic] produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both.

The semiotic is subject to social order and the symbolic is dependant on the semiotic. The subject-in-process and poetic language are continually being formed by the
interactive movement between the semiotic and the symbolic by means of the maternal bridge or thoroughfare. In the process of subject formation and literary production, the maternal metaphor provides a thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic, which allows for the articulation of the drives and desires in the symbolic. Kristeva describes the maternal body as functioning as 'a filter . . . a thoroughfare, a threshold where "nature" confronts "culture."' Poetic discourse functions as the dialectical process of incorporating semiotic and symbolic elements. Thus the maternal body represents the desire for the intersection of sign and rhythm, the intersection of rationality, language and culture with instincts, drives and desire. The breach or rupture of the symbolic by the pre-Oedipal, the semiotic chora or maternal womb-like space, functions as desire for maternal jouissance that is a reclaiming of the maternal body through language.

The three images which Kristeva uses in relation to the maternal metaphor; those of filter, thoroughfare and threshold, function differently. If we accept the Freudian Oedipal theory, the child must reject the mother in order to enter the symbolic order of Law and language, hence irruptions of the semiotic into the symbolic can be said to be filtered through the mother's body. But if the mother's body is represented as the thoroughfare for the passage between the semiotic and the symbolic then the mother becomes the privileged vehicle of language and subjectivity. Kristeva favours the male artist as inscriber of the maternal metaphor, because of his privileged position in the symbolic, and she claims that it is the child who enables the mother to have access to the symbolic; it is the child's entry into the symbolic that offers the mother the chance to escape from the risk of psychotic entrapment in the pre-Oedipal, and the chance to form 'that relationship with the symbolic and ethic Other so difficult to achieve for a woman.' Her analyses of subversive writing strategies usually focus on the male artist because of his desire to claim 'maternal jouissance,' that is, a reclaiming of the child's pleasure in the mother's body, which he achieves by speaking the semiotic in the symbolic. Kristeva describes this as a 'kind of incest,' which functions as a reconstruction of the maternal body in language. In this thesis I argue for a reclaiming of the woman artist's desire for the mother's body. Sometimes the maternal experience may be filtered through the Freudian paradigm, or, the woman as writer may be placed on the threshold, mediating the semiotic into the symbolic. Certain writing also reveals the trace of a hidden path, a secret thoroughfare that links the mother/child body and the semiotic to the symbolic. Thus a study of the treatment of motherhood by women writers establishes a basis for the reclaiming of language and subjectivity for women. It is this process which I examine in my study of Elizabeth Jolley's writing.

In Julia Kristeva's work the maternal metaphor works within and yet across patriarchal structures. Kristeva claims that maternity is a function, a space, a process
without a subject. For her, pregnancy does not involve the mother's agency or identity. Kristeva's argument resists essentialization and valorization through inscribing the maternal metaphor as a site of linguistic and social rupture, but the mother risks losing her subjectivity.

Kristeva's maternal model is vulnerable because of her reliance on a Freudian/Lacanian model of subjectivity. Lacan's analysis fragments the autonomous subject and allows for the filtering of the unconscious into the symbolic and a decentring of self. He claims that the concept of a unified, autonomous self is a fiction created by language. His linguistic subject allows for the possibility of a variety of speaking positions, but it is done from a phallocentric position, through entry into language, which is seen by Lacan to be effected through the Name-of-the-Father.

Lacan posits a split and shifting subjectivity, created through the child's image of himself in a mirror. This image is a reflection, an imaginary self. In Lacan's model there is no unified self, only multiple, partial representations, but an 'illusion of self' is created, an 'alienated subjectivity,' which the child learns to project to the external world as the image of self. The free flow between the child and the image provides a continuous reflection, hence there is a sense of fullness and contentment and an illusion of integrity and autonomy is created, to use Lacan's imagery, it is 'pregnant' with illusions of 'I'. Lacan's birthing image suggests his narcissistic desire for self-creation, in which woman as mother is silenced. Lacan 'forgets' that the first image the child forms of itself is not in the mirror but reflected from the mother's eyes. Winnicott, however, acknowledges that 'the precursor of the mirror is the mother's face' Winnicott's work in this area, based on a response to Lacan's paper, 'Le Stade du Miroir,' suggests that a child's sense of self is formed through the mother 'mirroring' the child in an interactive process in which the child sees itself in the mother's eyes and also sees the mother's face. This image, rather than working on the binary separation of the subject/object of Lacan, or even, as Winnicott supposes, on a self/other model, is based on an intrasubjective perception which could be termed 'self/other/self,' a concept which I discuss in my chapter on Elizabeth Jolley's novel, Palomino. The term 'self/other/self' suggests that the child, in gazing at him/her/self in the mother/mirror, sees an other, a self with whom s/he identifies, but also a self who is separate, an otherself. Likewise the mother recognizes the symbiotic sameness of her relationship with the child, she holds the child in her gaze, but she also maintains her separate otherness. While the child is formed and mirrored by that gaze the mother has an existence beyond it, a network of experiences beyond the maternal inscription. Motherhood thus becomes the site of multiple displacements and an interweaving of the self/other model into a self/other/self, replacing binary opposition with flux.

It is interesting that the dominant model of alienation and otherness in identity
formation has come from male psychologists' analysis of child development which is based on a male Oedipal model of separation from the mother. This model focuses on the father/son relationship, silences and objectifies the mother and ignores the daughter. Irigaray's 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other' is a reworking of the Oedipal theory that deals with the relationship of the daughter to the mother. In Irigaray's reformulation of the myth the mother/child dyad experience being the same and different, and mirror one another: 'You/I exchanging selves endlessly and each staying herself. Living Mirrors,' and the child leaves the mother for the father not because of lack, but because of fullness, the surfeit of the mother's feeding of the child. Feminist theorists, such as Carol Gilligan and Sara Ruddick show how an interactive mother-child model can provide a different paradigm for research and theory and studies like Chodorow's, Jessica Benjamin's, and Jane Flax's acknowledge the mother as a subject in the mother/child interaction and recognize the child's ambivalent desire for separation and interrelation, an issue I examine in my chapter on The Newspaper of Claremont Street.

In Lacan's paradigm the child's subject position is achieved through identification with the Father, that is by assuming the male subject position. Socialization and sexual engendering are achieved through the acquisition of language and the resolution of the Oedipus complex. To achieve this the child needs to separate from the mother and enter the symbolic order, which is the world of language and culture, represented as the world of the Father. Lacan again ignores the evidence that, in the cultural context within which he works, the mother is usually the means of the child entering the symbolic social world through her role in teaching the child language acquisition. The mother functions as the vital thoroughfare between 'nature' and 'culture.' The child's linguistically constructed subjectivity grows out of interaction with the mother which is both bodily and linguistically communicated:

Through her body language — holding, nursing, caressing, bathing, dressing — and then through mirroring, through the image the child forms of itself as it sees itself reflected in the mother's face, especially in her eyes, the mother communicates an identity to the child.

Thus the child can be represented as acquiring a sense of self through the interactive pattern of nurture and separation between the mother and child and entry into the symbolic is effected by means of language and behaviour learnt from the mother. In this model the image of self is constructed not from the mirror and a repudiation of the mother, but from the maternal gaze and maternal interaction. Speech can also be said to develop as an echoing of the mother's words and actions, thus the formulation of subjectivity can be represented as a sense of self which forms within a process of
self/other/self as the child moves through what can be called the maternal thoroughfare, which allows for a movement and flow between what Kristeva refers to as the maternal *chora* and the symbolic, social world. The *chora*, in Kristeva's usage is the pre-Oedipal site of bodily sensations and wholeness, site of the unconscious drives and desires and linguistically, the site of semiotic preverbal 'babble' which partakes of a symbolic 'ordering.'61 The writer's attempt to construct a sense of self at the threshold of the semiotic and symbolic can be seen in Jolley's text *Foxybaby*. The interactive pattern of bonding and weaning between mother and child involves both desire and hostility as the self/other/self boundaries stretch and connect. It is this writing that deals with abjection, an important part of Elizabeth Jolley's writing which I discuss in my chapter on *The Well*.

The maternal body can be said to represent the linguistic and social role the mother provides as the thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic, acting not as the Phallic Mother, that is the mother who is accorded a fearful power because she acts in the Name-of-the Father, but acting in her own right, as a 'symbolic mother,' that is a *maternal* figure of mediation of social and linguistic codes, for it is the mother who performs a symbolic function by teaching the child language and social behaviour. The term 'symbolic mother' is a means of laying a claim to woman's possession of the symbolic, as an acknowledgment of woman as the guarantee of sociality. It also draws on the resonances of the Italian feminists' use of the concept 'symbolic mother' as discussed in Teresa de Lauretis' account of Italian feminists, where it is defined as a social contract between women based on the mother–daughter pattern of embodied knowledge:

> As a theoretical concept, the symbolic mother is the structure that sustains or recognizes the gendered and embodied nature of women's thought, knowledge, experience, subjectivity, and desire – their "originary difference" – and guarantees women's claim to self-affirmative existence as subjects in the social; an existence as subjects not altogether separate from male society, yet autonomous from male definition and dominance.62

Woman's subjectivity can thus be sited within a social contract and through a process of symbolic mediation. In this process the maternal body may be said to act as a thoroughfare between 'nature' and 'culture,' connecting up heterogeneous sites and polyvalent meanings. The reclaiming of woman's maternal inheritance is examined in my chapter on *Miss Peabody's Inheritance*.

According to Lacan, in the symbolic order, which the child enters through the acquisition of language, he or she learns that, unlike baby babble, language gains meaning by the differentiation between signs; the sign presupposes the absence of 'the
thing' itself, and language acts as a substitute for the direct possession of an object. Recognition of lack forms the basis of the process of signification. Language is thus a constant chain of signifiers which only ever achieve temporary meaning. Desire is created through the potentially endless movement from one signifier to another, associated with the lack or absence of 'the thing' signified, which is essentially a yearning for the imaginary wholeness of the mother/child dyad. This rupture or separation from the mother initiates a desire to replace the loss of the mother with other objects of desire, but always also, the desire to return to the mother. Desire for the mother is repressed as the child enters the symbolic. Kristeva argues that poetic language functions as the process of 'sublating the void,' in an attempt to sublate the absent mother through language. Sublation, which Kristeva uses in a Hegelian sense of preserving the negated elements as part of the synthesis, requires the recognition of the function of the semiotic in language and the maternal in society:

But through the efforts of thought in language, or precisely through the excesses of the language whose very multitude is the only sign of life, one can attempt to bring about multiple sublations of the unnameable, the unrepresentable, the void. This is the real cutting edge of dissidence.63

The search for heterogeneity of identity and language can be said to be an attempt to fill the void created by the separation from the mother, which Freud argues is substituted for by the 'imaginary father' and which Lacan represents as being filled with the phallus, his 'master signifier' that controls desire. However, to acknowledge that we all experience a sense of loss due to separation from the mother's body, and a sense of lack on entry into language, allows for identity to be formulated in relation to the mother's body rather than the father's. Instead of the Freudian concept of castration, a more appropriate metaphor for this lack is the 'castration' we have all experienced, that is birth. The cutting of the umbilical cord, the separation from the mother functions as the founding act of the division of self. I examine this view in Miss Peabody's Inheritance. It may be that the void created by the separation from the mother spurs the child to challenge society, to explore the self, to write to ease the ache caused by the loss, as multiple sublations of the desire for maternal jouissance, the return to the maternal body. To deny the desire for the mother can result in melancholia and loss of signification and meaning, as I suggest in my chapter on Milk and Honey. Empty symbolic structures lead to a desire to reclaim the semiotic in death, as a study of Mr Scobie's Riddle reveals.

In Lacan's theory the object of desire, the search for transcendental reality or satisfaction, is the 'transcendental signifier,' the phallus, around which language, the Law of the Father and social processes and institutions are structured. It is the master signifier that signifies power and control in the symbolic order through the control of
desire. Lacan claims that the Phallus is a symbolic signifier and not reducible to the anatomical particularity of the penis. However, it appears to function as a linguistic attempt to appropriate desire just as the 'Name-of-the-Father' as a paternal metaphor is substituted for the absence of the real father as a misogynistic response to the fear and uncertainty concerning the identity of the father in conception. Lacan's formulation for the 'Name-of-the-Father' is that 'by the operation of the absence of the mother,' the metaphor becomes an equation of 0/phallus. But, mathematically, if 0 is divided by anything the result is 0, revealing that the phallus has nothing to go into! I suggest that the hole in Lacan's argument, left by the absence of the mother, reveals that the original loss the child experiences is the cutting of the umbilical cord at birth and that desire is structured around reclaiming the lost mother.

Socially, it has been women's confinement to the home that has enabled the appropriation of their role in the symbolic. Linguistically the sexual difference in language has silenced them. The maternal metaphor enables a reclaiming of the mother's symbolic status, it embodies and inscribes women's experiences.

The fragmentation and heterogeneity of contemporary culture reveal the breakdown of the paternal function and the filtering of maternal elements into the symbolic. As Pam Morris' article, 'Re routing Kristeva: from Pessimism to Parody' suggests, Kristeva's use of Bakhtin's view of language as dynamic, dialogic and intertextual offers a critique of, and an alternative to Lacan's formulation of the symbolic as static and totalizing, and provides a basis for an analysis of the techniques used to represent the mother in Jolley's writing. The maternal body, read as the thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic, becomes the site of carnival. Carnivalesque writing challenges the totalizing symbolic forms, inverts social patterns and delights in the polyvalent excess of language and identity, offering 'a feast of becoming.' The carnival is used by Mikhail Bakhtin as a model for a celebratory inversion of hierarchies and cultural and linguistic codes:

One might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.

Carnivalesque behaviour is transgressive, subversive behaviour. It positions the subject in a space of negativity, the site of uncertainty and horror, but also a place of joy. It is the position of the exile, the mother and the writer. It offers change and renewal, new forms for language, society and self. Paul Salzman in 'Elizabeth Jolley: Fiction and Desire' shows how Jolley's writing subverts categories of the real and the imaginary,
superimposes the mundane with the eccentric, the domestic with the alien, shatters linguistic structures with undecidability and transgresses social and sexual codes in a carnivalesque narrative pattern of desire, with multiple sites of meaning. Such carnivalesque activity functions to incorporate the maternal body into the symbolic and challenges the paternal authority, as I demonstrate in my reading of *The Sugar Mother*.

If, as I argue, we constitute ourselves as subjects through the process of interaction with the mother which involves a desire for the mother and a need to separate from her, then it is the mother who holds the strategic position, as thoroughfare between the pre-Oedipal and the Oedipal, between the semiotic and symbolic, offering the possibility of a folding and unfolding to create a diversity of subject positions, meanings and relationships as mother and daughter, mother and non-mother, to effect a radical rupture of binary opposites. The maternal metaphor offers a linguistic model in which the process of subject formation and literary production are enacted in relation to the mother's body and it allows for a recognition of the semiotic in language and the maternal in society. A reclaiming, by women, of the maternal thoroughfare would allow for the repressed maternal elements to be incorporated into the symbolic, as is shown in an analysis of Elizabeth Jolley's companion novels, *My Father's Moon* and *Cabin Fever*.

In this thesis I claim that the maternal metaphor effects a linguistic rupture which breaches the 'master narrative' and positions woman in the maternal thoroughfare, where multiple narratives fold and unfold. I examine Elizabeth Jolley's writing to reveal the often hidden pathways of the maternal thoroughfare, which, through the use of carnivalesque narrative techniques, articulate the semiotic in the symbolic, in a process which reclaims the mother through language. Through an analysis of specific maternal figures in Jolley's texts I argue that the mother's subjectivity is reclaimed in the process of inscribing the maternal metaphor.

II

The writing of Elizabeth Jolley lends itself to an analysis of the function of the maternal metaphor as a means of providing a speaking position for women. Motherhood occupies an interesting, ambivalent position in Elizabeth Jolley's writing. Mothers are not immediately apparent in her texts. One is more aware of the eccentric spinster figures such as Weekly, Miss Porch, Miss Thorne and Miss Hartley. However, there is a significant mother figure in all of Jolley's work. In the short stories it is the eccentric cleaner mother with the selfish son and silenced daughter, the daughter who perhaps finds her voice in *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*, there is the dreadful Mrs. Peabody from whom Dorothy must escape by means of the linguistic fantasy created by Diana Hopewell's letters, there are the absent, silenced mothers in *Milk and Honey* and *The Well*, the reluctantly and illicitly pregnant mothers of *Foxybaby* and *Palomino*, the 'surrogate' mother of *The Sugar Mother* and the joyful birth of a grubby baby in *Mr
Scobie's Riddle. Jolley's later fiction has a more direct focus on mothering, especially the disruptive presence of the 'becoming-a-mother' figure in *My Father's Moon* and *Cabin Fever*. Here the focus is on the body, the body as invaded site, the splitting of self, the grafting on of another, which Kristeva refers to as '[m]otherhood's impossible syllogism.' Jolley's pregnant woman is usually reluctantly pregnant, having become pregnant in 'non-sanctioned' ways, as an unmarried mother, or as the result of incest. This pregnant woman can be said to disrupt bodily and social constraints and her marginalized, silenced position in the text decentres narrative and linguistic structures. Thus the pregnant woman becomes a site of contestation for voice and space, and an intrusion of the repressed, semiotic, instinctive and imaginary into the legitimate and symbolic. The pregnant woman functions as a rupture of authorial control and a decentring of subjectivity by the subjectless, becoming—a-subject foetus, whose birth will challenge the legitimating structures of society and narrative.

Perhaps the constantly present, although often unacknowledged mother figure in Jolley's writing is suggestive of the absent mother who functions as the silenced primary term in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, a theory that privileges the role of the Father, and the son's Oedipal struggle for entry into the symbolic social and linguistic structures. It is necessary to confront the mother, both as a need to 'write the mother,' to reclaim her, in what Kristeva terms a 'kind of incest' and also the need to 'write out the mother,' to separate from her. This is particularly important for the doubly dispossessed mother—daughter relationship which is occluded in the Oedipal story.

It is for this reason that Julia Kristeva's reworking of Freud makes a useful vehicle for approaching Jolley. Despite the difficulty of accepting the patriarchal paradigm of the Oedipal configuration, with its father/son focus, Kristeva's critical work offers an interesting reading of Jolley's fiction, because the repressed element of the Oedipal story is desire for the mother, a desire which becomes evident as maternal jouissance unsettles the symbolic.

*The Sugar Mother* is a pivotal text in a movement from repression to reclaiming of the mother. Joan Kirkby in a pre-publication footnote to her article, 'The Call of the Mother in the Fiction of Elizabeth Jolley,' which is a study of the influence of the mother figure in Jolley's early work, comments that it was not surpirzing that Jolley's next book should be called *The Sugar Mother*. Kirkby's article deals with the Oedipal configuration evident in the family patterns in Jolley's novels and the effect that denial of the mother has on female subjectivity and sexuality. From my point of view what is of interest is the repression of the maternal which is often filtered through images of abjection and hysteria, as in *The Well*, but, also the 'call of the mother,' the desire to return to the semiotic, disruptive imaginary, and the attempt to move in and out of the *choric* place, to establish a thoroughfare for mother and child, an interweaving of the
processes of the symbolic and the semiotic.

Jolley's last major piece of work, *Central Mischief*, a collection of essays on her writing, her past and herself, reveals that the 'central mischief' which initiates writing may well be provoked by impulses associated with the writer as daughter, mother and grandmother. Kristeva claims that the woman as artist has an added complication in speaking as woman because she has to deal with her own mother and the implications for her own mothering. Jolley's writing suggest the ambivalence of a woman dealing with the maternal function, as mother and as daughter. Her writing can be said to contain elements of a woman as writer attempting to integrate creativity and maternity.

Kristeva suggests that it is vital to deal with the link between feminism, female creativity and maternity: 'real female innovation (in whatever social field) will only come about when maternity, female creation and the link between them are better understood.' Kristeva argues that maternity, rather than tying woman to biology, as de Beauvoir claimed, can function as a site for female creativity and transcendence, by linking nature and culture and enabling a speaking of the semiotic in the symbolic:

[Far from contradicting creativity (as the existentialist myth would still have us believe), maternity as such can favour a certain kind of female creation, provided the economic constraints are not too heavy, at least in so far as it lifts fixations and circulates passion between life and death, self and other, culture and nature, singularity and ethics, narcissism and self-denial. . . . it always succeeds in connecting up heterogeneous sites.]

Kristeva suggests that the dissidence which pregnancy may provoke can promote creativity. The ambivalence of the maternal position 'the pivot of sociality . . . at once the guarantee and a threat to its stability' is the basis of its dissidence.

Ambivalence is effected through the intersection of the spaces of lived experience (which resonate with intrasubjective ambivalence) with the spaces of novelistic structures (which resonate with intertextual dialogism). The interplay of texts and contexts creates a transformative fiction, a dialogic multivalence of representations. The maternal metaphor effects a thoroughfare between lived experience and representation, body and text, semiotic and symbolic, in a process that involves 'writing the mother.' Jolley's writing reveals the conflict of woman as mother; the need to 'write the mother,' to confront the mother, to reclaim repressed maternal elements but also the need to 'write out the mother,' to establish boundaries between self and mother, yet to acknowledge the porous nature of those boundaries.

Despite the important influence of Jolley's father in providing a desire to write, the attempt to forge a maternal thoroughfare appears to have been a more significant force in Jolley's writing, as a means of releasing the unconscious drives and desires of
the pre-Oedipal. As I argue in the chapter on *My Father's Moon*, the maternal thoroughfare is the secret motor which powers the text. The unleashing of this power appears to open up a thoroughfare between the paternal and maternal, creating an interactive passage.

In Jolley's linguistic reconstruction of her memories of the mother, the references are veiled and guarded and negative, as in the opening incident of the essay, 'What Sins to Me Unknown Dipped Me in Ink?' where the mother is 'hidden' by the fantasy of the two maids, who cherish the child. The mother is the one whose 'hopes did not turn out to be as expected' (*CM* 4), whose 'homesickness lasted throughout her life' (*CM* 4). Jolley refers to an interesting incident in which the mother destroys the correspondence from the daughter to the father. There is a restrained comment about her mother destroying the letters, but the effect of this on Jolley is not mentioned. The writer's pain and anger are silenced, explained away, 'covered' by the mother's desire for order (*CM* 70).

What is revealed in these essays is the child's desire to be needed and cherished by the mother:

In the train I am possessive and careful over my mother, pleased to have her to myself. (*CM* 37)

Jolley, in 'What Sins to Me Unknown Dipped Me in Ink?' writes that she understands now, too late, the hopes and the sufferings of the exiled mother, the mother who herself lost her mother and three stepmothers and was brought up in a convent, establishing a cycle of an 'unmothered' mother who found it difficult to mother:

When I was twelve my mother gave me a little needlebook she had made. Perhaps she hoped the loving verse embroidered on the cover would express her tenderness in some way. I still have the book and perhaps I understand now, too late, something of her hopes and of her suffering. (*CM* 2)

The embroidery functions as a way of encoding the semiotic within the symbolic. But the daughter appears to be only now able to read this 'maternal language.' The last essay in the collection returns to the desire to reclaim the mother:

Can I suggest that . . . we send for our mothers/grandmothers and hold fast to everything these people represent in our own lives and so be sustained in any work we may do. (*CM* 184)

The gift of the mother is as necessary for writing as the gift of the father. The child who desires the mother, but cannot gain access to her, must continue to search, rifling
through the signifiers of desire. In her fiction, Jolley represents this idea through the motif of writing and books. In *My Father's Moon* and *Cabin Fever* Vera chooses a book of embroidery patterns as her gift from Ramsden. The gift leaves her frustrated because it does not encode her desire for Ramsden. She continues to search for ways of approaching Ramsden, to claim her desire. Similarly Vera, in *Cabin Fever*, searches through her books for some trace of her mother (*CF* 123). This trace is found, I argue, in a reclaiming of the childbirth experience (*CF* 123–4, 135–6) and it is inscribed in multiple ways in the body/text of Jolley's work.

In *Central Mischief* Jolley describes her childhood as both strange and normal. The moods of her mother were savage and unexpected, the language of the mother was that of an exile (*CM* 4). The child's desire for the mother leads to the writer's attempt to use language to catch desire, to locate the mother. The opening essay, 'What Sins to Me Unknown Dipped Me in Ink?' which explores Jolley's reasons for writing, begins with the power of the father's word to create heat and light, but it also reveals the influence of the mother in her writing. Jolley's explanation of her desire to write follows her description of the moods of her mother. Her thoughts about the mother lead directly to her attempt to explain why she writes:

> I cannot explain why I am a fiction writer unless the explanation comes in part from a response to my experience of the world in which I grew up and to the strange new world in which we exist today. I do not maintain that a writer should conceal her private life. What must come first are the words which must not be twisted to fit some preconceived image of the writer. Sometimes what is most important after infancy is the experience which finds expression only in writing. It is the word which is not spoken, the resolve which is not kept which become a part of the created. It is as if these things emerge from hidden pathways in an unexpected form. Writing fiction is not easy for me; to write facts is almost impossible. (*CM* 6)

It is the gap of desire, 'the word not spoken,' the rupture created by the absence of the mother, the yearning, longing for the mother which the writer seeks in the signification of language. It could be said to be a search for an embodying of the unspoken word. The textual representation of the pause of intention is an important motif in Jolley's work; it characterizes Laura's desire, Vera's search for Ramsden, Mr Scobie's dream of entering his house, the shifting movement of desire evident in Jolley's work.

What becomes important in Jolley's fiction is the written attempt to find and use the hidden pathways, to locate the maternal thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic, to situate the desire for the mother, the drives and desires of the unconscious, the cherishing of the maternal *chora* at the site of signification, to articulate the imaginative fiction in the symbolic. The writer attempts to reclaim the mother through
language, in a process which involves a substitution of one desire for another, in a sublation of the void of loss.

Language can be said to be a process which continually remakes desire. Created fiction opens up a kaleidoscope of patterns as the signifiers of desire rupture the symbolic with semiotic dreams, memories and perceptions. In my analysis of Jolley's fiction I show how the psychoanalytic theory of the child's desire for the mother works as a model for the writer's desire to position the semiotic in the symbolic and how language works to veil the loss of the real through a series of substitutionary desires. According to Kristeva, to confront the issue of maternity in writing 'lifts fixations, and circulates passion between life and death, self and other, culture and nature.' Jolley's writing could be said to articulate this claim, by effecting a variety of writing sites, as a moving site of a subject-in-process experimenting with an explosion of language and narrative forms to search for the maternal thoroughfare which will give access to both maternal and paternal, semiotic and symbolic.

The dissident writer, writing in the maternal thoroughfare, is also an exile. Kristeva's model of the dissident writer can be used to read Elizabeth Jolley's novels. The dissident for Jolley is represented as the exile, the mother and the writer who seek to 'sublate' the void created by separation from the mother and the loss of the father through an excess of language. Jolley says that her experience of being an exile has given her 'the feeling of inhabiting several worlds,' which is relevant to the experience of the exile, the woman, the mother and the writer, all of who are on the margin, connecting up heterogeneous sites of meaning.

The child's sense of loss, referred to many times in Jolley's commentary on her own writing, works its way in many forms in her texts, sometimes 'muffled' as the cry of an exile, sometimes revealed in the distorted family patterns or in the play of language. In her 'Self Portrait' at the end of the collection of short stories in *Stories*, Jolley's statement about the importance of exile in her own work is followed by a statement concerning the child's relationship with the parents:

- Looking over my own work I have been surprised to find how important is the theme of exile.
- It is not given to the child either to know or to understand the happiness or the sadness of the parent. ('SP' 302)

Jolley claims that she experienced being an exile vicariously through her parent's experiences, but also because of the inconsolable longing and abjection she experienced as a child. Although it is not unproblematic to interpret representations of place as a desire for the mother, it can be useful in situating desire as arising from the original relationship with the mother in both its good and bad aspects. The displacement of the
structures. Narrative structure and language use call into play the polyvalent, polylogical nature of language and incorporate the semiotic elements of sound, music, movement and fragrance, effecting a synthesis of semiotic and symbolic elements. Jolley’s writing effects a carnivalesque challenge to form and structure and to the construction of the linguistic 'T'.

Both Kristeva and Jolley’s writing disrupt the symbolic with semiotic elements by means of the artist and the pregnant woman figure. In Jolley’s texts the mother figure, and especially the pregnant woman becomes a significant site for deconstructing the Law of the Father as it functions in both literature and society. Representations of motherhood become an important articulation of working in, through and against the structures of language and society. The mother’s rupturing of subjectivity allows for an unfolding of the structures of language and society, and suggests a multiplicity of perspectives and positions for writing and reading.
NOTES


3 Kristeva 297.


7 Irigaray 71–2


9 Irigaray 28

10 Irigaray 29.


12 Rorty 9, 16.


15 Jacques Derrida, 'Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,*Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*, ed. David Lodge (London:


17 Cixous, and Clément 66.

18 Cixous, and Clément 65.


20 Rich 284.


25 Spivak, 'Displacement' 173.


28 Derrida 304.

29 Spivak, 'Displacement' 184.


Jaques Lacan, 'The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud,' *Écrits* 175.


Kristeva, 'Revolution,' trans. Margaret Waller, Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* 95 (see 93–8)

Kristeva 93.

Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 238.

Kristeva 242.


Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 241–2.

Kristeva, 'Dissident' 297.

Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 242–3.

Kristeva 249.


Lacan 2.


Winnicott 112–3

I am drawing on the term 'self/other/self' used in Penelope J. Engelbrecht's "Lifting Belly is a Language": The Postmodern Lesbian Subject, *Feminist Studies*...
16.1 (Spring 1990): 85–114, but I wish to extend the idea of self/other/self to provide a more general concept of the development of subjectivity.


53 Irigaray 62.

54 Carol Gilligan, In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982).


63 Kristeva, 'The Dissident' 300.
Lacan, *Écrits* 285


Bakhtin 10.


Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 237.

Kristeva 249.


Elizabeth Jolley's new novel, *The Georges' Wife*, will be released after this thesis is written. She has allowed me to read her manuscript copy, but, because of the length of this thesis, I have not been able to include a discussion of the novel.

Kristeva, 'Dissident' 297–8.

Kristeva 298.

Kristeva 298.

Kristeva 297.


Kristeva, 'Dissident' 298.

Kristeva 295.

Elizabeth Jolley, 'Cloisters of Memory,' *Meanjin* 48.3 (Spring 1989) : 533.

Chapter 2: Zero Degree Deviancy: *Palomino*

I intend to read Elizabeth Jolley's *Palomino* as a text about mothers and lovers: Laura, Eva and Andrea. In an intriguing unfolding of the love triangle, Andrea, the daughter of Eva, the woman whom Laura had desired, becomes Laura's lover, thus a displaced mother–daughter pattern structures the text. The gap resulting from separation from the mother is filled by a mother/lover. A lesbian love relationship does not function as a substitute for the mother/child relationship, but the mother/daughter interaction may be part of the expression of love in woman–to–woman relationships. It might be said that it is reductive or dismissive to consider lesbian relationships in terms of mother–love, however, we all began life enfolded in a woman's body, and most women's first memory of being caressed, held, loved and nurtured is of the time in their mother's arms. The pleasure and nurture associated with the mother's body can be said to be imprinted on the child's desire and to become a part of all future searches for love, represented as a desire for a return to primal origins, which has maternal rather than paternal connotations, a womb–shape rather than a phallus, a desire for a return to the 'oneness' or 'merging' that is acknowledged as a part of the aesthetic of romantic love and a necessary part of psychological theory. Freud, among others, argues that both men and women retain the desire to return to the embrace of the mother. In Freudian theory the transfer of the boy's love for his mother to another female love object is considered as part of his successful resolution of the Oedipal complex, while for a woman, a similar transfer is seen by Freud as an unresolved fixation.¹ To deny the mother–love component in women's desire is an example of the phallogocentrism of Freudian psychology, where desire for the mother is considered a necessary component of male maturity, but seen as a sign of immaturity in a woman. As Joanne Ryan suggests, such reasoning is circuitous, using an assumption of universal heterosexuality as a premise in order to validate a conclusion which thereby claims to prove the necessity and desirability of heterosexuality in a way that validates men's sexual experiences and silences those of women:

The imposition of heterosexuality is seen at its starkest: what men are allowed in terms of suitably displaced union with the mother is disallowed to women and made taboo.²

A lesbian love relationship challenges this taboo, acknowledges the sexuality and ambiguity of the mother's body and recognizes the childhood origins of adult sexuality.

In 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,' Adrienne Rich argues that while 'mothering–by–women is [not] a "sufficient cause" of lesbian existence,³ it does raise questions about what Rich terms the 'political institution' of compulsory heterosexuality.⁴ She asks:
If women are the earliest sources of emotional caring and physical nurture for both female and male children . . . *why in fact women would ever redirect that search.* [italics in original] 5

Rich suggests a 'lesbian continuum' that includes a wide-range of women-identified activities, beginning with the mother/daughter relationship, within which women share their love, knowledge and friendship in order to empower one another. 6 Similarly Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, in her study of the female world of American pioneer women found an 'intimate mother–daughter relationship lay at the heart of this female world.' 7 Helene Deutsch claims that women never completely transfer their love from the female figure to the male figure 8 and Nancy Chodorow argues that while women transfer their erotic desire to men, they retain an emotional involvement with women. 9 An acknowledgment of a mother/daughter/lover interweaving of love and desire allows for an attempt to reclaim a variety of women–to–women relationships that have been devalued in the exchange economy of patriarchy.

While the desire for the mother/child unity is one aspect of the development of the capacity to love just as important is the reality of mother–child conflict and the desire to separate. (The child's desire to separate is well documented in psychological literature, but the mother is more usually treated as an object from which the child separates. 10 The mother's need to be separate is, however, addressed in Luce Irigaray's 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other.' 11) It is the daughter's desire to return to the mother, coexisting with the desire to separate from the mother which lies at the heart of many Jolley texts.

A lesbian love relationship offers the opportunity to explore the ambiguities, contradictions and potential of women–to–women relationships grounded in the mother/daughter paradox of being same and different, self and other, mother and not–mother. The lesbian lover's body suggests an investigation of the development of woman's sexuality and subjectivity which involves a separation from and a return to the mother through the body of the lover. The mother/child relationship provides a range of metaphors to express the nature of woman–to–woman lovers to highlight the complex bond of mother/lover as the following passage by poet Sue Silvermarie reveals:

I find now, instead of a contradiction between lesbian and mother, there is an overlapping . . . .

In loving another woman I discovered the deep urge to both be a mother to and find a mother in my lover. At first I feared the discovery. Everything around me told me it was evil. Popular Freudianism cursed it as a fixation, a sign of immaturity. But gradually I came to have faith in my own needs and desires . . . . Now I treasure and trust the drama
between two loving women, in which each can become mother and each become child.

When I kiss and stroke and enter my lover, I am also a child re-entering my mother. I want to return to the womb-state of harmony, and also to the ancient world. I enter my lover but it is she in her orgasm who returns. I see on her face for a long moment, the unconscious bliss that an infant carries the memory of behind its shut eyes. Then when it is she who makes love to me... the intensity is also a pushing out, a birthing! She comes in and is then identified with the ecstasy that is born... So I too return to the mystery of my mother, and of the world as it must have been when the motherbond was exalted.

Now I am ready to go back and understand the one whose body actually carried me. Now I can begin to learn about her, forgive her for the rejection I felt, yearn for her, ache for her. I could never want her until I myself had been wanted. By a woman.

Sue Silvermarie suggests that a lesbian love relationship can provide a rebirthing, a reclaiming of the mother–daughter bond.

The love relationship that Laura has with Andrea in Palomino can be seen as a restoring of the lost motherbond, a reclaiming of a woman's embrace and a reworking of female desire incorporating harmony, pleasure and cherishing. For Laura their relationship is an opening, an unchancing, 'the little ceremony of unfastening the buckle of my belt' (P 2), which functions as a release, or birthing of Laura's emotions and desires which have been repressed, silenced, denied. For both of them it is a return to the hidden secret womb-like place of harmony, represented by the farm hidden in the valley and the jewel that nestles in the hollow of Andrea's throat. It is an affirmation of a 'female world.'

Woman–to–woman love is not a specific concern in Kristeva's analysis of love in Tales of Love, however, Kristeva's argument concerning the function of the mother in constructing a love object makes a useful frame for approaching Jolley's love story, Palomino.

Kristeva's argument is that separation from the mother is necessary for the formation of the capacity to love. Separation from the mother enables the child to develop a self-image, which is a movement from the merging of mother/child in auto–eroticism, to the self/other awareness, necessary in developing the capacity to love by shifting one's desire for self to desire for the other through the agency of a 'Third Party' or object of idealization.

The first section of Tales of Love, entitled 'Freud and Love: Treatment and Its Discontents' was originally entitled 'L'abjet d'amour,' indicating that the capacity to love is effected by separation from the mother by the process of abjection of the mother. The child's separation from the mother and the transfer of identification to the father is the
basis of Freud's theory of the Oedipal complex. Traditional Freudian psychology claims that the construction of subjectivity and sexuality is effected as a result of the child's successful resolution of the Oedipus complex. This process begins with the child's movement away from the mother and the awareness of the separation between mother and child which opens up a void, a gap, a sense of loss which the ego seeks to fill with an idealized love object, which Freud refers to as 'the father in his own personal prehistory.' This 'imaginary father' is not to be confused with the biological father. It is an idealization that takes place in the pre-Oedipal stage, prior to the individual's construction of subjectivity in language. For Kristeva the imaginary father is the father in the semiotic, a precursor to the symbolic father. 'His' function in the semiotic is seen as necessary by Kristeva, to serve as a third term, to screen the emptiness, fill the hole left by the absence of the mother. The imaginary father, as a 'magnet of identification,' acts as a link between the pre-Oedipal and the Oedipal, or in Kristeva's terms, which focus on the linguistic basis of the construction of subjectivity, the semiotic and the symbolic. His presence acts as a necessary condition for the formation of idealization and language.

Some interesting gender manoeuvres are going on here. Firstly, the child is presumed to be male, so that, in separating from the mother, a clear sense of self and other is suggested through sexual difference. The development of a strong ego identification is more problematic when the child is a girl. Secondly, the idealized parent figure is represented in psychological theory as paternal because 'he' has a social and linguistic function, although, since the idealization occurs in the pre-Oedipal, that is the pre-verbal, pre-gendered stage of the child's development, the 'Third Party' should be sexually undifferentiated, an amalgam of both parents. Kristeva recognizes this fact, but her Freudian framework means that, despite her conflict over this issue, she claims that it is necessary to construe the idealization of the object of love as paternal. Even Freud acknowledges, characteristically in a footnote, that the child's first identification occurs with both parents. But, within Freudian theory, the object of identification/desire is represented as phallic; Freud and Kristeva refer to the 'imaginary father' and, for Lacan, desire is desire for the phallus. Entry into the symbolic, social world is deemed to be entry into the realm of the Father.

Kristeva suggests three reasons why the idealized love object is represented as paternal. Firstly, using object relations theory, she separates the physical functions of nurturing and needs gratification and designates these functions as 'maternal,' while the function of loving idealization and separation necessary for psychic life she designates 'paternal.' Secondly, the 'imaginary father' is seen as a 'speaking subject,' a symbolic other, an idealization, an 'ideal signifier,' which are functions attributed to the symbolic.
link to the Father in the symbolic, as a 'ghost' of the symbolic function. Thirdly, 'the imaginary father,' who acts as a third term to fill the gap created by separation from the mother, must be represented as masculine because 'he' functions as the Other desired by the mother:

The loving mother, different from the caring and clinging mother, is someone who has an object of desire; beyond that, she has an Other with relation to whom the child will serve as go-between. She will love her child with respect to that Other, and it is through a discourse aimed at that Third Party that the child will be set up as "loved" for the mother.22

For Kristeva, the mother's desire for the father is a necessary 'diversion' to prevent the mother/child relationship becoming too consuming.23

This gendering of the 'imaginary father' is perhaps the result of a specific social construction of mothering in Western society. Modern Western-style mothering locks women into the corporeality and confines of mothering in the isolated modern nuclear family and separates the private, domestic sphere from the public one, which is seen to be the realm of the Law and language of the Father. The psychological phallogocentrism that claims that the father is the means of the child's entry into the symbolic through language is not supported by empirical evidence from child development studies which Kristeva acknowledges demonstrates that the child's first imitations and vocalizations develop within the mother/child relationship and are initiated by and directed towards the mother when the mother is the primary caregiver.24 The sharp division between the maternal and paternal function is not a necessary division, but one based on our society's division of labour and its binary philosophical and linguistic structures.

The phallogocentric basis of language and culture means that identification, language and difference are represented as not only symbolic functions, but as operations under the control of the phallus. Melanie Klein's work offers another perspective. She suggests the development of an idealized maternal object of love, represented by the 'good breast'.25 Since the mother is the primary agent of the child's development of language and identity, it may be argued that the mother has the capacity to function as the link or thoroughfare to the symbolic. The child's entry into language can be said to function not as a desire for the phallus, but as a desire to reclaim the mother's absence through language, as Freud's 'Fort–Da' game demonstrates.26

Kristeva rejects Klein's concept of the 'good breast' because, for Kristeva, the mother must be 'mastered' by the phallus through her desire for the 'imaginary father':

The archaic inscription of the father seems to me a way of modifying the fantasy of a phallic mother playing at the phallus game all by herself, alone and complete, in the back room of Kleinism and post–Kleinism.27
Kristeva's comment seems to be an attempt to cover or control the child's overwhelming desire for the mother, including her own desire, as she reveals with her later comment, 'my own precociously lost love.'\(^{28}\) Kristeva's own loss may be the basis for her fascination with the discourse of the Virgin Mary, because Mary's virgin, deathless status positions her as an 'idealization' of the mother, effecting a maternal discourse situated within the symbolic.\(^{29}\)

The idealized love object is represented as paternal because the gap created by the separation of the mother and child is 'seen' as an absence or hole that needs to be 'filled' by the phallus, so that even the mother must become the 'phallic mother,' modelled on a male construction of sexuality, identity and power. In describing the child's separation from the mother it is, however, possible to represent the 'Third Party' in non-phallic terms, by representing the 'hole' by its boundaries, as 'two lips' which function to give women a speaking position and allow a claiming of a fluid, mobile, diverse sexuality. Irigaray does this. The phallocentric representation of woman as lacking becomes, in her terms, an image of woman's diverse excess, with the two lips constantly in touch with each other in pleasurable interchange and the vaginal 'hole,' rather than being represented as empty, awaiting phallic definition, becomes a diverse, diffuse two-in-one, inner and outer.\(^{30}\) Such metaphors allow for the construction of models of identity which are not based on the subject–object dichotomy or the Oedipal triangulation, but on a mutually interactive movement, a sense of same and different, which allows for the construction of a more fluid subject position which may be referred to as self/other/self, that is the other is treated not as an object but as another self. Jolley's text about lesbian lovers allows for the exploration of such a metaphor. By positioning a female lover in the gap created by the separation from the mother, alternative images of love, diverse constructions of identity and other means of interactive relationships become possible.

Even when Kristeva discusses lesbian love she envisages the hole being filled with an imaginary phallus. Kristeva's uneasy fascination with homosexual love is conveyed in her confession concerning the proposals she receives from homosexual analysands:

Why homosexuals? Could they have guessed an uneasiness on my part in dealing with their uneasiness about a subjugating mother, precociously and encroachingly loving, abandoned or abiding, but always underhandedly fascinating? Do they set up, in my place, instead of an object of love, my own precociously lost love? Probably. With, in addition, the ability - weakness or cunning? - peculiar to those who love the same sex, to build a phallus at the very place of castration, to be engulfed in a hole in the very spot of phallic power, to see imagination in the place of the symbolic, and to long everywhere for the real.\(^{31}\)

Revealing the depth of her own anguish for the lost mother, Kristeva appears to attempt to hide her 'castration' by filling the hole with a phallic shape.
While *Palomino* can be read in terms of Kristeva's analysis of love, such a reading is phallogocentric. Using Kristeva's argument, Laura can be said to fill the gap left by the absence/death of her mother with a love for the imaginary father. When Andrea asks Laura if she has ever loved anyone her first answer is "'My father'" (*P* 113). Laura's story can be read as her desire for the phallus, a desire which motivates her work as a doctor and on the farm, a desire to be situated in the symbolic through her primary identification with the 'imaginary father,' the idealized father represented by her own father and substitute 'father,' Dr Gollanberg. It is possible to view her fantasized relationships with Eva and Dr Gollanberg as attempts 'to build a phallus at the very place of castration.'

With Dora, (whose name reverberates with Freudian ambiguity and burlesque associations) Laura positions herself as the father, receiving comfort and physical care and cherishing from the housekeeper/wife. However, it is also possible to read Dr Gollanberg as mother or as an idealised Laura and Dora can be read as a mother/lover/child (Her Freudian namesake reminds us of the limitations of a closed paternal reading). A rigid, unitary reading that imposes mastery and fixity of the text does not reveal the diversity and movement of desire. The gendered subjectivity of the characters keeps slipping, changing, widening the gap; a phallic image is too rigid, inflexible. Desire and death function in this text to silence paternal love and the symbolic function and to give voice to a semiotic harmony.

Desire for the imaginary parent can also be represented as a repositioning of desire for the idealized mother. Laura's desire for Eva and Andrea can be seen as a filling of the gap with a woman's shape rather than a phallus. The lesbian lover's body permits an exploration of the development of sexuality and subjectivity which allows a separation from and a return to the mother through the body of the lover. Kristeva does, at one point in *Tales of Love*, speculate about a non-phallic representation of sexuality, suggesting that if one were to imagine a female libido free from 'confrontation with the Phallus,' it would be in terms of the self/other/self of the mother and child:

> It evokes the loving dialogue of the pregnant mother with the fruit, barely distinct from her, that she shelters in her womb. Or the light rumble of soft skins that are iridescent not from desire but from the opening–closing, blossoming–wilting, an in–between hardly established that suddenly collapses in the same warmth, that slumbers or wakens within the embrace of the baby and its nourishing mother.34

In *Palomino* the trope of pregnancy, as a metaphor of the opening of a woman's body in lovemaking and birth, functions to represent the opening of language to create a female subject position.

Monique Wittig claims that the only subject position available to women is that achieved by splitting language. One way that she opens out language in her work is by splitting the subject pronoun 'j/e.' For Wittig such a division functions as a metaphor of
force, opening up language in order to find a position in the social structures. She argues for the necessity of rupturing the subject position in order for woman to enter language:

'T[Je] as a generic feminine subject can only enter by force into a language which is foreign to it, for all that is human (masculine) is foreign to it, the human not being feminine grammatically speaking but he [il] or they [ils].

... J/e is the symbol of the lived, rending experience which is m/y writing, of this cutting in two which throughout literature is the exercise of a language which does not constitute m/e as subject.35

Penelope J. Engelbrecht in "Lifting Belly is a Language": The Postmodern Lesbian Subject36 is critical of Wittig's violence in splitting the lesbian subject. Engelbrecht suggests that lesbian lovers, rather than functioning on the split dichotomy of self/other, interact as 'self/other/self.' Engelbrecht uses this term to describe/inscribe the interaction of a lesbian subject and a lesbian other/self as being mutual, inter/active, non–hierarchical and interchangeable. A combination of Wittig's and Engelbrecht's models suggests that another way of representing the split subject is as an opening up to a loving interchange of the lesbian lovers' bodies and as an opening of the mother's body in pregnancy and birth.

Subjectivity constructed on a model of woman's lovemaking or birthing, offers an interesting paradigm for language and subject formation in contrast to Kristeva's model of the thetic break which she claims occurs at the mirror stage and at the realization of castration with the resolution of the Oedipus complex.37 Instead of subjectivity being constructed on the specular mirror–image suggested by Lacan, a model may be mapped through the exploration of the mother's body which is sexually similar to the daughter's. In this case sight is not privileged. Subjectivity is the product of all the senses. Rather than inscribing the subject in language within the current subject–object dichotomy in which linguistic social models utilize a male subject who acts upon a female object, a lesbian model, as Penelope J. Engelbrecht suggests, offers an alternative that does not work on the binary self/other difference:

[Ph]allocentric Subjectivity relies on an essential visual distinction of binary (sexual) difference between Subject and Object (phallus/absence) which is inimical to lesbian(ism), because two lesbians display no such essential physical distinctions.38

Lesbian desire transgresses the masculine/feminine binaries of phallic sexuality and subjectivity and makes possible a fluid movement of difference in relation to desire and subjectivity. It suggests an equal, shifting relationship in which both have a subject position. Identity need not be based on a self–other model, but can draw on the need for interconnectedness with another self. Nancy Chodorow argues in 'Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective' that a subject–subject model is important:
[A]dequate separation, or differentiation, involves not merely perceiving the separateness, or otherness, of the other. It involves perceiving the person's subjectivity and selfhood as well.'39

Chodorow's interpretation suggests that difference and separation is not simply a perception of self and other experienced through an image in a mirror, based on a phallic representation of presence and absence. Rather it involves a realization of two selves, two presences, two subjects. Such a model also redresses another imbalance in traditional psychoanalytic theory that concerns itself with the child–subject separating from the mother, who is represented as an object or 'Thing.'40 Jessica Benjamin claims that most psychoanalytic theories view the child as tied to the mother in a subject–object relationship because of the mother's function in meeting the physical needs of the child. Thus 'selfhood is defined negatively as separateness,' rather than as developing out of a reciprocal self/other/self interaction.41 An alternative model of subjectivity which can be referred to as interaction on a self/other/self basis is an important model because it recognizes the mother's own selfhood. Irigaray advocates a subject–subject relationship in language, basing her model on woman's bodily experience:

Between our lips, yours and mine, several voices, several ways of speaking resound endlessly, back and forth. One is never separable from the other. You/I: we are always several at once. And how could one dominate the other? impose her voice, her tone, her meaning?42

She suggests that self and other, inside and outside, subject and object meet and enfold one another like two lips rather than stand as rigid, dichotomous entities.

The concept of self/other/self is helpful in discussing Palomino, which is written as a harmony of the voices of Laura and Andrea. The story is told through their alternating narratives so that two voices in the text break down the phallic subject/object relationship based on dominance/submission, as the text shifts from Laura's to Andrea's point of view, and includes a letter from Eva. On their women–centred farm Andrea and Laura elude the male exchange system where women are objects to be exchanged by men. They are able to construct a subject–subject relationship. Rather than inscribing a subject/object position, the text creates a self/other/self tonality allowing a shifting point of view and a split subjectivity which accommodates Laura's 'mothering' care of Andrea, her 'masculine' work on the farm and her childlike desire to be cherished. Likewise Andrea enacts a variety of subject positions; she lets Laura take care of her, but she takes the initiative in love-making, she desires both Christopher and Laura and she wants to be hidden on the farm, but also wants to leave the loneliness of the farm. They articulate a harmonious polyphony.
The mother–daughter relationship represents one aspect of Laura and Andrea's love. One feature of Laura's love for Andrea can be read as a relocation of her desire for a daughter, demonstrated in her protective care and nurture of Andrea, such as taking her to her farm, providing for her, teaching her and nursing her when she is sick:

I never expected it could be like this. She is my dearest dearest child! She is only a child. I must see no harm ever comes to her. I want to protect her, to give her things and I want to see her happiness. (P 94)

Laura's desire for a child is also revealed in her dream of holding and trying to warm the cold little child who belonged to someone else, a dream which draws on her repressed memory of holding Andrea as a child (P 41, cf 60).

Laura's love also contains elements of an acting out of her desire to be nursed by her own mother who died when Laura was a child. Absence, created by the loss of her mother, positions Laura on the threshold, desiring love, but afraid to claim it. Dr Gollanberg had offered an opportunity to reclaim the lost mother/child relationship. Laura's fantasized love for Dr Gollanberg has elements of the mother/daughter, father/daughter, teacher/pupil relationship, as well as the element of equal colleagues. However, when she actually meets Dr Gollanberg she is disgusted by her age and physical appearance. One reason for Laura's disgust is that the object of her desire has turned her desire to another, to a man. The mirror, which permits Laura to see Dr Gollanberg in bed, initially arouses delight when it appears to provide access to the mother's bed, but this turns to disgust and fear when it reveals a glimpse of the primal scene of the mother making love to a rival.

Because Laura was not mothered as a child, she has created an idealized fantasy of the mother/child relationship. She transposes her love for the absent mother onto a youthful, child–like figure, thus she is disgusted by Dr Gollanberg's age, aroused by Andrea's youth and considers her housekeeper Dora to be child, despite the fact that it is the 'mothering' which she receives from Dora that she cherishes (the ambivalence of Dora's position again resonates with Freudian associations). The love image she has of Dora is of Dora's full breasts and of the care and comfort she provides:

She was always ready to look after me whatever time it was, day or night. She would come, her plump arms folded round her breasts, to lean on the car door to ask, 'How was everything?' and 'Will I make your coffee or your bath first?' and so on till I was quite soothed and cared for and rested. . . . I suppose Dora was cherishing me. (P 27–28)

Laura's memory of her time with Dora interweaves mother/lover/child images: Dora's 'childish' underclothes, her youth and innocence, her childish face lined with sleep, Laura's
desire to provide for and care for Dora, coexisting with her desire to be cared for by Dora and her desire for Dora's body and love which is mingled with Laura's image of Dora's body as the maternal body. The representation of desire for the mother moves between a positioning of the child as subject and a positioning of mother as subject. Thus Laura's subjectivity is constructed through the variety of different subject positions she enacts.

Andrea also experiences one aspect of her relationship with Laura as a reclaiming of her desire to be nurtured by a mother. Andrea is alienated from her own mother, so Andrea's desire for a bonding with a mother figure has been repressed: 'The thought of anyone being close to Mother is so appalling I never think of it. Never' (P 55). Andrea transfers that desire to Laura, seeing her as a mother/lover, a woman who allows Andrea access to her body, who is accepting, comforting, who offers nurture and love. Andrea also recalls sitting on Laura's lap as a child, at her mother's house (P 60). She feels safe, secure, nurtured by Laura. She positions herself as a dependant child, protected by Laura's care after her horse-riding accident:

Laura's hands. Laura's hands are holding me. . . .
I am safe with Laura. I am better. . . . I was helpless and Laura never left me. She has looked after me. She has done everything for me; all the awful things that have to be done when one can't get up. (P 120–1)

Andrea enjoys the recreation of the mother/child relationship and the suggestion of the return to symbiotic unity and dependence.

The mother/daughter bond is, however, only one aspect of their love, Laura and Andrea also see themselves loving as equals: 'We are so equal' (P 112). They see themselves as twin souls: 'It is more as if two halves of a whole have come together' (P 193–4). Yet this desire for equality can also grow out of the imagined Edenic perfection of the mother/child relationship, which, in the case of Laura and Andrea, has been denied in their original relationships with their own mothers, and has thus become a repressed, idealized desire. Laura feels abandoned by her own mother who died when she was eleven, and betrayed by her hoped-for substitute, Dr Gollanberg, whom she killed because she deviated from Laura's created fantasy image.

Laura's fantasy functions as/at the threshold, as a gap created by the rupture of desire and death into the symbolic. Her desire and love are enacted in her imagination and writing: 'I created for myself your perfection' (P 180) she says of her desire for Dr. Gollanberg, while she represses and controls her body and her speech, restraining from speaking of her desire to Andrea:

We are side by side at the ship's rail watching the wharf and we could speak now and, though the small space between us seems to vibrate with longing, neither of us says one word to the other. (P 18)
She has controlled her desire more effectively than any institutional systems: 'All the years I am my own wardress' (P 19). As a gynaecologist Laura writes idealized theoretical articles about the 'tender beauty of the pregnant woman, her loveliness, sacred in its limitation, the soft rich skin of her breasts, the smooth white thighs and the tender expression in the eyes of the healthy young primapara [sic]' (P 175), while the actual bodies of her pregnant patients fill her with disgust, 'the dreary ugliness of the bodies changed and weary with childbirth, stupid and repressed women' (P 183). The abject bodies draw her to the gap made by the absent mother.

Mrs Murphy is one representation of the mother who threatens Laura's idealization. She is the mother the child cannot separate from, the woman who positions Laura as a child despite Laura's age and position, and their relationship:

As a doctor I was accustomed to a position of authority but in Mrs Murphy's presence everything I once possessed, authority, dignity, integrity, personality, everything fades; everything I have is destroyed. (P 32)

The mother-figure that Mrs Murphy represents refuses to acknowledge the daughter's awakening sexuality. On returning to her farm Laura stands on the threshold of her desire, longing to be enfolded in the secret folds of her valley, but she must be free of Mrs Murphy if she is to enjoy her land, because Mrs Murphy takes away Laura's pleasure in her farm (P 35–6, 22). On Laura and Andrea's first night together they are interrupted by a call to help a sick Mrs Murphy. Mrs Murphy's oppressive physicality and fertility which is construed as repulsive, are characterized by her illness, her constant need for food and attention and her dirty, sickly brood of children. As the tenant she occupies a space on the border of Laura's land, suggesting the mother from whom Laura needs to separate, in order to escape the elements of abjection associated with Mrs Murphy that threaten to engulf and entrap Laura. This image of the mother must be exorcised if a woman is to create her own subjectivity. However, it is not achieved through a denial of the maternal body, but rather a reclaiming of it. Andrea's pregnant body offers a thoroughfare for the restoring of semiotic desires in and through the materiality of the mother/lover's body.

For Laura desire has existed in the gap that has been created by the loss of the mother. Her desire for love is conveyed through a number of images of being on the threshold which recurs throughout the text: the opening of a tent in her school dream (P 26), her experiences at theatres: 'I sat on the edge of every human predicament and took no part' (P 12), her desire for Andrea: 'I feel on the threshold [sic] of discovery, ... I feel again on the edge of some enchantment, a magic truth and a very real reason' (P 37, cf 18, 20) and the dream of knocking on the door of the house with pots of green jade (P 41). Laura's fantasy functions as/at the pause of intention, as a gap created by the rupture
of desire and death into the symbolic that vibrates with restrained desire, as in her dream of entering a tent:

When I was at boarding school often, at night, I had times of make believe when on the borders of sleep I was at the opening of a tent in a quiet clearing in a deep forest and I put out my hand to open the folds in almost a caressing way, slowly, holding back from the moment of going in to my beloved. This pausing on the threshold of happiness became my way. (P 26)

Laura's lovemaking with Andrea enables her description of love to move beyond the threshold images to ones of unfolding and birthing:

She talks about the Beethoven, she says the first phrases of the Ninth Symphony are like the very beginnings of love in two people, shy and quiet and hesitating, like the unfolding of the sky and the sun and the fields and woods and mountains in the very beginning of the world. Everything slowly opening and coming to life in the first warm light of the sun and this was the way love happened between two people. (P 99)

As Laura enters love, crosses the threshold, her imagery opens out to images of birth and maternity. The mist lifts and a secret nest is discovered (P 85), a harmony of music and riding conveys 'the shared music, a perfection of harmony and rhythm' (P 84, cf. 88).

Most significant in the mother/lover nexus is the fact that Laura's love for Eva and Andrea occurs when they are pregnant. Their pregnancies open up the thoroughfare and establish the motherbond. Their pregnancy also ruptures the ideology of heterosexuality and maternity with the eruption of female desire, not only for another woman, but for the sexually desiring and desired mother. Using the pregnant body as the site of the expression of woman's love-making opens up the idea of giving birth to new expressions of love and knowledge.

For both of them Andrea's pregnant body acts as a maternal metaphor, a thoroughfare for the articulation of their secret desires. Andrea's hidden pregnancy echoes or images their secret desires, nourished by love, threatened by abortion and discovery. For Andrea desire has been betrayed and violated within her family by her mother's lack of interest and her brother's secret interest. She seeks the safety of a hidden Edenic place, the farm hidden in the secret folds of the valley, which functions as a reverberation or reflection of the pregnant body image; where her lovemaking with Laura can effect a healing process after the violence of murder and incest.

Their lovemaking, incorporating Andrea's pregnant body, functions as a source of healing and energy for Laura and Andrea who have both been alienated from their own bodies. Their woman-to-woman love acts as a body-mirror, enabling each woman to see
self and other, same and different, thus restoring each woman to her own body, in a mirroring of self/other/self. They thus affirm the materiality of woman's own body as a self-expressive site of desire rather than as a locus of male desire. Semiotic images of music and nature are used to affirm the maternal metaphor. Laura says "we are concerned with a friendship between two women, with the harvest from the land and with the birth of a baby" (P 219). Their love is depicted in images which convey harmony and fertility. The threshold has become a thoroughfare offering possibilities of growth and change, affirming a 'whole' rather than a hole:

It's like a quartet, the four seasons taking up and passing on the growth and the work of the land; it's like the four instruments taking up and passing on the theme and phrase of the complete music. All four seasons make the whole, cherishing and nourishing the seed, the root, the branch and the flower. The season changing, the sowing and the growing and the harvest brings the explanation from the earth. (P 106)

The birthing image enables Laura to give expression to her previously silenced desire. Laura's sexuality is affirmed as active and full, in contrast to the Freudian representation of female sexuality as passive and needing the phallus. Joan Kirkby has commented on the suffusion of female sexual imagery, including Laura's dream of the tent, 'I put out my hand to open the folds in almost a caressing way' (P 26), the lark's nest with four eggs (P 85) and the tiny, nipple-like fruits of the quince (P 126). She suggests that they function as a variation of Freud's reading of phallic symbols, that is as an attempt to assert a plurality of presence in an attempt to mitigate the horror of castration. Considering Freud's positioning of female sexuality as lack, the female imagery can also be read as a challenge to Freud's lack through a reclaiming of female sexual presence and plenitude.

The image of the four seasons is interwoven with music, suggesting a harmonious intermingling:

It is like the shared music, a perfection of harmony and rhythm. I keep feeling the perfection and I seem full of the music, the Beethoven, the harmony and movement fit so closely to this private cherishing. (P 84)

Music suggests the interactive and various voices of Laura and Andrea.

To birth new forms of love and signification requires a writing based not just on the specular imagination, but an incorporation of what are seen to be the maternal, semiotic elements of rhythm, sound and fragrance with the so-called paternal elements of linearity and structure. This is activated in Palomino by imagery associated with music and nature.

Fragrance also works to blur the boundaries between self and other and the semiotic and the symbolic, as Kristeva suggests: 'But perfume is also and especially the
allegory of the pulverizing of meaning and language, the pulverizing of one's own identity.\textsuperscript{44} Jolley links nature, music and fragrance to describe Andrea and Laura's love:

It's the way of the seasons. The four seasons are like the four instruments in the quartet passing on their phrases of the music. The seasons pass on their fragrance. \textit{(P 257)}

Fragrance suggests the interweaving of subjectivities and meanings.

In Kristeva's \textit{Tales of Love} the essay 'Stabat Mater\textsuperscript{45} offers a representation of mother love, which could be said to represent textually the birthing of a woman's voice. Mary, 'alone of her sex,' is contained within the paternal discourse and it is necessary for Kristeva to open out this discourse with her own personal experience to create dialogical ambivalence. In \textit{Palomino}, Laura has been silenced within the symbolic order by not being able to practise or to publish her work and she is represented as having repressed her desire. Laura's hands and tongue which have been silenced in the symbolic order she now uses for lovemaking in a healing process which give voice to the silenced parts of her life. As her lovemaking with Andrea develops it creates a subjectivity for her, providing her with a speaking position, so that she is able to reveal herself through her journals and letters, even through an 'unwritten letter.' Laura's story is written in a diary in which she overwrites paternal chronology by beginning her account at the beginning of her story rather than follow the chronology of the calendar year \textit{(P 132)}.

Perhaps it is even more significant that as Laura finds confidence in expressing her love she appropriates patriarchal love codes to apply to her female lover:

'This is my body of the New Testament which is given for you –' \textit{(P 219)}

Laura thus claims a speaking position and inserts the female body into the text, but her choice of text it is not a representation of power, but rather one of sacrifice, linking her to Kristeva's representation of the mother as the 'Stabat Mater.' Laura and Andrea's love and Andrea's baby defy patriarchal social codes. They are safe and protected in their female haven of the farm and the guest house retreat to which Andrea goes, but a sacrifice, a libation is required:

Every morning Laura pours a little water carefully, a libation, she calls it, into the tins and pots to sustain her little pomegranates and the myrtle, the rosemary and the jade. \textit{(P 223)}

Laura makes that sacrifice for Andrea, providing her with the chance to find peace and harmony with a quartet of women and a cradle song:

'Tonight we shall sit und enjoy! In every Beethoven quartet there is a little
dance und there is how do you call it, a cradle song.' (P 256)

However, the fertility dance requires a sacrifice. Laura must kill the ram as she killed Dr Gollanberg, she must hide her love in an unwritten letter and allow Murphy to intrude on her secret valley. The sacrifice is a rupturing of desire with death, a covering of the unspeakable.

The 'unspeakable' event of Andrea's pregnancy to her brother effects the rupture and a crossing of the threshold, which struggles to articulate a speaking position grounded in desire and death. Incest and lesbianism constitute a challenge to the symbolic order by thwarting the patrilineal transmission of the Father's name and thus the Law (and language) of the Father. Incest subverts the patriarchal family structures. Pleasuring the pregnant women subverts the phallocentric economy of (re)production which has separated pleasure and reproduction and positioned the mother as asexual. Lesbian relationships are non reproductive within the patriarchal economy. Thus Andrea and Laura's story challenges the structures of language and society and is 'unspeakable' within patriarchal constructs, yet able to be articulated within the semiotic through music and nature imagery and given access to the symbolic through the maternal thoroughfare, thus providing a subjectivity and speaking position for Laura and Andrea. The unspeakable can be spoken in and through Andrea's pregnant body, but her pregnancy itself remains unspeakable, rupturing the Law of the Father with desire and death and incest.

Catharine R. Stimpson's article, 'Zero Degree Deviancy: the Lesbian Novel in English,' suggest that writing about lesbianism provokes strong reactions. Palomino establishes a female world where Andrea and Laura explore joyfully and positively their lesbian relationship, but this has been atypical of the lesbian novel until recently, according to Stimpson:

Because the violent yoking of homosexuality and deviancy has been so pervasive in the modern period, little or no writing about it can ignore that conjunction. A text may support it, leerlingly or ruefully. It may reject it, fiercely or ebulliently. Moral or emotional indifference is improbable. Few, if any, homosexual texts can exemplify writing at the zero degree.

In may be that in order to write at 'the zero degree' it becomes necessary to transfer the deviancy associated with lesbianism to another relationship, in this case, the brother–sister incest. Here Andrea's 'disgusting' sexuality is acknowledged, thus releasing her relationship with Laura from censure. This device diverts the child's incestuous desire for the mother to desire for the brother, thus enabling access to the mother's body.

'Zero degree' writing is, according to Barthes, 'amodal ... [a] new neutral writing ... [that] takes its place in the midst of ... ejaculation and judgements; without becoming involved in any of them: [that] ... consists precisely in their absence.' For Kristeva, zero
represents the blank space, or gap of possibility, which, in monological texts, is replaced by the 'one' of prohibition and dogmatism and in poetic texts becomes the dialogical space of carnival, which transgresses linguistic and social codes. 'Zero degree' is the 'gaping hole' caused by the loss of the mother. Writing at zero degree can be said to be writing in the maternal thoroughfare which enables the constitution of subject and language through an interaction of the symbolic and semiotic element. To apply this term to woman-to-woman love and the creation of female subjectivity, zero degree writing may become possible when that site designated the gap created by the absence of the mother is not presumed to need to be filled by a phallic, unitary form, but is allowed to stretch and open to accommodate a woman's shape and diverse semiotic elements. The mother giving birth provides just such an image and thoroughfare.

The maternal thoroughfare functions as a passage to birth and death. Laura and Andrea are precariously positioned. They can choose the semiotic shelter of the farm or they can attempt to claim a position in the symbolic. Stimpson claims that lesbian love stories have two characteristic endings: 'the dying fall' or 'the enabling escape.' Palomino can be read as attempting to claim both endings. Laura chooses the silencing of a return to the womb, in being enfolded in her valley farm. Andrea chooses to find a new life in the mountain guest house. Their choices are prefigured in the dreaded, inevitable family visit, which acts as a pivotal incident.

During the visit Andrea focuses on objects of abjection in her telling of the incident, such as Eva's injuries: 'Eva smiles slowly and crookedly because of her swollen face, she doesn't look like Mother really' (P 211), and the joke about shit (P 214). Andrea is oppressed by the heat, the seclusion, her pregnancy. For her, the water is bitter and there is a rotten smell (P 226–7). She feels trapped:

I'm really trapped in this place, every time I feel the baby move I feel caught. (P 228)

The association with abjection indicates that it is necessary for Andrea to separate, to develop her own sense of identity. For this she needs to go on a journey:

I didn't weep then, I was preparing for a long journey and had, in every sense, already set out on it. (P 252)

On the other hand, Laura's description of the family visit is linked with her land:

My land is lovely today. The day is still and very warm and fragrant. . . . 'All is safely gathered in before the winter storms begin.' (P 216)

Her associations are with the mother's body, the warmth, fragrance and security of being
enclosed within the maternal space:

This partly cleared little place on the edge of the forest is so small and the bush presses in from three sides. It is hot here. It's too hot for working though I have done some work here during the last few days. (P 217)

For Laura the day is characterized by inactivity, silence and loneliness. She will continue to live and work alone, maintaining the gap, the pause at the threshold, at the site of subjectivity and sexuality, with the paradoxical written/unwritten letter:

I shall be writing this letter forever. I am writing it all the time but it will always be an unwritten letter. (P 257)

By choosing the semiotic shelter of the farm she appears to be denied access to the symbolic.

*Palomino* ends with Laura's unwritten letter, but Jolley's short story 'The Libation' (WL 105–117) offers an alternative reading and ending for *Palomino*. Here Laura's unwritten letter becomes Lois'/Andrea's unpublished letter which echoes Jolley's own anguish at the criticism and difficulty associated with attempts to get *Palomino* published.51 Lois' story, which has no beginning or end, no acknowledgment of writer or addressee, is silenced; the clean, blank sides of the letter pages being used to line drawers. In the short story the absent text, rejected by the publisher, functions like the purloined letter which Lacan uses as a signifier of desire.52 The letter functions as the signifier of an absence, the sign of desire that will disrupt the symbolic with death. The published/unpublished text, like the written/unwritten letter, is thus at the threshold of language, the point of entry of desire and death into the symbolic.

Is this the fate of a woman who dares to try to replace 'the imaginary father' with a woman's shape, or is it a comment on a society that cannot read the multivalent signs of woman's own expression of subjectivity and sexuality?

*Palomino* can be read as offering a possible site for the construction of female subjectivity. The opening of a women's body in lesbian lovemaking and in birth allows for the exploration of an interactive model of subjectivity, a self/other/self interaction. Jolley's text suggests that female subjectivity and sexuality can be explored by an incorporation of semiotic elements of nature, music and fragrance into the symbolic structures. Allowing a woman's shape to fill the hole left by the absence of the mother opens up a thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic with diverse representations of being and knowing.
NOTES


15. Julia Kristeva, 'L'abjet d'amour,' *Tel Quel* 91 (Spring 1982) : 17–32.

17 Kristeva, *Tales* 29.
18 Kristeva 26–29.
19 Freud, *SE* 19: 31.n.1
20 Kristeva, *Tales* 29.
21 Kristeva 27, 37.
22 Kristeva 34.
23 Kristeva 34.
24 Kristeva 27.
27 Kristeva, *Tales* 44.
28 Kristeva 11.
30 Irigaray, *This Sex* 23–33.
31 Kristeva, *Tales* 11–12.
32 Kristeva 11.
34 Kristeva, *Tales* 81.
36 Engelbrecht 85–114.
37 Kristeva, 'Revolution' 100.
38 Engelbrecht 86.
I discuss the representation of the mother as the 'Thing' in my chapter on *Milk and Honey*.

Benjamin, 'The Bonds of Love,' in Eisenstein and Jardine *The Future of Difference* 45

Irigaray, *This Sex* 209.

Kirkby, 'The Call of the Mother' 53.

Kristeva, *Tales* 329.

Kristeva 234–263.


Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, quoted in Stimpson 244.


Stimpson 244.


Chapter 3: The Mother, Cleaning & Cats

Freud considers the Oedipal story to be the founding myth of Western civilization. In *Totem and Taboo*, where he examines the 'historical' origins of this myth, he expresses 'surprise' that he has discovered that the foundations of religion, ethics, culture, art and individual psychic development are all based on 'relation to the father' (with the footnoted alternative 'the parent complex'1). In Freud's representation of the development of social and psychic order, the sons desire the death of the father in order to assume his power, which is transferred by means of a totemic meal. In *The Father, Love, and Banishment*, Kristeva bases her analysis of Beckett's work on Freud's representation of the Oedipal myth. She claims that with the breakdown of the father function in contemporary society the father figure has become a rotting corpse, the totemic meal has become refuse and meaning has become absurd. The sons are now separated from paternal authority, but still live under the sway of its power, now represented by death.3

While discussing the son's separation from the father and search for meaning Kristeva makes a parenthetical comment about the daughter:

... *Meaning*, merges with the son's "self" (but where a daughter can very easily become trapped)...4

Kristeva enigmatically suggests that the daughter is trapped, but passes over this situation in her discussion of the son. In Kristeva's account of a search for meaning and subject position, the daughter remains trapped and silenced in Kristeva's parenthesis.

Perhaps in Kristeva's parenthetical dismissal of the daughter she has cast aside more than she realizes. In the first paragraph of *The Father, Love, and Banishment,* she claims that her essay is itself a parenthetical discussion of two parenthetical texts by Beckett. She suggests that her focus is justified because these 'marginalized' texts include everything: 'a father's death and the arrival of a child ... the mouth of a lonely woman, face to face with God, face to face with nothing.'5 Kristeva also claims that her discussion consists of a Venetian ambience which offers an "unnamable" interplay of meaning and jouissance.6 Some parenthesis!

Why does Kristeva, following Freud, pass over the daughter and focus on the son's story? In Freud's Oedipal story the son has a privileged position and the daughter is trapped by her lack of position and function. This does not concern Freud:

It does little harm to a woman if she remains in her feminine Oedipus attitude. (The term 'Electra complex' has been proposed for it.)7

Freud is content to leave woman trapped. His parenthetical comments about the daughter suggest that her lack of a penis leaves her with an unresolved Oedipus complex. (Perhaps
Freud's brackets suggest woman's hole.) Likewise, Kristeva has claimed that a woman's access to the symbolic is difficult, unless a woman finds meaning through a child, specifically, a son. Without a child to provide the symbolic father/phallus Kristeva states that woman can become trapped in her body, in the semiotic, having no authoritative speaking position.8

In 'The Father, Love, and Banishment' Kristeva claims that the son/artist searches for and challenges meaning, which is mediated through the dead/undead father/Death whose corpse covers the void of the loss of meaning.9 But the corpse conceals 'barred incest,' desire for the mother. At the very point of loss of paternal function and the threat to meaning, at the mouth of Death is the 'unspoken woman.'10 The silenced part of the Oedipal story is the desire for the mother. Freud's 'the parent complex' elides the mother, although his original formulation of the Oedipal theory was based on a realization of love of the mother and jealousy of the father:

It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father.11

Peter Rudnytsky in *Freud and Oedipus* suggests that Freud's subsequent silencing of the desire for the mother was the result of Freud's own personal identification with Oedipus and an unresolved idealization/ hostility towards his mother.12 Kristeva's own account of the founding myth suggests that the totemic meal, the substitute for the father's body, is itself a substitute for the maternal breast. She too is participating in the silencing of the role of the mother in effecting the child's entry into the symbolic.13

In the search for meaning Kristeva suggests that the artist/son has two options: to search for meaning and its carnivalesque challenge within paternal structures, which involves working with the corpse of the father, meanings and forms, or to celebrate desire for the mother, to write of maternal jouissance through nonsense, rhythm and luminous colours.14 Kristeva claims that Beckett, who focuses on the banished son, covers the loss of meaning with the decaying corpse of the father. She claims what is missing from his work is the incestuous jouissance, the celebration of desire for the mother, necessary to 'offset the morbid and murderous filial love of paternal reason' with a celebration of 'maternal fecundity.'15

While the son finds meaning through the body of the mother, Kristeva claims, in another essay, that the mother may find meaning through the being/words of the son:

The mother of a son . . . is a being confronted with a being—for—him.16

For Kristeva to claim a celebration of maternal fecundity affirms her own speaking position, hence her interest in the discourse of the Virgin Mary, Christianity's mother-son
discourse, which is represented as the son's inscription of desire. 'The Father, Love, and Banishment' was first published in 1976, the year Kristeva's son was born. Is Kristeva, as mother/writer attempting to claim a speaking position as the mother, speaking through the son? She asks: 'Having had a child, could a woman then, speak another love?'

For there is, in the son's search for meaning and jouissance, a maternal jouissance left untouched, an other, unnamed and seductive. Kristeva ends her essay with this statement:

> And that will have to do until someone else comes in a burst of song, color, and laughter to conquer the last refuge of the sacred, still inaccessibly hidden in Bellini's remote Madonnas. To give them back to us transformed, secular, and corporeal, more full of language and imagination.

Perhaps this maternal jouissance could be found in a woman's text. What meaning and jouissance could be found if we freed the daughter from her bracketing out by Kristeva (and Freud)? Let us consider a daughter who is trapped in the Oedipal story, but who does not become a mother. Peter Rudnytsky, in *Freud and Oedipus*, suggests that Freud, obsessed with the Oedipal story, and denying the mother, collapses Jocasta and Antigone into an absence, a womb/tomb, a void of desire and death. Is the daughter trapped here, denied access to meaning and maternal jouissance? Does she have a story that can be told?

One version of the silenced tale that Kristeva does not tell, the story of the daughter who is banished, who searches for meaning outside of paternal structures, including the paternally constructed maternal function, might be found in Elizabeth Jolley's text, *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*. It is the daughter's attempt to claim a speaking position that I examine in this chapter.

Weekly can be seen as a childless mother, trapped in a form of mothering seen to be necessary to give her meaning within an Oedipal family story. She can be said to be trapped within the mothering role, unable to separate from the internalized mother and caught by the imposition on her of the mothering role by others. Weekly's situation can be read as an example of the social and psychic entrapment women experience within the Oedipal representation which banishes them from maternal jouissance and meaning.

*The Newspaper of Claremont Street* is an interesting text because it appears not to be about mothers but about lonely old women, without children. However, every woman is a daughter and part of the mother/child dyad. The text can be read as a text that reveals a woman's attempt to separate from the mother and the mothering function, a need which is itself complicated by her desire for the mother. This conflict between nurturance and autonomy characterizes the tensions in women's experiences of mothering.

The mother/daughter relationship is difficult in Western culture because women
are socialized to reproduce nurturing behaviour through the social and psychic structures within which women learn mothering by being mothered. This takes place within a heterosexual economy which requires that they separate from the mother and transfer their love to a male in order to establish a family structure where they can reproduce mothering behaviour. This family structure will privilege the son in his quest to accede to the father's function and it will provide compensation for his loss of access to the maternal body, while it will characterize the daughter as castrated, thus her experience will be one of lack within the symbolic order and it will deny her access to the mother's body representing the birth of her child as a penis substitute rather than as a return to maternal jouissance.

Nancy Chodorow, in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, argues that the nature of child care and nurturing practised in Western society produces daughters who are socially and psychologically constructed to reproduce mothering because of social patterns where mothers take primary responsibility for young children and foster emotional ties and psychological dependency:

> Women's mothering as an institutionalized feature of family life and of the sexual division of labour reproduces itself cyclically. In the process, it contributes to the reproduction of those aspects of the sexual sociology of adult life which grow out of and relate to the fact that women mother. . . .
> The capacities and orientations I describe must be built into personality; they are not behavioral acquisitions. Women's capacities for mothering and abilities to get gratification from it are strongly internalized and psychologically enforced, and are built developmentally into the feminine psychic structure. Women are prepared psychologically for mothering through the developmental situation in which they grow up, and in which women have mothered them.  

Chodorow argues that the asymmetrical structure of parenting creates significant differences in the social and psychological development of boys and girls. Because of being parented by a woman a boy first desires the mother, but, because of the fear of castration, he seeks to separate from her, deny dependence on her, and to structure autonomy on a denial of feminine characteristics. However, the gender symmetry of the mother/daughter relationship encourages close psychic bonds between mothers and daughters, thus girls tend to see themselves as less separate and they tend to reproduce their mothers' patterns of behaviour. There is also a general expectation on women to take on the mother role in order to meet the emotional needs of others:

> Women's early mothering, then, creates specific conscious and unconscious attitudes or expectations in children. Girls and boys expect and assume women's unique capacities for sacrifice, caring, and mothering, and associate women with their own fears of regression and powerlessness.
All family members are positioned by their relation to the mother; their desire for her, their dependence on her, their need to separate; their experience of fullness and of lack.

*The Newspaper of Claremont Street* is constructed on an Oedipal family pattern and Margie Morris and Victor both reproduce the behaviour outlined by Chodorow. Margie identifies with her mother in her tasks and emotional responses and Victor expects them both to care for him:

Weekly and her mother were in service in a large house. House cleaning was the only work they knew. Between them, on swollen feet, they waited on Victor, cherishing him, because they knew no other way. And Victor, as he grew older, made his own life which they were obliged to hold in reverence because they did not understand it. (*N* 11)

Mother and daughter's energy is directed to providing Victor with whatever he needs to establish himself in society, to take up his privileged place in the symbolic order; they give him money, clothes, binoculars (*N* 15). They also provide him with special food, delicacies which have an appeal because of their association with the realm of the semiotic, the pre-Oedipal, thus nurturing his desire for the comfort and love of the mother.

Weekly is not a mother, but she reproduces this pattern of mothering. Women are ascribed a mothering role within society generally. Weekly reproduces the nurturing she has learnt in her daily work of cleaning, in her relationship with Victor and with Nastasya; as Chodorow indicates that women tend to do:

[W]omen . . . reproduce people – physically in their housework and child care, psychologically in their emotional support of husbands and their maternal relation to sons and daughters.²⁴

Weekly's cleaning, apart from maintaining her employers' houses, often provides the emotional nurture that families need, such as in her relationship with Diana Lacey and Mrs. Chatham. The people she cleans for liked 'to feel the soothing comfort of having their things well cared for' (*N* 52). As substitute mother she provides the mothering that other women, as wives and mothers need:

Weekly found that quite middle-aged women liked the suggestion that they treat themselves like babies. (*N* 33)

Like the mother, Weekly is at the primal centre of their houses, she knows their secrets, their 'deep hidden wishes' (*N* 2). Weekly has seen lovemaking, nudity, human arms in bed jackets and half eaten pizzas in the laundry. She knows everything and controls her 'family,' sitting in the Claremont Street store passing on news and advice, thus gaining her
name of 'Newspaper.'

Also, like the mother, Weekly is expected to be the source of provisions and comfort, to meet the needs of the household without anyone caring about her own needs. The opening page of the text establishes this pattern of unrequited nurture:

No one knew or cared where the Newspaper of Claremont Street went in her spare time.

Newspaper, or Weekly, as she was called by those who knew her, earned her living by cleaning other people's houses. . . . filling untidy kitchens with her presence, one kitchen after another, for she worked steadily all day, every day, one house after another. . . . She knew everything about the people she cleaned for and she never missed anything that was going on. (N 1)

She has lost her own identity and name, simply becoming Weekly, the weekly cleaner, or the Newspaper who knows the news and secrets about everyone's lives. Likewise Nastasya who becomes Weekly's oppressive surrogate child, forgets the name of her nurse (N 62). Those who provide a function, especially a function like mothering, tend to lose their identity, becoming simply 'the Mother.' Weekly has no relatives, she is not cherished by anyone (N 4), she lives on her own in a rented house (N 5) and she has ceased to reveal any identity or individuality or beauty in her body which has become an extension of her work. As a mother she is expected to have a sexless body:

Her body was hard like a board and withered with so much work.
Her feet were so large and ugly with rheumatism, she seemed to have stopped looking like a woman. (N 4)

Her body has simply become an instrument for meeting the needs of others:

She was sent into service, and from then on hardly noticed her own body at all, being well covered with the uniform supplied by the Lady of the Big House. (N 7)

Social encoding silences her body.

No one mothers Weekly. She has to meet her own needs herself. Chodorow suggests that this is part of the reproduction of mothering: 'What is hidden in most accounts of the family is that women reproduce themselves through their own daily housework.'[italics Chodorow's]25 The nurturing skills which Weekly demonstrates in providing for the needs of others, are also necessary to maintain herself. While her existence is spartan and her life is uncherished by others, the imagery of her money cradle (N 56) and her memories of Granny Ackroyd and the pear tree suggest ways in which she nurtures herself. Although the Oedipal story silences the daughter, her desire for the
sustaining re-creational power of the maternal ruptures the text. As Weekly cleans her own house, sunlight transforms the old brown linoleum, as it does the embroidered patchwork of her old clothes. This incident is followed by a childhood memory concerning her mother and Granny Ackroyd. Thus cleaning is linked with the desire to return to the mother, to receive nurture and care and cherishing from her, and this memory slides into a memory of Granny Ackroyd's where, in the midst of pit shafts, pit dust and slag heaps are sunflowers and a pear tree:

Out of this nothing there also grew a very old pear tree. In spring Weekly stood pretending she was being married in the cascade of white blossom, but later, when the fruits came, they were small and hard and dry and had no taste at all. (N 6)

The dream and desire are for the beauty and sense of promise provided by the old pear tree, despite the reality of hard, tasteless fruit, just as the desire is for the cherishing and comfort of the mother's body despite the reality of the initiation into a life of hard work.

Within the Oedipal configuration desire is represented as loss. At the Remand Weekly misses her mother. When she runs away she dreams of happy childhood incidents but, superimposed on her memory, is a dream of her mother's death and funeral. The implication appears to be that she can only find freedom and love and comfort in the merging with the mother in death. Weekly has no maternal thoroughfare to reclaim her happy childhood memory, to find the mother, or to seek death. 'Nothing had come along the track to take her anywhere' (N 29). She is alone. In Kristeva's account the son can choose banishment, escape the paternal function and the permanence of meaning and live in the company of paternal Death, and veiled incest, or he can challenge the paternal structures and claim maternal jouissance as if it were his own, but the daughter is trapped, reproducing mothering, yet unable to take hold of the mother's body.

The reproduction of mothering and the Oedipal family structure means that Victor is privileged, as son he is nurtured and cared for, while the daughter is required to satisfy his needs. 'She was older and protected him, but he was the one who ordered her about' (N 9). As son he understands that the family is structured around his access to the mother, who cannot resist his demands. The mother says: "He'll have us through the law courts and in the poor house before he's finished . . . He'll take everything" (N 53). After her mother's death Weekly continues to fulfil the mother's role, letting Victor take all her money (N 14) and providing him with special foods associated with the maternal comfort of the breast, such as white rolls, paté, soft creamy cheese and peaches (N 81). Jolley, in an interview with David Headon, comments that 'Victor really feeds on Weekly.'26 In Kristeva's terms, this totemic meal is mediated through the mother's breast which celebrates the death of the father and the son's right of access to the maternal body.27
The daughter/mother is positioned as desiring to provide all his needs, because she idealizes their relationship: 'she kept wishing she had said something more to comfort Victor. She wished she had kissed him like she sometimes, in those days, kissed his faded childhood photograph' (N 82). But even as she desires that she also wants to be free of the nurturing role, free of his demands of privilege. She desires independence, autonomy. Is there a jouissance of the daughter/mother who resists speaking through the son?

Weekly realizes that betraying Victor will free her of the responsibility of nurturing him, free her from the mothering function (N 98). But the guilt inculcated in her learned mothering behaviour causes her great unhappiness, knowing that she has betrayed her brother in order to free herself from the mothering role (N 99). There is death and loss of meaning for both daughter and son who are trapped in the Oedipal story.

Jolley has spoken about her own experience of the conflict induced by the need to mother. In an interview with David Headon she associates her Quaker upbringing with her own mothering:

I was very much my brother's keeper. It took me a long time to throw off a sense that I was responsible for people. This is a good thing, but it can also be a bad thing. I would tend to see people's problems in such a way that I would react to them. It was only as my own children grew up that I changed. I worried about things for them without at first realizing that they were not worrying about them. I slowly learned not to worry so much.28

In the interview Jolley connects this sense of responsibility to care for others with Weekly's experience with Nastasya:

Weekly cares for Nastasya until she finds she can't manage any more, and then, of course, she really dumps her. I think that experience of feeling that I must care for someone who is in a less fortunate situation than my own has clung to me very much.29

In the text Weekly cannot escape the mothering role. Nastasya takes over Victor's function. She imposes herself on Weekly, needing Weekly to look after her. Despite Weekly's reluctance to care for Nastasya, she finds that she has been conditioned to mother, to care for others, to be her 'brother's keeper.'

Weekly feels herself being drawn in, caught, abjected by the demands Nastasya makes of her:

Weekly felt more and more, in some strange way, claimed by Nastasya. . . . And if one human being claims another then this other is, in a sense, bound by this claim to belong. . . . Weekly had to do everything for her. (N 70)

Weekly is trapped by the maternal function. She cannot find her own place of
solitude, of banishment, or of love, because she is tied to the mother/child dependency.

Interweaving the account of Weekly's reproduction of the mothering function, is a secret desire which has been crisscrossing the fabric of the text like Weekly's herringbone stitch. This is Weekly's desire to separate, to own a place of her own. Is this possible? Can a mother or a daughter own land, claim her own place, her own position, or does she exist only as an exchange object in the paternal economy? Weekly fears such is the case:

All land is somebody's land. For Weekly the thought of possessing land seemed more of an impertinence than a possibility. (N 60)

Weekly's feelings arise out of a class consciousness, yet her fear does have a greater edge because as a woman she is seen as a possession rather than a possessor.

Jane Flax, in her article 'The Conflict Between Nurturance and Autonomy in Mother–Daughter Relationships and Within Feminism,' argues for the importance of the child first establishing a close relationship with a caretaker – usually the mother, and secondly, then moving through that relationship to the process of separation, individuation. She defines separation and individuation in the following terms:

Separation means establishing a firm sense of differentiation from the mother, of possessing one's own physical and mental boundaries. Individuation means the development of a range of characteristics, skills and personality traits which are uniquely one's own. 30

This process also needs to be reclaimed by mothers and acknowledged by a culture that traps mothers, binding them in symbiotic union with their child, locking and blocking them in a household chora without access to the symbolic. Susan Rubin Suleiman has pointed out the lack of attention given in psychoanalytic theory to the mother's desire for separation and self–realization, even from woman analysts such as Alice Balint, Melanie Klein, Helene Deutsch and Karen Horney. 31 Weekly is interesting because she is positioned as daughter and as mother, thus she can represent the intersection of the daughter's and the mother's desire for separation.

Weekly has had no models for individuation and separation, except the drowning of Crazy's kittens, but slowly a pattern of images makes possible an alternative position for Weekly, providing a release from the mothering function.

Weekly's growing pile of money is the most significant object in her process of individuation. Throughout the text her money is uniquely her own secret, she sees her money as her means to escape, to enable her to establish a different identity. It is represented by an image of a mountain, an image which represents search, discovery, conquest and self–knowledge:
She rested a little while longer, lingering on the shining slopes of her money mountain, seeing all that the money, in its power, promised her. (N 31)

Her money offers her a chance to separate and be independent.

Cleaning, which is a sign of mothering and caring, a 'looking-after' of others, can also become a sign of separation, a shaking off of the abject, the dust and grime of household living in an establishing of boundaries. So Weekly strips and cleans the stoves and scrubs the shower curtains with gusto: 'she scoured off the grease and burnt coffee grounds' (N 52). While she cleans the stove at Lacey's she slides into the memory of her mother warning her not to let Victor take her things, and the threat of the resultant loss of autonomy:

'Margie I can't ever understand why you let Victor take your things. You'll hardly have a thing to call your own, and you should never give him money.... He'll take everything.' (N 52–3)

It appears that she needs to leave the Oedipal family formation to find freedom.

Weekly sweeps and polishes her own rented room to establish it as her place, a private place where she can be alone, free to dream of her secret. She also uses the sweeping to sweep away her memory of Victor:

The boys in the street reminded Weekly of other boys in other streets. The policeman had called that day, long ago, to warn her mother about Victor. . . Weekly tried to dismiss the memory. . .

There was something special about sweeping. While she swept, all the time while her broom was moving, sweeping and sweeping, her mind found a freedom that might be quite unknown in any other kind of work. Weekly felt the fresh air of the morning touch her cheeks, it brought with the forgetfulness of sweeping, green meadows and willow trees along the flat, grassy banks of a river. (N 9)

Her sweeping suggests a glimpse of jouissance, gained through dismissing the brother and claiming the memory associated with maternal pleasure. Again the link between her sweeping, her patched clothes and childhood memories suggests a possible jouissance. The clothes she has been given, the cast-offs, she makes her own by her herringbone embroidery, establishing her own borders and boundaries, imprinting her design on the fabric, as a representation of her own dream of separation and connectedness. Likewise her sweeping transforms the void of loss with memories of consolation.

The desire for her own land is a desire for her own place, her territory. A piece of land, separate from other land, acquired by her, for her own purpose, to do with as she
She did not want very much, just for a few acres to be her own land. *(N 64)*

Her memory of land is associated with her father's desire to have some land 'all through
his years stoking at the steam laundry he had talked of the country' *(N 27)*, establishing
the desire for land as belonging to the paternal realm. In another memory of her father and
the country her desire slides into 'the strength and beauty of her money' *(N 85).* Ownership of land is a material recognition of her rights, her autonomy.

The stories of Victor, Nastasya and Crazy the cat interweave in the text, all playing
out the conflicting demands for nurture and autonomy to which Weekly is subject.
Weekly's treatment of Crazy the mother cat, is the penultimate strand in her claiming of
independence. Crazy deposits her kittens on Weekly's bed knowing that Weekly will feel
obliged to take care of them. At first she does, finding homes for the kittens, but when she
is unable to find homes for all of them she kills them and shuts out the cries of the mother
cat, demonstrating the sense of separation she needs to develop to maintain her autonomy.
The incident is preceded by an account of the enforced separation of Nastasya from
Torben before Nastasya is capable of looking after herself, and Weekly's memory of her
love of Victor (the child) but also her need to separate from him:

She tried not to think of Victor when she went to bed, at last, after her
long day. She put Crazy out on the verandah and climbed into her bed. It
was time to have the room to herself. She enjoyed the privacy and
quietness of her ugly room. *(N 55–6)*

But Narsty is an insistent, demanding child who invades Weekly's room in a way that
Crazy was never able to *(N 58).* Nastasya threatens to merge with Weekly, to take over
her room, her thoughts, her solitude. Weekly must fight to retain her own boundaries, her
separateness:

Whatever could she do with Nastasya. She had become an obstacle, a kind
of wall which Weekly would have to climb over every day before she
could do anything. As well as having to care for her and prepare her food,. .
. . there was the burden of this endless talking, just when she wanted to be
quietly with her own thoughts. *(N 69)*

Weekly needs to flee the maternal function.

Crazy has given Weekly the model for separation. Weekly positions Nastasya as
the kittens making mothering demands on her that she can only meet at the cost of the loss
of individuation:

All she had was her land and her solitude and this way to be taken over by
Nastasya. If only Nastasya could be quietly and kindly put out of the way; her useless existence, which only survived by living on Weekly, ended quickly and without fuss like the kittens whose wailing was so easily and promptly extinguished. But how could this be done? (N 107)

Interestingly Nastasya is also positioned as Crazy, the mother cat, which Weekly puts out of her room, ignoring the cries (N 55–6, cf 114). Perhaps this suggests the Weekly as mother needs to separate from the demands of the child and also that Weekly, as daughter needs to separate from the expectations of nurturing and mothering imposed on her by her own mother and by the institution of mothering.

It is on her land that Weekly discovers freedom and power. She is able to dance her own dance. The image of the bride, although bound by patriarchal associations, perhaps suggests the blossoming of a young woman, a rite of passage into a new life of fruitfulness. She is a bride without a husband, although perhaps he is represented as the land on which she dances and rests with bare feet. But the land has both maternal and paternal connotations associated with memories of both the mother and the father. Or perhaps the groom is the pear tree which has phallic associations, but it is also represented as maternal, since it is going to bear fruit and it is called her baby (N 109). This interesting intermix of images of polymorphous gendering, the blending of autonomy and nurture present in the land and the degendering and scattering of the Oedipal family configurations suggests that there are multiple movements to the daughter's dance. Weekly dances to her own music. This necessitates letting go of the demands of others. It means standing brave and tall and full of new life, like her pear tree. It means not hearing the calls of others, letting them dance their own pear tree dance, 'it looked as if Nastasya was dancing the pear tree dance' (N 114). Weekly distances herself from Nastasya; she looks at her and sees her as if she is dancing. There are interesting associations here with the mother/child mirroring necessary for the development of self. In Lacan's formulation the child misrecognizes a sense of self. Nastasya's dance appears to be modelled on Weekly's, but Narsty's dance is a dance of death, a desire for a return to the fantasy of a unity with love and cosseting she received as a child from her nurse.

The pear tree is a central image. It represents the beauty and grace of freedom of movement, the claiming of one's secret desire, the entry into a new life of one's own:

For the first time in her life the Newspaper of Claremont Street was dancing. Stepping round and round the little tree she was like a bride dancing. She imagined a veil of lacy white blossom falling all around her. Round and round the tree, dancing, firming the softly yielding earth with her bare feet. And from the little foil label, blowing in the restlessness of the evening, came a fragile music for the pear tree dance... Weekly went on dancing. She forgot Nastasya for a moment. There was a smoothness and ease about her bare feet on the soft, black soil and the little tree seemed
comfortable at last. Weekly looked at its tiny twig like trunk, perhaps it was not dead after all. It looked glossy and stood bravely there in the dusk. She began to walk slowly up her land still dancing, it seemed, only more slowly; she heard the tiny label, it was like strange faint music. (N 113–14)

The strange music of the label is reminiscent of what Kristeva refers to as a language that 'musicates through letters,' which claims love and denies death. Such a vision could be said to draw on the daughter's desire for maternal jouissance.

Despite the beauty of the pear tree image, and the textual and psychic justification for Weekly's behaviour, there is a ruthlessness in her action which is unsettling. While we recognize the need to separate, the desire for independence, the grotesqueness of Weekly's solution often evokes reactions of horror from readers. If we read Weekly as a character constructed within a psychological framework that represents woman as immature, childlike, narcissistic, able only to separate as a lacking being who requires a man and a child to fill the hole of her lack, then resolution requires drastic, destructive action and a carnivalesque insertion of a pear tree in the hole. It could be represented as the reaction of a daughter struggling to escape from the trap of parenthesis assigned to her by Kristeva's Freudian reading of the Oedipal story.

Weekly's desire for a place of her own can be interpreted as a desire for a place in language, a speaking position, the daughter's coming to language in the gap created by the absence of the mother. It is appropriate that in one of her earliest books Jolley should claim this speaking position for her character, a speaking position which in later texts will be broken open, shattered, reformed in a multiplicity of ways. But first a speaking position, a claiming of autonomy within an acknowledgment of the diversity that is held together in the inscription I/i, a term used by Trinh T. Minh-ha to convey the interactive dialogue of 'the plural, non-unitary subject.' The inscription 'I/i' represents the interaction of the 'I (the all-knowing subject),' who speaks, who is published, with the 'i (the personal race-and gender-specific subject)' who questions the writing. The claiming of a subject position as writer could be said to involve the daughter's desire to move aside from the maternal function, to position it as 'i,' a personal specific subjectivity, not the totalizing function of 'I, The Mother.'

Woman's difficulty in claiming a subject position and the ruthlessness of the actions necessary to separate from the maternal function reveal the privileging of the son's position with the Oedipal family structure and his 'rite/right of passage' to language. Because of a girl's sense of merging with the mother, achieving autonomy is difficult, the rupture feels like rejection, murder. Victor has no similar difficulty in separating, going his own way and yet demanding nurture when he requires it.

For a daughter, or a mother, freeing herself from the maternal function may feel like a rupturing. What is required to avoid this is a maternal thoroughfare, to enable a
claiming of both nurture and autonomy, an attempt to dance the secular maternal jouissance that Kristeva suggests is needed as a resolution to 'The Father, Love and Banishment.' According to Kristeva, poetic language represents the subject's struggle to speak the semiotic within the symbolic, that is a speaking from the maternal thoroughfare, a claiming of maternal jouissance within the symbolic structures of language and society.

There is a semiotic murmur which sings through *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*, hinting at the maternal thoroughfare which can be read more strongly in Jolley's later texts. While Weekly's desire for a place can be read as a desire for separation, independence, a desire for a position in the paternal order, a speaking position, Weekly's loss of her mother evokes the desire for maternal nurture and cherishing. Thus Weekly's desire for land, representing access to a position of freedom and ownership, also functions as a maternal thoroughfare, a claiming of the semiotic within the symbolic. The short story 'Pear Tree Dance,' an earlier version of *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*, focuses on Weekly's desire for the land rather than the obstructions to obtaining it; in particular Victor and Nastasya are absent (WL 1-9). *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* questions this position, exploring the social complications and resistances to our desire to claim our dreams, the family ties and responsibilities that block desire. There is in fact no paternal authority in *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*. The death of the father functions to release the daughter's secret desire, analogous to the son's, that is, access to the mother's body. To claim authority and position a daughter must use the maternal thoroughfare. Rather than trapping women in the *chora*, maternal jouissance can provide a thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic.

Weekly's secret pile of money, her means to achieve knowledge and pleasure, resonates with polyvalent associations. It is represented as a mountain with the fragrance of roses and honeysuckle and fresh country air. Her beautiful fragrant wealth (*N* 41), her silver cone of money smells of the scent of pine forests and the cold clean air of a fast-flowing river (*N* 54). The fragrance of her money is dialogic, associated with wealth, freedom, land and fresh air. Weekly's image of her money changes from a mountain to a cradle. The cradle soothes Weekly, providing a return to the security of the mother, maintained by an anal desire to retain the mother through her savings. Weekly is rocked to sleep in the gentle musical depths of her cradle, with the lullaby of coins. Her money in her bank books is represented as 'her babies' (*N* 18). Her money, as a way of attaining independence through a claiming of a place in the symbolic, is also represented as a cradle, which positions it in the maternal *chora*. This suggests the possibility of a maternal thoroughfare, an ingress from the semiotic to the symbolic. It suggests the possibility of a coexistence of nurture and autonomy, a desire to enjoy the closeness and the comfort of the mother without losing one's separateness. The representation of her money as a cradle and babies could also be read as a parodic gesture, a disclaiming of the
need for women to be fixed in a maternal role and a challenge to Freudian notions of penis envy. Money will do very well instead!

The land is also described in terms of a semiotic experience, a return to the mother. The first and perfect, Edenic place that Weekly sees and desires, is in a valley with lush pastures and cattle grazing and a new born calf struggling to get up on its legs. The memory of a hymn evokes associations of being nurtured and protected (N 66). The rich, fertile, Edenic first land is unobtainable. The second piece of land, apparently less perfect, which does become hers, is similarly described in semiotic terms. It is different from the first valley, which had suggested the original archaic place of the fertile mother, but the second site also resonates with desire. The second valley is more ambiguous, polyvalent, it seems to contain elements of merging and autonomy. There are many tall trees promising independence (N 88). The black cockatoos also have a separateness, an independence:

[T]hey brought to the place a quality of strangeness, of something unknown, as if they had some other knowledge, something to do with another kind of life. (N 89)

Their 'strangeness' also evokes a sense of 'untouched serenity,' which Kristeva associates with the maternal chora, place of desire and jouissance in its stillness and solitude, which the son desires but cannot attain. Weekly walks over the fragrant warm earth, caressed by the light and shade amongst the trees (N 90) indicating the possibility of a mother/daughter dialogue where the daughter can enjoy the caresses of the mother while enjoying her independence from the mother and the mother likewise can enjoy separation and merging.

Weekly situates herself as child and mother in this land/chora. She falls asleep and wakes like a little child crying and desiring the mother (N 88). In the pear tree dance she becomes the mother planting and tending her pear tree baby (N 109), which involves her in the cycle of life, a dance progression passed on from grandmother to mother to daughter. The trees and plants on her property have a sense of waiting for her to continue with them what some other person had started a long time ago (N 110).

The pear tree dance is a celebration of the maternal nurturance, but also a reclaiming of the daughter's autonomy. The woman who seemed to have stopped looking like a woman, reclaims her body and her subjectivity in the pear tree dance. She is like a bride entering her land, blossoming with jouissance. In Kristeva's analysis of Not I the old woman (whom Kristeva reads as woman speaking through a man) has sacrificed sexuality and self to become a mouth through which mad, meaningless jouissance seeps because the maternal body has been censored. Alternatively, a woman's writing of her body/text may be sustained by her embrace of the maternal body, through a speaking of the mother.
Weekly's desire for a place of her own can be read as a desire for a place in language, a speaking position, a desire for an acknowledgment of her identity and independence, a claiming of her body/text. She takes her place in language by stepping aside from the mother/child symbiosis which threatens to bind her in reproductive dependence, replacing it with her money which allows her to separate, her pear tree which functions to signify the gap created by the loss of the mother/child merging, a gap which functions as desire to be reclaimed in language, and with her land, as a maternal thoroughfare giving entry to the semiotic and the symbolic. The pear tree dance can be read as the dance of a woman who has escaped from the trap of being bracketed out, denied access to either the symbolic or the maternal body.
NOTES


4. Kristeva 149.


18. Kristeva 158.

19. Rudnytsky 89.


22 Chodorow 167.
23 Chodorow 83.
24 Chodorow 36.
25 Chodorow 36.
26 David Headon, 'Elizabeth Jolley,' (interview) Meanjin 44.1 (March 1985) : 46.
28 Headon 42.
29 Headon 42.
30 Flax, 'The Conflict Between Nurturance and Autonomy' 172.
31 Suleiman, 'Writing and Motherhood' 355–6.
32 Kristeva 'Banishment' 157.
34 Kristeva, 'Banishment' 158.
35 Kristeva 155–8.
36 Kristeva 154.
Chapter 4 : The Polylogue of Miss Peabody's Inheritance

Kristeva's work challenges the fictive unity of phallic presence with the heterogeneity of language and the diversity of subject positions possible for the subject–in–process, as represented by the male artist. It is necessary to explore the possibility suggested by Kristeva of finding a speaking position by a destabilization of the phallic presence, but also to go 'beyond' Kristeva by positioning the subject as a subject–in–process who experiences loss in relation to birth and language rather than in relation to the phallus. I want to use Kristeva's method to read Miss Peabody's Inheritance, in order to show how the phallic presence may be destabilized by a polylogue of women's voices.

In 'The Novel as Polylogue' Kristeva discusses the need she sees in Western society to find a new language and a new speaking position. This is necessary because society is at a 'turning point'; while still grounded in rationality and unity and control, it also acknowledges, but does not know where to situate the fragmentation of meaning and control, the articulations of the unconscious and the representation of the subject as a subject–in–process:

What about us, here, now, concretely, enclosed within a still–active bourgeoisie, living in a culture that is weakened but still capable of integration, at the peak of a rationality that is no longer Greek, but dialecticized, materialized, permeated by the unconscious, and structured by the reality principle laid down by social contradictions? A language, a subject within language, seeks itself – it seeks one that might enunciate this turning point, this whirlwind, this reversal, this confrontation of the old within the new.¹

A recognition of the subject as a subject–in–process requires a speaking position which incorporates the heterogeneous drives and desires of the semiotic into the symbolic social and linguistic structures. Body and language are shattered and the subject is poised on the edge of the abyss, searching not for meaning, but for jouissance. What is required is a body/text which incorporates the other, the heterogeneity, the negation, the lost territory (of the mother):

This heterogeneous object is of course a body that invites me to identify with it (woman, child, androgyne?) and immediately forbids any identification; it is not me, it is a non–me in me, beside me, outside of me, where the me becomes lost. This heterogeneous object is a body, because it is a text. . . . A body, a text that bounces back to me echoes of a territory that I have lost but that I am seeking within the blackness of dreams. . . Territory of the mother. What I am saying to you is that if this heterogeneous body, this risky text provide meaning, identity, and jouissance, they do so in a completely different way than a "Name–of–the–Father."²
Kristeva suggests that this new form of writing functions as a body, as a site of repressed drives and desires which breaks open language and identity. In the gap thus revealed, in the territory of the other, echoes and dreams reconstruct the lost maternal jouissance.

Kristeva claims that the 'speaking self' in the process of speaking twists and divides itself:

'T continually makes itself over again, repositits itself as a displaced, symbolic witness of the shattering where every entity was dissolved.'

The split and divided subject is on the threshold between bodily and textual inscription, continually separating from and reclaiming the lost mother.

In Kristeva's analysis the experience of the shattered multiplicity of 'T, this non-identity, is determined by sexual difference. For Kristeva it means that woman is situated in the semiotic without a speaking position, the position of 'non-me,' a position of lack. Kristeva claims that if woman is to speak she must place herself in the symbolic through positioning herself in relation to the phallus:

I think that for a woman, generally speaking, the loss of identity in jouissance demands of her that she experience the phallus that she simply is; but this phallus must immediately be established somewhere; in narcissism, for instance, in children, in a denial and/or a hypostasis of the other woman, in narrow-minded mastery, or in fetishism of one's "work" (writing, painting, knitting, et cetera). Otherwise, we have an underwater, undermaternal dive: oral regression, spasmodic but unspeakable and savage violence, and a denial of effective negativity.

Kristeva's argument, coming from within the Freudian phallocentric representation of women, is that a 'phallic' empowerment is necessary, otherwise infantile regression traps woman. If we accept Kristeva's claim then power resides with the phallic mother and women are either trapped in the semiotic or in narcissism or penis envy. Within Kristeva's Freudian paradigm the subject must be positioned in relation to the phallus; or, as Lacan claims, one must have or be the phallus.

However, Kristeva also suggests that if a solution is to be found to the 'feminine problematic' of lack of a speaking position it involves a destabilization of 'phallic presence' and the possibility of maintaining the semiotic elements of the diverse, 'split apart' heterogeneity of language and identity within the symbolic. For woman to speak, the semiotic needs to be spoken in the symbolic. She says:

As far as I am concerned, it involves coming to grips with one's language and body as others, as heterogeneous elements.
infinite, repeated, multipliable dissolution, until you recover possibilities of symbolic restoration: having a position that allows your voice to be heard in real, social matters – but a voice fragmented by increasing, infinitizing breaks. In short, a device that dissolves all of your solutions, . . . in order to point out to you that you do not take place as such, but as a stance essential to a practice. With this device, castration applies not to this or that person, but specifically to each individual in recurrent fashion. It applies to him as he experiences his phallic fixation; to her as she accedes to it, and the other way around, interchangeably.6

For Kristeva, who is working within a phallocentric signifying system, woman's stance is one of negativity. However, to argue 'beyond' Kristeva, a destabilization of the phallic presence offers the possibility of castration being interpreted in a wider, different sense than Freud (or Kristeva) allows. Rather than the 'hole' of loss being filled with the rigid phallus, other factors attributing to a sense of loss or 'castration' may lead to a splitting of identity. The castration equivalent we have all experienced is, of course, birth, the cutting of the umbilical cord, the separation from the mother, the founding act of the division into self and other:

The first wound comes with the cutting of the umbilical cord. The thread is cut and we're out there alone.7

Freud acknowledges, then disavows the castration of birth, characteristically in a footnote (his fetish?) in his discussion of Little Hans' case:

It has been urged that every time his mother's breast is withdrawn from a baby he is bound to feel it as castration (that is to say, as the loss of what he regards as an important part of his own body); that, further, he cannot fail to be similarly affected by the regular loss of his faeces; and, finally, that the act of birth itself (consisting as it does in the separation of the child from his mother, with whom he has hitherto been united) is the prototype of all castration. While recognizing all of these roots of the complex, I have nevertheless put forward the view that the term 'castration complex' ought to be confined to those excitations and consequences which are bound up with the loss of the penis.8

Freud offers no explanation for dismissing other, more fundamental experiences of loss, preferring to make castration dependant on an awareness of sexual difference. To locate castration in the female body is to maintain the fiction of a unified, complete male subject. By contrast, to acknowledge that we all experience a sense of loss due to separation from the mother's body, and a sense of lack on entry into language, allows for identity to be formulated in relation to the mother's body rather than the phallus, and offers maternal language as the means of ingress to the symbolic. One could then say
that one must have or be the mother!

Kaja Silverman, in *The Acoustic Mirror*, argues for a castration that is the result of an awareness of loss and difference created by language. Basing her argument on Lacan's mirror stage, she claims that a child's entry into language is the point at which an awareness of loss occurs and where language takes the place of the real:

The entry into language is the juncture at which the object is definitively and irrevocably lost, and the subject . . . found. . . . the child identifies with a signifier through which it is inserted into a closed field of signification. . . . Since the loss of the object always entails a loss of what was once part of the subject, it is -- in the strictest sense of the word -- a castration. . . . *castration* is the only correct term with which to designate the break with the real induced by language.9

Castration can then be said to apply to the loss of the real, that is the child's *choric* existence with the mother. Silverman's image of the 'acoustic mirror' is a recognition of the function of the mother's voice and language as the 'mirror' in which the child merges and separates from the mother, constructing identity by echoing and differentiating sound. It is also the maternal voice which ruptures and separates, introducing difference and Otherness, giving access to the symbolic order through a naming of objects. Thus it can be argued that the body/text experiences castration and desire in relation to the loss of the mother's language. Silverman claims:

[I]t must not be forgotten that the maternal voice is also what first ruptures plenitude and introduces difference, at least within the paradigmatic Western family -- the voice which first charts out and names the world for the infant subject, and which itself provides the first axis of Otherness.10

Thus identity and language can be said to be constructed in relation to the mother, rather than the phallus. To destabilize the phallic presence enables the mother to be positioned as providing the maternal thoroughfare, the access to the symbolic through maternal language and positions the subject as experiencing lack in relation to language and desire for a return to the maternal *chora* through the body/text.

Silverman engages in a strong criticism of Kristeva, claiming that Kristeva's representation of the *chora* is one which functions to enclose the child in a sonorous envelope which the child must leave to enter the symbolic, and this process strips the mother of language.11 Kristeva's rejection of the mother's role in teaching the child language and in introducing the child to the stories of our culture,12 a role which she attributes to the father in *Freud and Love: Treatment and its Discontents*,13 robs the mother of agency, positioning her as a filter for patriarchal constructs, rather than a maternal thoroughfare.
Silverman also claims that Kristeva's privileging of male artists' writing of the semiotic within the symbolic, and Kristeva's own heavily theoretical discourse, is a defence against a repressed desire for union with the mother:

The insistently masculine identity of the artist permits Kristeva to articulate her desire for the mother under the cover of heterosexuality, or of a preoccupation with male homosexuality. However, the insistently return of the figure of the male artist also speaks to the tremendous anxiety which accompanies Kristeva's chorique, an anxiety which has much to do with her own status as a speaking subject, and which helps to explain her ambivalent relationship with feminism. . . . How are we to account for the distance that separates Kristeva's enunciative stance from her theoretical preoccupations, her discourse from the dream that sustains it? Her highly rationalized language must be understood at least in part, it seems to me, as a defense against her desire for union with the mother, since within the terms of her own analysis that union would necessarily mean the collapse of her subjectivity and the loss of her voice.14

Perhaps it is Kristeva's anxiety about the mother which motivates her insistence on a Freudian phallocentric paradigm that requires that a woman position herself in relation to the phallus and causes her, in the midst of maternal jouissance in 'Stabat Mater,' to cry out 'I yearn for the Law.'15 Silverman's criticism of Kristeva allows for a reassessment of phallic presence and Kristeva's insistence on a male speaking position.

In 'The Novel as Polylogue' Kristeva analyses Philippe Sollers' novel H as an example of a text which speaks the semiotic within the symbolic. Features of such writing include a rejection of the phallic mother, which in Kristeva's terms, involves a confrontation with her in order to go beyond her, to situate the subject (male) in the paternal function, while the 'spoken incest'16 with the mother allows diversity and multiplicity of subject positions.17 The 'spoken incest' of the body/text is evident in the musical, broken rhythmic pattern which gives rise to jouissance. To challenge this, to enable women to claim the maternal inheritance involves a reclaiming of a maternal jouissance that exceeds the phallic mother, that is the mother who acts in the Name-of-the-Father. It effects a speaking of the body/text as an enunciation of the semiotic within the symbolic. It positions the subject as heterogeneous, diverse and fluid and it challenges the unitary structures of genre, language and form.

Miss Peabody's Inheritance challenges the unitary structures of genre, language and form in a text which functions as a text within a letter within a text. Identity is also destabilized, opened out and reformed. The power of the phallic mother is rejected in favour of a reclaiming of the daughter's linguistic inheritance of maternal language and jouissance through the maternal body/text.

To apply Kristeva's reading strategies in The Novel as Polylogue without
challenging her claims in relation to women, would result in a reading which positions Miss Peabody as a lonely spinster, who, because she is responsible for the care of her invalid mother and her only form of escape is her night-time reading of Diana Hopewell's letters, could be said to be trapped within the semiotic impotent *choric* space created by her mother and the novelist, or it would leave her, precariously, compliantly, within the world of Fortress Enterprise, where she works. Miss Peabody's mother would be read as the phallic mother, the controlling and constraining mother who seeks to position her daughter in the symbolic as female through the tasks of nurturing, caring, cleaning and cooking. Seeking to be the phallus, Miss Peabody could be said to insert herself between Mr Bains and Mr Barrington in the lift: 'she stood cheekily between them breathing in their maleness in the lift' (*MPI* 13). She could be said to attempt to fill her social role through a fantasy based on Miss Truscott's love life (*MPI* 13). Miss Peabody and Diana Hopewell would be read as ineffectual women, trapped in the semiotic, coiled in their own jouissance. Miss Peabody's inheritance then becomes the traditional Freudian one of lack, through a narcissistic positioning of herself within the symbolic structures of language and society. But to read the text in such a way is to deny the disruptive and joyful diversity of identity and jouissance at play in the text, it is to ignore the destabilization of the phallic presence represented by Barry Bain's experience of feeling stifled and '[t]angled utterly in female arms and legs' (*MPI* 135).

Other readings of *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* are possible. The text requires a reading that uses the maternal thoroughfare to speak the semiotic within the symbolic, to speak diversity of subject position and play in language. Such a reading challenges Kristeva's claim about woman's need to speak the phallus. It utilizes a language of diversity and desire in order to 'provide meaning, identity, and jouissance, . . . in a completely different way than a "Name-of-the-Father."'¹⁹

If birth is allowed to be the primary castration then all subjects are positioned in relation to the mother rather than in relation to the phallus. This refocusses our reading of *Miss Peabody's Inheritance*. Miss Hopewell's narrative turns things upside down which suggests that the 'mothering' which Dorothy receives from the antipodes 'turns her world upside down,' an idea which is suggested by Dorothy's bedtime reading of *Great Expectations* to her mother, where Pip's world is turned upside down by Magwitch (*MPI* 23). Although Dorothy's mother functions as an example of the controlling phallic mother: 'it was uncanny how her mother seemed to know what she was doing' (*MPI* 5), she is also shown as child-like, reduced to elements of orality and anality. While Mrs Peabody is the mother from whom Dorothy desires to separate, the self/other boundaries merge so that Mrs Peabody is also positioned as the child who Dorothy must mother, providing milk, bathing, bedtime stories and prayers. Confined to her room, Mrs. Peabody's day consists of reminiscing with her neighbour, eating tasteless sandwiches
and being bathed and taken to the toilet by her daughter. Miss Peabody desires to separate from both the daughterly and mothering role, to live a life of freedom and imagination where 'The nights belonged to the novelist' (MPI 1), but the petulant, childish voice and controlling power of her mother refuses to allow her to separate. Dorothy soothes and reads to the old lady, enacting scenes from her own childhood:

> It took some time to soothe the old lady. Dorothy, happy with her letter and the late, out of turn, bath, remembered her own childhood earache and she remembered her mother's gentle hands, hovering in candlelight, putting something warm in her ear. It was somehow softening to remember this; it made it easy not to be impatient however selfish and tiresome her mother might be now. (MPI 20–21)

This passage seems to confirm the claim that Kristeva makes that women can become trapped in the semiotic. The semiotic pleasure of the bath and the letter activate Dorothy's memory of the idealized mother of childhood desire and fantasy. But this maternal jouissance functions to comfort her, enabling her to carry out the day to day tasks for a selfish, complaining mother.

One of the features of a polylogical text which challenges the phallic presence is suggested by the shifting of the boundaries of the mother/daughter relationship, the daughter who is daughter and mother, me and non–me in the reversal and interplay of the maternal relationship. Shifting subject and family boundaries are ruptured by contrapuntal movement of polylogical time: Kristeva refers to the fact that 'shattering the family through rhythmic polylogue puts an end to that time [The linear–phallic time of Oedipal family relations].'20 So Kristeva's own text provides the rupture with which to challenge phallic presence. What is needed is an enabling mother, a reclaiming of the mother/daughter relationship, a surrogate mother and a second birth, to enable a birthing of the semiotic within the symbolic through the maternal thoroughfare. Kristeva, while acknowledging the need for a rebirth, positions it within an Oedipal context:

> This "second birth" – this Dionysiac birth – probably comes at the moment of puberty: then the subject and the Oedipal, maternal body come together again, her power collides with the symbolic... and the subject experiences the trauma of this collision. At that point, either the subject submits inextricably to a reactivated Oedipal experience, or he and his semiotic capability flee beyond the burnt out, distracting mother who threatens symbolic unity, but who is ultimately carried along within a semiotic process, where the subject is alternately put together and pulled apart.21

Miss Peabody's 'second birth' is a textual one, she reclaims the maternal in the letters of Diane Hopewell. The textual delights of night–time fantasy are pleasures experienced by
an escape from the mother's calls for attention and control, a jouissance located in the gap created by the absence of the mother, but functioning as a means to rediscover the mother:

As she lit the gas under the hateful little milk saucepan she let her mind wander pleasantly. . . . It was beyond Miss Peabody's experience to understand why Miss Thorne should do this. What would the girl's parents think? It seemed an impulsive thing for a woman in Miss Thorne's position to do.

The milk frothed all over the stove.

'Oh drat!'

'Dotty! Dotty!'

'Coming Mother.' (MPI 4)

Separated from the mother, Miss Peabody is able to let her mind wander, the contemplation of an impulsive pleasure beyond her daughterly experience froths and bubbles in her mind as she desires to escape her hateful task; the milk and the demands of her mother. Mrs Peabody, as the phallic mother, represents the mother whom we desire and fear because she draws us to the maternal chora of regressive behaviour: 'the phallic Mother who gathers us all into orality and anality, into the pleasure of fusion and rejection,' represented by the hot milk drinks and commodes.

It is necessary for Miss Peabody to separate from such a mother, but she does not separate in order to situate herself in the symbolic paternal order, represented in this text by the boring, submissive office routine and repetitive daily life:

She went up to London every day to work, a short sedate train journey and a short walk at either end. The routine never varied. How dull this was in her reply. (MPI 7)

All day long fussing through filing cabinets while surreptitiously nibbling biscuits and screwing up and throwing away countless typing errors, she looked forward impatiently to the evening and to the novelist's letters. (MPI 4)

For Miss Peabody, access to language is not through the paternal structures of the office with its dull routine, files and typing errors. The language which opens up meaning for her is the alternative created world of Diana Hopewell's letters and novels. As the title and conclusion of the text suggest, Diana Hopewell's novel is to become Miss Peabody's thoroughfare to language, subject position and jouissance. It is to be her maternal inheritance. Miss Peabody's inheritance is a claiming of a daughter's birthright, not a rejection of the mother, but a separation from a phallic mother as a representative of paternal Law, and a reclaiming of a lost maternal inheritance, a mother/daughter
relationship through a reclaiming of the lost tradition of women's writing.

The mother and daughter relationship can be said to be doubly-dispossessed; the daughter is represented as 'lacking' as woman and in relation to the mother. Coral Ann Howell's study of Elizabeth Jolley and Margaret Laurence, which is entitled 'In Search of Lost Mothers,' makes such a claim. She uses a post-colonial paradigm to explore women writers' relation to literary and cultural traditions as they write their way out of dispossession into inheritance. Miss Peabody's inheritance gives her right of entry to the symbolic through maternal language. It involves a recognition of the specificities of women's experiences. Maternal language can provide a voicing of the language and stories women have learnt from their 'mothers.' Miss Peabody is enabled to write herself through the mother's narrative. It is also necessary that she recreate, reform the narrative so that it tells her own story. To claim her inheritance she needs a title to situate the unfinished text in the symbolic (MPI 157). To entitle her story is to claim a speaking position. 'Perhaps it is in writing, the novelist wrote, that the writer remakes himself and his world' (MPI 15). The maternal thoroughfare provides a polylogue of language with which women may take possession of the symbolic.

Maternal language shatters the unity and control of symbolic linguistic structures with a desire for a diverse jouissance of female genitalia/difference in writing. Thick, many paged letters, glowing with different coloured inks, stuffed through the letter box, hidden in bedroom drawers and carried in handbags, are read in bath and bedroom; the physical context forms an important part of the letters' textuality/sexuality. The semiotic elements of the text; such as the letter format, the discontinuous, interrupted, disruptive narrative with its multilayered stories and variety of characters, the play of language, the rhythm and music of the text, reveal a jouissance which is from the lost territory of the mother. This jouissance needs to be reclaimed and allowed to speak in the symbolic as a process of the birthing of poetic language. This is the claim that Kristeva makes for the function of the mother in relation to subjectivity and textuality:

No language can sing unless it confronts the Phallic Mother. For all that it must not leave her untouched, outside, opposite, against the law, the absolute esoteric code. Rather, it must swallow her, eat her, dissolve her, set her up like a boundary of the process where "I" with "she" - "the other," "the mother" - becomes lost. . . . Know the mother, first take her place, thoroughly investigate her jouissance and, without releasing her, go beyond her. The language that serves as a witness to this course is iridescent with a sexuality of which it does not "speak"; it turns it into rhythm - it is rhythm.

Kristeva claims that in order to write the artist must confront the sexuality of the mother which has been silenced in the patriarchal inscriptions of an asexual phallic mother. The
writer needs to '[k]now the mother,' then 'go beyond her' to locate jouissance. By releasing the iridescent jouissance of the mother into the text language comes to sing in the maternal thoroughfare.

In *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* the maternal metaphor is read as a linguistic device. There is no pregnant body to enact the birthing of signification, although there is Gwenda's desire for a child. Birthing is textual, Diana Hopewell's letters function as the thoroughfare for the interplay of the semiotic through the symbolic. The letters encode the drives of the semiotic in the symbolic structures of the text. Julia Kristeva, in an interview with Vassiliki Kolocotroni, discusses the interplay between bodily and textual practice, indicating how the release of the semiotic into the symbolic creates poetic language which has a psychic and a textual function:

> Once this passage is effected, once the semiotic enters the symbolic, we reach a moment of distortion, a moment of rhetorical figures, rhythms and alliterations, what is in fact poetic language in all its particularities. This is for me an instance of both a subjective crisis and an amplification of the register of expression, since repression is overcome and the individual is exposed to his/her passions, while, at the same time, being able to formulate them and communicate with others. This is what I call 'text'... my formulation includes the psychoanalytical aspect of the phenomenon, that is, the unconscious and the drives.  

In this interview Kristeva claims that the 'return' of the semiotic into the symbolic achieves a 'transformation,' a 'transubstantiation,' effected through a recovery of memory and of one's own body, in the body/text. Miss Peabody's repressed, unconscious drives and desires are represented as located in another, hidden, dark continent, on the other side of the world. The novelist's letters, as the 'host,' allow Miss Peabody to enact her desires, through the text and, by repositioning the characters, within Miss Peabody's own world. Miss Peabody desires to claim and enjoy her body/text and to reclaim her repressed maternal inheritance. A transformation is effected by the text, a jouissance claimed by a reading of Diana Hopewell's novels rather than through a meeting with her. The body revealed in the imagination of Miss Peabody and Diana Hopewell's texts is not the person at the nursing home; the text transforms the body of Miss Peabody and Diana Hopewell.

The transformation works through the many strands of the narrative. The novelist's letters allow Miss Peabody to escape into the fantasies of her unconscious where the mother is an accepting body with whom one can merge:

> She could look forward to writing more of her letter the next night. She would, later, lie in bed with her window open to the summer night fragrance of the small suburban gardens. She would, in the dark, reach out to Diana and Diana would enfold her. But first there was the letter to
Diana Hopewell becomes the mother for whom Miss Peabody is able to shed the tears she cannot shed for her own mother (MPI 113, 147); she becomes a mother who allows pleasure in the female body; a mother who has passage to the semiotic and the symbolic, providing a maternal thoroughfare for Miss Peabody. The maternal language of Diana Hopewell is written in black ink (associated with official Name-of-the-Father documents), but also in blue, red, green and violet ink (MPI 33, 47), although not with Cixous' white ink, mother's milk, which, in this text, boils over on the stove (MPI 4).

The body/text of maternal language is concerned with the physical form of the letters on the page:

I love your handwriting. It excites me! Perhaps I should say I am in love with your handwriting.

The sentences plunged across the enormous sheets of paper. (MPI 6)

The physical form of the letters contrasts with the Miss Peabody's neat typewriting which is full of mistakes. The omniscient phallic mother/narrator figure, who knows that pots and pans are out of order in the kitchen, is replaced with a shifting narrative perspective which challenges phallogocentric inscriptions of subjectivity, genre, maternity and sexuality suggesting that the narrative control of the phallic mother is ruptured by the carnivalesque desire of maternal jouissance. Miss Peabody's nightly fantasies enable her to confront the phallic mother and go beyond her to reclaim a woman-centred sexuality.

The textual representation of maternity acknowledges the ambiguity, contradictions and sexuality inherent in the mother figure, represented by Diana Hopewell's namesake, the Goddess Diana, the Goddess of Fertility, Goddess of Birth and Goddess of Virgins. The contradictory nature of the mother means that the text flourishes with a wide variety of mother/daughter, non-mother/daughter figures. Miss Thorne, Miss Snowdon and Miss Edgely, spinster friends, living together at Miss Thorne's school for young girls, are represented as 'motherless,' conceived in the text as without mothers, suggesting that they, like Athene, might have sprung from Zeus' head. Debbie and Gwenda have lost their mothers, but desire a maternal bond, which Debbie establishes with her grandmother, and Gwenda by becoming a mother herself and by associating Miss Thorne with her mother, an association which Miss Thorne accepts with pain and longing (MPI 67–8), an association which could be read as suggesting that the basis of human relationships is the mother/daughter relationship and that loss of the mother is the equivalent of primary castration.

In this polylogical representation of maternity the mother bond is also parodied by Gwenda's desire for the baby change bag (MPI 110–11) and in the lecture that Miss
Thorne imagines for her students, based on the text 'Immensitie cloystered in thy deare womb' (MPI 80).

The lack of a family life for so many of the characters suggests that a semiotic subversion of paternal structures breaks down family grouping, allowing new structures to develop. Kristeva claims that in traditional narratives 'the speaking subject constitutes itself as the subject of a family,' but that poetic structures tend to subvert social and linguistic structures. Miss Peabody's Inheritance plays with the contradictions inherent in social, family and genre forms. There are traditional, but hardly typical family structures, missing family members and the absence of family patterns. Eccentric individualistic behaviour flourishes, characters experiment with bizarre and contradictory subject positions and diverse sexuality. They appear to be unaware of their inscription within a phallic linguistic and social structure which designates them as lacking or castrated.

Especially significant for women writers is Kristeva's claim that, in the polylogical novel, the subject position I is 'pulverized' into heterogeneous elements of 'not me,' 'non–me in me,' 'beside me,' 'outside of me.' Kristeva suggests that the polylogue of the diverse subject–in–process, who draws on the semiotic but is positioned in the symbolic, can be spoken by avant–guard male writers because of their position in relation to the phallus. However, Miss Peabody's Inheritance provides an interesting illustration of maternal language's ability to provide a subject position for the heterogeneity of woman who 'is' and 'is not.' The unity of the subject is shattered by the intertextuality of Miss Peabody's Inheritance. Diana Hopewell's text searches for 'a reader who matches its rhythm.' Miss Peabody functions as reader giving life to the text but she also occupies multiple subject positions within the text. Kristeva's comment on the polylogical explosion of meaning evident in H is relevant to Miss Peabody's Inheritance:

\[H\] has gone beyond the One in order to be written, and thus calls on every "one" to venture out into the explosion that surrounds us, moves through us, refashions us.

The intertextuality of the narrative allows for a weaving together of stories concerning Miss Peabody and her mother, Miss Peabody and Miss Truscott, Diana Hopewell, her farm and her fiction, Miss Thorne and her school, Miss Thorne and her European holiday with Miss Edgely and Miss Snowdon, Miss Thorne with Gwenda and Debbie and Mr Frome, Wagner's story and Othello's. The intertextuality of these stories is shown in Miss Peabody's conviction that she will bump into Miss Thorne and her party in London.

Characters interweave and share experiences. The text bounces back echoes of
similar experiences, lost territories. One example of this is the choice of stocking colour which interweaves the characters and desires of Miss Peabody, Miss Truscott and Gwenda; Miss Peabody's 'steel' grey stockings imitate the 'gun metal' of Miss Truscott's, then find a more sensuous expression in Gwenda's 'Cobweb Mist' (MPI 99, 121); Miss Truscott's love affair is one that Miss Peabody has pretended was her own, and then rejected (MPI 13); Gwenda and Miss Peabody both desire to be Miss Thorne's 'friend' (MPI 64, 69). Miss Edgely, Gwenda and Miss Peabody spend a night in a police cell (MPI 93, 127). Miss Edgely and Miss Peabody's imagined shared journey on the plane makes us aware of the possible connections between their lives, as does the textual interweaving of their shopping expedition (MPI 69–72), and the repetition of the little prairie flower song (MPI 20, 129). As Miss Peabody's social and textual lives interweave she marvels at the richness and form of the polylogue of experiences: 'How it all fitted together!' (MPI 129).

The heterogeneity of experience invites us to interrelate the various stories. Diana Hopewell and Mrs Peabody are both invalids, at what points do their stories touch, the 'T' and the 'not I' interweave, so that the fantasy mother and the real mother may confront one another? Miss Peabody and Miss Thorne both hide their letters as well as their unconscious drives and desires under an embroidered dressing table cover or in their bedside drawers (MPI 4, 78). Is a sexual/textual climax possible? Reading about the shower scene makes Miss Peabody desire a bath (MPI 20). The intertextual reference to jealousy in Othello makes an ironic comment on Miss Edgely's jealousy (MPI 35), while the confusion over identity in the text is echoed in The Importance of Being Earnest. The inter/intertextuality of the Valkyries and Angels on Horseback informs Miss Peabody's image of Diana 'dismounting from her horse at sunset to open the gates leading to her property' (MPI 5). Both school and office are associated with a fortress (MPI 9, 151). Desire shifts and slides from Miss Thorne to Debbie, to Gwendaline, to Miss Edgely to Miss Snowdon. Like Lacan's representation of the purloined letter, desire is passed from player to player. The play of desire requires the reader to complete the textual circuit.

Miss Peabody's Inheritance is one of the few Jolley texts where images in mirrors feature reasonably prominently. The mirror image provides an interesting development of the kaleidoscope of textual images of characters who reflect one another. Early in the text we are told that Miss Peabody has not given much thought to her reflected image:

> It was exciting too to be asked about being in love. Though she glanced at herself quickly in the hall-stand mirror before leaving the house every morning she had never looked long and deeply at or into herself. She did not know what her back was like. (MPI 12)

But Miss Peabody's correspondence with the novelist acts as a maternal mirror which
creates multiple images so that a variety of identifications and subject positions become possible. Later in the novel when she is acting out some of Miss Truscott's mannerisms, Miss Peabody looks at her image with more interest:

Later blinking behind her round glasses, looking at herself in the mirror in the ladies' toilet she thought she looked pleasantly cheeky. (*MPI* 99)

At another point in the text the intertextuality allows Miss Peabody, through Gwenda, to see herself transformed by a new dress and now able to look at her back and respond with delight to her image:

Gwenda, posing in front of the wardrobe mirror, turns to her Headmistress. 'Isn't it lovely, Miss Thorne,' she looks at herself again and turns her head to look at her back. 'Isn't it lovely! I never thought a dress could feel so lovely. I don't feel a bit big or awkward in it. I've never felt like this before...' (*MPI* 115)

The intertextuality suggests that Miss Peabody functions as a subject-in-process, whose subjectivity slips and slides:

The writing is packed, it is dense writing, emotions on several levels packed in. It is, I hope, a novel of existence and feeling. A reader can be as involved as he wishes and some readers will fight off this involvement. Don't worry. Read on. (*MPI* 115)

Diana Hopewell's writing provides multiple subject positions for Miss Peabody and the reader. It functions as the maternal gaze which reflects 'self,' 'other/self,' 'other' and 'us,' allowing an interweaving of subjectivity, providing a multiplicity of subject positions. Miss Peabody is reader, writer, character, a characteristic which is similar to Kristeva's shattered writer, the 'I' who breaks open and multiplies meaning, who twists and challenges meaning in order to enunciate a polylogue of speaking positions. Such writing exceeds the controlling function of the paternal, shatters the unity of the subject and of writing, and locates the subject in the maternal thoroughfare.

Intertextuality extends beyond the text, images of other Jolley characters in other texts inform the construction of character in *Miss Peabody's Inheritance*. Diana Hopewell working on her farm evokes memories of Laura in *Palomino*, the novelist in the nursing home reminds the reader of Miss Hailey in *Mr Scobie's Riddle*, Miss Thorne's school among the pines may be the same one that Daphne runs in *The Sugar Mother*, Miss Peycroft and Miss Paisley in *Foxybaby* interweave with Miss Thorne and Miss Edgely, the single mother as housemistress move in and out of Miss Thorne's school and Fairfields. Gwenda's youthful body could be Leila's in *The Sugar Mother*, Debbie and
Kathy in *The Well* must have gone to the same dancing school, where perhaps they met Robyn and Frankie. Could Miss Peabody find an extension of her life as Miss Porch? In yet another unfolding of intertextuality, in *Central Mischief* Jolley engages in a parodic inversion when Miss Thorne appears on the same plane as Jolley and engages in conversation with the author:

> When she leaves the plane I follow her and watch her but I can't speak because, of course, she doesn't know who I am. I mean, can the character recognise her creator? ('Of course I do deah, I wince all the time at your punctuation and your excruciating use of the cliché.') *(CM 150)*

This can be seen as a writer's joke in response to the reader's desire to situate the fiction within the fixed point of autobiographical writing:

> When I write 'I' in a story or a novel I do not mean I–myself. Some people have been disappointed that I am not any one or all of my characters. *(CM 7)*

The interweaving of characters suggests the polylogue of Kristeva's writing: "'I" continually makes itself over again" in a multiplicity of signifying positions so that the process of writing functions as opening up a space of polyvalent subjectivity and discourse. As Salzman argues this involves a process of fragmentation and proliferation which entangles the reader in Jolley's 'burgeoning œuvre.'

Intertextuality and diversity of subject position provide a rich inheritance for Miss Peabody, 'a polylogical "discourse" of a multiplied, stratified, and heteronomous subject of enunciation.' The text functions not only as multiple narrative and diverse subjectivity, but as a rupture of narrative and language itself, a breaking up unity of form and content to provide music. The totalizing function of symbolic operations are fragmented, genres are broken open and an external polylogue reverberates. Jolley's interweaving of different levels of textuality creates what Kristeva, following Bakhtin, terms a polylogue. The disjointed, multiple narrative relies on a reader constructing her own narrative fiction as part of the polylogue, so that Miss Peabody re–enacts parts of Diana Hopewell's narrative and the reader needs to fill other narrative gaps, such as that created by the typewritten letter to the doctor amongst Miss Hopewell's papers *(MPI 87).*

Jolley constantly makes the reader aware of the textuality of the narrative, through a focussing on the physical appearance of the written letters, often incorporated into the text in a sentence which combines the differing narrative levels:

> Since this last operation, the typing was flawless, I am practically helpless. *(MPI 87)*
The flawless typing mocks the narrative rupture while the helpless invalid is empowered through the writing, thus the novel weaves a polylogical narrative which positions the reader as reading in the gaps of Miss Peabody's reading.

Another feature of the polyphonic novel is the broken sentence patterns and the play of language and rhythm. The broken sentence patterns of the letter interweave Miss Thome's story with Miss Peabody's, with another level of the story coming from Diana Hopewell's comments. Often the narrative intersperses the three situations, so that monological writing, or a unitary subject position, is constantly been interrogated. This is evident in the passage in which Miss Peabody's attempt to write about a childhood memory is ruptured by her discovery of a previously overlooked postscript in Diana's last letter (MPI 46-8). A range of disconnected narratives and narrative strategies are evident in this passage. The reader is made aware of the physicality of reading and writing, the position of information on the page, such as the overlooked P.S., the postscript, written with violet ink, which assumes a life of its own, 'Write quickly, the violet ink sprawled to the bottom of the page,' the external context such as the chill of the evening and the maternal presence, 'her mother's gentle snoring;' Dorothy's desire for another thick envelope decorated with expensive stamps, and the pain occasioned by her first hasty reading which had missed the personal inquiry. The interweaving of novel/letter/response creates a diversity of subject positions. There are different levels of fictionality created by Dorothy's memory, Diana Hopewell's account of her novel Love At Second Sight, and the continuing tale of Miss Thome. The construction of a fictional world is highlighted by Diana Hopewell's comments on her novella, Love at Second Sight, and underscored by Miss Peabody's reconstruction of her reminiscences. The narrative pattern challenges the symbolic structures concern with boundaries, unity and sequence. Dorothy is constructed as a character who is participating in the fiction created by Diana Hopewell's novel as well as her own fiction of memory. The narrative voice is layered, polyvalent. Closure is resisted and deferral is situated in the gap created by separation from the mother and desire evoked by invitation to write soon.

Word play also challenges the symbolic's claim to reason and meaning. Miss Edgely's typing errors subvert the scholarly discourse of Miss Thome's article through misplaced and ommitted letters: 'the copulation in the pubic schools is increasing at an alarming rat' (MPI 1), as do Miss Thome's misquotations.

Intertextuality works at another level when Jolley (?) inserts her own joke about the incomprehensibility of contemporary literary criticism:

...The discussion falls on the concept of structuralist reading and the exposure of the artistic process as being an achievement, on semantic
levels, of harmonious surfaces built on insoluble conflicts, for example, the lexical, the grammatical and syntactic levels, with an ideological solution to the contradictions in the mode of discourse, the angle of narration and the symbolic structure of a culture... (MPI 151).

This 'scrap' interrogates the present critic who is analysing the text in terms of 'the lexical, the grammatical and syntactic levels' and who hopes to provide 'an ideological solution to the contradictions in the modes of discourse.' Such intertextual criticism functions to throw into question the existence of character and narrative function, not to mention critics!

Dare I suggest 'an ideological solution'? Maternal language, that is the embodiment of semiotic elements within the symbolic, effected through the maternal thoroughfare, offers a speaking position for women. Maternal language positions the subject in relation to the castration of birth and language to activate the desire to fill the gap created by the absence of the mother. Woman's experience of similarity to and difference from the mother's body positions her as a fluid, diverse subject speaking the semiotic/symbolic as an iridescent jouissance. This is demonstrated in a reading of Miss Peabody's Inheritance as polylogue which acts as a reclaiming of woman's inheritance within a play of possibilities.
NOTES

2. Kristeva 163.
10. Silverman 86.
18. Kristeva 163.
23. Coral Ann Howells, 'In Search of Lost Mothers: Margaret Laurence's *The

24 Kristeva, 'Polylogue' 191.

25 'Julia Kristeva interviewed by Vassiliki Kolocotroni,' Textual Practice 5. 2 (Summer 91) : 158.

26 Kolocotroni 165.


28 Kristeva, 'Polylogue' 174.

29 Kristeva 163.

30 Kristeva 207.

31 Kristeva 207–8.

32 Kristeva 163–4.

33 Selden 86–7.

34 Kristeva, 'Polylogue' 173–5.

35 Kristeva 163–4.

36 Paul Salzmar, Helplessly Tangled in Female Arms and Legs: Elizabeth Jolley's Fictions (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993) 56.

37 Kristeva, 'Polylogue' 173.

38 Kristeva 175.
Chapter 5: Revolution and Riddles in Poetic Language

'Revolution in Poetic Language,' establishes the linguistic foundation of Kristeva's theory of signification and the speaking subject. She postulates two 'modalities' of the signifying process which she terms 'the semiotic' and 'the symbolic.' Kristeva sees both as necessary and inseparable within language and functioning as a dialectic process, with the shifting emphasis determining the type of discourse, such as theory, narrative or poetry. She claims that because the speaking subject is constituted by both semiotic and symbolic processes, language is necessarily constructed through an interaction of the semiotic and the symbolic:

Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he [sic] produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both.1

Kristeva's speaking subject thus decentres the transcendental ego, the unified, knowing self of liberal humanism that is assumed to reside in the symbolic. She posits instead a subject-in-process, situated within the symbolic, but continually acted upon by drives and desires, the semiotic process, and the death drive. Thus a thoroughfare or means of transition is necessary between the semiotic and the symbolic both for the subject-in-process and for discourse.

In her survey of modern linguistic theories, Kristeva claims that what is missing is a theory of transition, or incorporation of the semiotic into the symbolic:

Although they rehabilitate the notion of the fragmented body – pre-Oedipal but always already invested with semiosis – these linguistic theories fail to articulate its transitional link to the post-Oedipal subject and his always symbolic and/or syntactic language.2

'Revolution in Poetic Language' is an attempt to locate a process of thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic for the articulating subject, and to consider the linguistic and social implications of a fragmented subject of enunciation who has already been acknowledged as a split psychic subject in psychoanalytic discourse.

Kristeva claims that in order for signification to occur a break or rupture is necessary to posit the signifying subject. She calls this break the thetic:

We shall call this break, which produces the positing of signification, a thetic phase. All enunciation, whether of a word or of a sentence, is thetic. It requires an identification; in other words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects. This image and objects must first be posited in a space that becomes symbolic because it connects the two separated positions, recording them or redistributing
them in an open combinatorial system.³

The thetic phase is the site of rupture, the threshold of language, the thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic. For Kristeva the thetic phase is the site of the activation of the dialectical process between the semiotic and the symbolic that is constitutive of the subject.

Within Kristeva’s Freudian/Lacanian framework she claims that the thetic phase is activated at two points: the mirror stage and the discovery of castration. Both are concerned with the speaking subject positioning him/herself in language. Both are also concerned with the gap created by separation from the mother and the subject's constituting of herself as other, with the resultant desire to replace/reclaim the absence of the mother, which becomes the basis of the signifying process. The subject's experience is one of loss, or, as Lacan terms it, the 'want-to-be' of the subject⁴ which acts as a thetic rupture, allowing for desire for the mother to be articulated in the symbolic in the form of desire for the other. Language thus becomes a substitute for the mother and the subject needs to be firmly positioned by the threat of castration in order to resist the death drive that will lead the subject back to fantasy or psychosis, a return to the chora and the mother. Kristeva claims: ‘Castration puts the finished touches on the process of separation that posits the subject as signifiable, which is to say, separate⁵[!] If the subject is firmly positioned by castration then a 'second-degree-thetic' may be established, that is, the release of semiotic activity within the symbolic structures of language, through artistic practices.⁶

In 'Revolution in Poetic Language' Kristeva suggests an interesting metaphor for the functioning of the semiotic within the symbolic, for the etymology of 'symbolic' suggests an 'object' split in two with the parts separated, but bringing together the two edges of the fissure, 'as eyelids do.'⁷ Her interest in a scopic image is revealing, given her positing of the thetic phase as the site of the mirror stage and the recognition of castration, knowledges which privilege sight and phallic function. Kristeva's positing of the thetic break as occurring at the mirror stage and at the discovery of castration presents some problems, as does her bias in favour of the son in the Oedipal theory of castration and her acceptance of the desire for the phallus. By contrast, an acknowledgment of the maternal gaze and mother/child dialogue as the basis of developing a concept of self through the use of the maternal thoroughfare, suggests the possibility of multiple sites conducive to the formation of subject positions and the possibility of alternative articulations for the signifying process. Irigaray uses the metaphor of woman's lips (in sex and speaking) to describe a thetic rupture which enables a more diverse, fluid speaking of the semiotic within the symbolic.⁸ The concept of the two lips may also be used as a birthing image to suggest the opening of a maternal thoroughfare, a delivery of the semiotic into the symbolic. Such a metaphor challenges the phallic construction of the thetic point of
rupture and allows for a representation of women's experience as one of plenitude rather than lack.

However, Kristeva's concern with how the signifying process is ruptured and her analysis of the process of how the semiotic is inscribed within the symbolic is applicable to Elizabeth Jolley *Mr. Scobie's Riddle*, which can be read as a text that is searching for a representation of a thoroughfare, a site which will allow the semiotic challenge to the symbolic and a symbolic inscription of the semiotic; a site where a subject—in-process can articulate semiotic rhythms and desires in the symbolic. *Mr. Scobie's Riddle* may be read as a text that uses the disruptive death drive to challenge subject position and the threat of castration and uses semiotic practices to unsettle the symbolic. Kristeva appears to suggest that the death drive exceeds the symbolic's attempt to contain or sublate semiotic drives; 'an influx of the death drive, which no signifier, no mirror, no other and no mother could ever contain.'9 Within the text of *Mr. Scobie's Riddle*, Mr. Scobie's music and riddles and Miss Hailey's Wagnerian horns and manuscript represent ways of rupturing the symbolic and articulating the semiotic. Mr. Scobie's riddle can be read as an attempt to breach the symbolic with the death drive from the semiotic:

'What is it that we all know is going to happen
but we don't know when or how?' (Mr SR 120)

His riddle remains unanswered in the text, a thoroughfare is not effected. The text suggests that the answer is death, but it could be birth. Would it be possible for the maternal thoroughfare to provide a passage to death and birth, to effect a birthing of poetic language and a speaking subject who can both ask and answer riddles?

A text that attempts to speak the semiotic without locating the thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic risks remaining trapped in the semiotic, or speaking from the rigidity and emptiness of a meaningless symbolic. Loss of meaning can be read in Jolley's parody of meaningful communication in 'A Guide to the Perplexed' and Lt Col Price's notices which challenge both the fixity of the symbolic structures of language and the nonsense resulting from an unregulated irruption of drives and desires:

**TO ALL NIGHT STAFF TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN** IT HAS COME TO MY NOTICE THAT STAFF ARE USING THE FOR THEIR PERSONAL LIFE THIS MUST CEASE IMMEDIATELY.

Signed I. Price (Lt Col. retired) (Mr SR 1)

Lt. Col. Price's note effects a textual rupture of the official with 'personal life,' his textual omissions suggest the gap created by the omission of the object of desire. The official notice mocks symbolic attempts to control meaning and impose unitary structure, and it challenges the semiotic location of drives and desires. Lt. Col Price is precariously positioned in the symbolic. Semiotic transgression negates I. Price's attempt to situate
himself within the symbolic through the parenthesis of being a (retired Lt Col). Such semiotic rupturing functions as a transgression, a negativity, which collapses into meaninglessness. Kristeva suggests that this form of symbolic expression represent a fetishization of language and such transgressive utterances rupture the symbolic with emptiness and meaninglessness and no speaking position is posited:

Such a breach does not constitute a positing. . . . On the contrary, the transgression breaks up the thetic, splits it, fills it with empty spaces.\

A fetishization of language, order, control and reason forecloses the thetic space and traps the subject in the semiotic. It is thus significant that Iris Price's card-playing threatens Matron Price with the loss of her nursing home, with control going to Mother (Mr SR 105, 157–8).

The empty spaces created by the irresolution of the semiotic and the rigidity of the symbolic which is unable to effect a thoroughfare and posit a speaking subject is shown in the Night Sister's reports which reveal the gaps and silences in the signifying process when the semiotic drives and desires are suppressed:

Nothing abnormal to report. . . . Patient did not come in till 4 a.m. also Mr Boxer and Mr Rob. . . . Lt Col Price lose very bad but enjoy himself. (Mr SR 1, 4, 8)

The fixity of symbolic utterance is revealed by the social upheaval which is silenced in the 'official' report, which claims there is '[n]othing abnormal to report.' The 'want-to-be' of the desiring subject, who 'lose very bad,' is dislocated, left searching for a thoroughfare.

The production of meaning is affected by the social conditions of the site of the signifying process, in this case a nursing home which positions the old people, the patients, as trapped and powerless, frustrated and without speech, controlled by Matron Price. She can be read as the phallic mother who, by depriving the patients of their money and property, has denied them access to the symbolic and holds them in infantile regression in the semiotic. As Mother, Matron Price controls her family, trapping the patients in orality and anality. They are treated like children; washed, taken to the toilet, made totally dependent on the nursing staff. Mr Hughes is left on the toilet until 10 pm, when Mrs Tompkins is bathed (Mr SR 29–30), Mr Scobie is pinned to his chair (Mr SR 178). The dependent relationship between Matron and patient is a parody of the mother/child symbiosis, enacted in the chora of the nursing home. Not only are the patients dependant, but they are demeaned: "There's no dignity," Mr Scobie complains (Mr SR 46). Nursing practices dehumanizes them:

Mrs Rawlings took the patients, one by one, as they were tossed from the bathroom and stuffed them into their clothes. She led them out, one by
one, and stacked them on pieces of plastic, in cane chairs, along the verandah. (Mr SR 49)

The verbs 'tossed', 'stuffed' and 'stacked' in the preceding passage indicates that the patients are treated as objects. The belittling and blurring of identity, suggested by comments like: 'Come along Aunty Dear - come along Aunty Dear come to the shower - come to the toilet - come to the dinette - come along back to bed Aunty - ' (Mr SR 178), indicates little opportunity to allow the formation of a speaking position for the inhabitants of the nursing home. Merging with one another, silenced, controlled, they are unable to detach themselves, to separate or individuate.

Maintaining a sense of self is necessary if the patients are to remain separate and resist being draw into the *chora* of death. Practices at the nursing home make this difficult. The old ladies blur into an indistinguishable 'Aunty'; the three old men, Mr Martin Scobie, Mr David Hughes and Mr Fred Privett, lose their identity and individuality when they are huddled together into the crowded, *chora*-like Room One. To enter the nursing home is to risk losing one's identity, one's speaking position, it is to risk being trapped in the maternal *chora*, existing only in Night Sister Shady's reported account. (There are characters who appear as textual references in Night Sister Shady's reports, but who have no existence within the context of the nursing home activity, such as Night Sister Shady (unregistered), Mr Rob Shady, Mr Boxer Morgan and Mother.) The nursing home threatens the patients with psychic fragmentation, the possibility of becoming an object without signification, a dislocated, desiring object, sliding in metonymic sequence to death. Without the maternal thoroughfare of birth, Mr Scobie's riddle has only one answer, the unspoken one, a return to the mother in death rather than a reclaiming of the mother in the birth of signification. Although Matron Price functions like a phallic mother, controlling the lives and finances of her patients, the real power and control reverts to 'Mother' the silent occupant of Room Three, who ends up owning the nursing home, and on whom, ultimately, everyone is dependant.

In 'Revolution in Poetic Language' Kristeva posits the thetic as the point of rupture or break in the signifying process. In *Mr. Scobie's Riddle*, the accident that occurs with the three ambulances colliding at the corner in front of the nursing home, at the meeting point of three roads, acts as a rupture in the text, suggesting the movement from one signifying system to another, thus acting as a textual representation of Kristeva's description of the thetic break. The thetic point can be said to rupture the text with transgression and negativity, thus making possible 'the enunciation of a truth.' In Jolley's text, the depositing of the three old men into the structure and signifying practice of the nursing home causes an upheaval of discourse that acts as a challenge to symbolic order. It is a transgression of that order, a 'revolution in poetic language' that challenges social practices and transforms language and social conditions. The upheaval posits Mr Privett,
Mr Hughes and Mr Scobie at the threshold of the hospital and suggest that their unsettling of the nursing home may allow for the reclaiming of semiotic processes in symbolic structures; but, ultimately they are not able to enunciate a speaking position with which to articulate their desires. The three old men remain trapped in the semiotic, desiring death and a return to the mother, represented by their memories of their homes and the songs, music and laughter of their youth. They disturb and disrupt the order and control of the symbolic realm of social and family structures but are powerless to claim their desires in the symbolic. They do not find a maternal thoroughfare to enable the semiotic to be articulated in the symbolic.

The challenge for the three ambulance patients is to maintain themselves at the point of thetic rupture, to be able to claim their desires, drives and dreams and to articulate them in the symbolic, to refuse to allow Matron Price to take possession of their clothes, their bodies or their money. They need to maintain themselves as speaking subjects, using language to posit themselves as separate and signifiable. Yet, within the nursing home they suffer loss of identity, they are merged together in Room One, Mr Hughes cannot move on his own, their clothes and possessions are taken, they risk the loss of identity.

For Mr Hughes to be positioned in the symbolic he needs to maintain control of his body and be able to articulate the talk and laughter of the bricks which he hears in his dreams. The laughter of the bricks represents his memories of his wife and her sisters, his working life, and his childhood memories of Wales. In his imagination the events become merged so that his desire is to return to the gentle chatter and laughter of the women, which functions as a desire for the semiotic, that is transferred to a memory of rustling bricks which he carried in his truck:

Almost at once the bricks fidgeted uneasily among themselves. He noticed that they were talking, quietly at first like people whispering in church, and then, with more noise, chittering and snittering together with occasional little squeals of brick laughter. Soft laughing, strange from hard things like bricks. The soft noise reminded him, at the time, of snow in the blizzard snittering on the window panes of the attic room he had shared with his brothers when he was a boy in Wales. Often, then, he heard the blizzard and was glad to be safe and warm in bed. (Mr SR 33)

The hard, cool clean bricks seem to provide a rupture, enabling childhood memories and woman's talk to be heard in the whispered laughing, but it is a maternal language to which Mr Hughes does not have access. It escapes a symbolic encoding:

The bricks moving, scraping on each other, sighed and gradually first one and then another began to talk. All of them talking and talking subdued whispering and then louder but never audible. Little excited whispering voices their communication escaping him. It was the same when his wife
and her sisters were all together. Seven sisters, like stars, six sisters-in-law. They chattered like the bricks never stopping busy, always telling laughing exclaiming, protesting agreeing endlessly...
The bricks shuffling rearranging went on talking...he tried to hear what they were saying...
...it was the whispering of the sisters, so much life they had... (Mr SR 34)

Mr. Hughes is unable to understand the whispered chatter. To understand it he must follow it into the semiotic, rather than being able to gain a symbolic articulation of his desires. The sense of lack he experiences is because of his loss of control, his passivity, his dependence on his sister-in-law, his loss of his wife and his livelihood. His 'castration,' to appropriate Freud's term, is his loss of the maternal thoroughfare, thus he is unable to understand or articulate the rustling laughter of the bricks. Only in death is he able to reclaim the talking, whispering, muttering, chattering, laughing bricks (Mr SR 104).

Mr Privett rejects the symbolic structures that his son and society try to fix on him, preferring the semiotic nonsense of his conversation with Hep Duck and Hildegarde. Like Hildegarde, his conversation is repressed, 'muffled in cardboard' (Mr SR 57); his position in the symbolic is too precarious to allow a semiotic encoding of his desires. The nonsense of his conversations with Hep Duck pretends to be authoritative and meaningful with the use of capital letters, but, like Lt Col Price's notices, something is missing:

HEP DUCK RATTLE DUCK TAP TAP HEP HEP DUCK
HEPPY DUCK
SHAKE DUCK RATTLE DUCK AND ROLL. (Mr SR 18)

The nonsense within the song format and the capital letters rupture the symbolic, but do not effect communication. Likewise his advertisement, with its proposal for the sale of his body, ruptures the structures of phallic linguistic and economic protocol (Mr SR 106), but to no avail. Although Mr Privett attempts in various ways to control the symbolic, to maintain his position, by running away from the hospital, by placing his advertisement and his resistance to the developer, he is tied to the semiotic. His desire slides towards death and a return to a merging with the ocean:

The road to the harbour was long and straight. The sun was near the horizon. A few people, keeping their eyes on the bright ball of the sun, were able to see the miraculous flash of green explode into the sky and the sea at the moment of sunset. (Mr SR 108)

Only a few people are able to see the coming together of sea and sun. Having experienced the loss of his land and his birds, Mr Privett is too precariously positioned in the symbolic to actuate the maternal thoroughfare, to keep his eye on the moment of
jouissance. His return to that thoroughfare is in death, which he experiences as a return to the infant's pleasure and comfort of being carried and held. He finds peace and rest in the cradle of his coffin:

The wood was not at all hard on his bones. Old Privett was surprisingly comfortable. It was like being in a wooden cradle. The gentle swaying, the result of four men walking in step, was restful. There was music too. (Mr SR 108)

Mr Privett, experiencing loss/castration, is not able to be positioned within the symbolic. He returns to the semiotic, reclaiming his land and his body in a death dream in which the harbour represents the maternal *chora* and the child returns to the comfort of the mother's body.

Mr Scobie's riddles and music offer the possibility of a pathway between the semiotic and the symbolic. Riddles provide an interesting possibility of rupturing the symbolic structures of unity and meaning with dialogic laughter, reversal and pleasure. However, in Mr Scobie's case his riddle points to death, the pleasure of merging in the semiotic. Mr Scobie's music also appears to offer an opportunity to position the desiring subject in the symbolic. Music is, for Kristeva, one of the vehicles for releasing the semiotic in the symbolic. But Mr Scobie's music leads him into the semiotic where his secret desire is located. The first textual inscription of Mr Scobie's music, the first tape he selects at the nursing home, is about death:

*Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am.* (Mr SR 22)

It brings tears to his eyes and reminds him of Lina (Mr SR 23). The constantly recurring memory of his pupil reveals the direction of his semiotic pathway. Lina leads him up to her mother's room, to the mother's bed to view holy pictures of the Madonna, which turn out to be pictures of nude women (Mr SR 97). He enters the mother's room, overcome with fear and desire:

He bent down to help her and Lina pulled him down so that they were suddenly in an intimate position on the edge of her own mother's bed in the mysterious woman's room, in an atmosphere of silk and lace underwear. It was a place, even though he was grown up, he had no knowledge of and had never dreamed of entering. (Mr SR 96–7)

Mr Scobie's focus is on the mother; her room, her underwear; the fear that he, as a grown man, should not be there.

Martin Scobie has protected himself from his desire for the mother by an idealization of women as innocent and untouchable, as Virgin. His own mother he
remembers as pure and devoted: "Mother was an angel. She devoted herself to him in spite of what he had done" (Mr SR 188). He sees his sister Agnes as an angel (Mr SR 112) whose marriage spoilt their idyllic life together (Mr SR 86). His former music teacher he thinks of as a 'beautiful queen' (Mr SR 94). He sees little girls as 'like little flowers waiting to be picked' (Mr SR 46). His love for Lina is disguised in spiritual terms as a pure love, but it is one that looks at her body rather than her soul:

Whenever he said, 'Piano, Lina,' she bowed her head gravely, her expression tender and serious, her chin tucked down on her softly rounded neck and her, as yet, childish bosom heaving, an indication of the gentle heavenly transformation taking place within the bodice of her expensive but simple dress. (Mr SR 79)

His desire slides from the music to the bodily transformation.

Mr Scobie's secret desire is also represented in the text as a desire for a small hill which rose behind his house. It is virgin, untrodden land, 'so close, but remote . . . accessible and yet inaccessible' (Mr SR 137), suggesting the original site of desire. Like the mother's body, it is part of him, yet separate. He has lived under the presence of the hill (Mr SR 143), but the hill is not part of his land, it is outside his boundary, 'he could not claim it as part of his land' (Mr SR 137). He had never seen anybody there, but he imagines the elusive maiden of Wordsworth's sonnet dwelling there: 'She dwelt among untrodden ways' (Mr SR 143). For Mr. Scobie the hill represents the chaste, virgin mother, desirable and unattainable.

His secret place of desire, his hill, has protective, maternal connotations, expressed in the spiritual language of the Bible:

. . . as an hiding place from the wind and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. (Mr SR 143)

The biblical passage evoked by Mr Scobie's desire concerns a shelter provided by Jehovah, but the connotations are maternal, associated with the female spirit of wisdom who has been silenced by patriarchal translations of the bible.

The maternal, spiritual dimension of the numinous is important. Desire for a return to the mother can be seen as a desire to return to the Edenic bliss of Paradise, or the desire for Eden/Paradise can be seen as desire for the mother. Mr Scobie's experience suggests a spiritual thoroughfare effected through an indwelling of the spirit. The subject of enunciation may be a subject of annunciation, the incarnation of the word as flesh. Thus maternal jouissance can elide with desire for the numinous, a theme that is suggested by the reference to the transfiguration and the three tabernacles (Mr SR 143).

But the biblical material also has sexual connotations, as indicated by Robyn
echoing the rock image as she interrupts Mr Scobie’s dreams to dance to a tape on his cassette player:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{Rock me baby hold my hand} \\
&\text{You gotta hold my hand} \\
&\text{I wanna hold your hand} \\
&\text{Rock a baby hoola Rock me Huh Huh Huh} \\
&\text{Rock me Top me} \\
&\text{Flop me Turn me on} \\
&\text{Yair Yair Yair}
\end{align*}
\]

She wriggled and swayed, her arms hanging or swinging as if they did not belong to her body. The head jerking became more violent. . . . He was afraid that her eyes, with their vacant look, revealed an obsession with sexual matters. (Mr SR 144–5)

Mr Scobie turns away from the expression of sexual desire to contemplate a ‘pure’ image of the virgin land. The metonymic signifiers of desire slide to cover the absence in Mr Scobie’s life, evoking a desire to replace absence with presence:

If he had his life all over again, he thought, he would find out what was on the other side of the little hill behind his house. It was strange to think of it now, to realize he had lived there so long and had never been over it. Always he had looked in the other direction, down and across his own land. Perhaps an unknown neighbour had a dam, a reservoir of pure water half way down on the other side of the hill. It was always possible that the hill was for sale and, in that case, the boundary of his land could be extended. (Mr SR 145)

Mr Scobie denies his desire, he stands outside the door, anticipating, but not entering (Mr SR 50), for sexual pleasure and the mother are forbidden territory. After his encounter with Miss Hailey when her straying hand comes to rest in that ‘almost forgotten region which is private’ (Mr SR 136), Mr Scobie goes away to dream about his secret hill. ‘There are places on earth which, strangely enough, have been completely overlooked by man’ (Mr SR 137).

Mr Scobie has always denied his desire. He has tried to construct symbolic structures to contain it, such as his biblical verses and his music and his polite, correct behaviour, because Mr Scobie knows the punishment for desiring the mother; it is castration, and he fears the threat of castration wielded by the phallic mother:

‘Take Mr Scobie to the dunny willya. We don’t want him falling around on his arse and breaking whatever he’s got there to break.’ (Mr SR 185)

Mr Scobie is precariously fixed in the symbolic and he must guard his position. His own father had disappeared and left his young family to struggle in poverty. In Freudian terms
the father's disappearance had denied his son the opportunity to resolve his Oedipus complex. In the child's mind death and desire and fear are associated with the slaughter of the animal and the bucket of blood (*Mr SR* 46–8), reminiscent of the original sons' murder of the father. Perhaps Martin feels responsible for the Oedipal reenactment of the disappearance/death of his own father, prefigured by the slaughter of the animal and a blood sacrifice. Kristeva's use of Freud and Lévi-Strauss' theory about the origin of the Oedipal complex acknowledges the significance of the sacrificial death:

In all known archaic societies, this founding break of the symbolic order is represented by murder – the killing of a man, a slave, a prisoner, an animal.\(^\text{13}\)

Within this construct social control and religion are used to contain and control the confrontation with death and desire, hence his parent's prayers and Mr Scobie's own piety.

The child's desire for the mother is not resolved but continues to disrupt his attempts at symbolic encoding. Later in his life, music activates the maternal thoroughfare by giving Mr Scobie intimate access to desirable young women, but, by responding to Lina's seduction, he loses his job. He therefore attempts to establish tight symbolic control in order to maintain his own 'clean and proper body',\(^\text{14}\) as suggested by his need to regulate his body functions (*Mr SR* 12).

Mr. Scobie is afraid to posit his desire within the symbolic. His use of biblical verses can be read as an attempt to contain the desire for the numinous within the symbolic order, using chapter and verse citations as an attempt to encode his desire in the Law. Mr Scobie is shocked by any breach of the rules, any immoral activity, such as the card game (*Mr SR* 62) and Robyn's dancing (*Mr SR* 145) and by Miss Hailey's dress and behaviour:

*He was shocked to see a lady in her dressing gown and carrying intimate things like a towel and a sponge bag. His shock was increased as Miss Hailey had made no attempt to fold over and tie up her dressing gown. He was embarrassed too because the music had caused tears to fill his eyes, and his cheeks were wet with them (*Mr SR* 22–3).*

He is embarrassed by the irruption of his emotions and the sight of hidden intimate objects.

However, music and riddles offer a possibility of a thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic for Mr Scobie. Music has the possibility of establishing a bond between singer and pianist, between a promise and a performance, of becoming an articulation of desire in words and music:

*He loved this promise between the music and the performance. This was where the real truth of human life lay, in promise and in performance and*
in the seeking between people for what was needed in the keeping of the promise. (*Mr SR* 181–2)

The interactive process of music and song, desire and act, functions as a thoroughfare, a site of rupture and harmony. But the semiotic structures of the nursing home do not provide a location for this thetic rupture.

Mr Scobie also attempts to rupture the symbolic with riddles. His first riddle is silenced by the moaning and crying old ladies, so he offers instead a text about the authority of the word:

> 'Here are words you may trust, words that merit full acceptance... Christ Jesus came into the world to save Sinners.' (*Mr SR* 53)

Mr Scobie hopes this will rupture and redeem the symbolic with soothing words, but he is silenced by Matron Price. He doesn't even get a chance to ask his second riddle, about human cruelty, which is provoked by Matron's comments about the cruelty of doves who peck each other to death:

> He thought he could make up a riddle. 'What do human beings do, what is it human beings do?' he began, he was thinking about adding a part about cages and doves but Matron, pinning up Miss Nunne's fallen hair, turned back quickly.
> 'That's enough Mr Scobie. We don't want anything disgusting,' she said. (*Mr SR* 119)

Cruelty, death and sexuality are silenced. His final riddle about death is treated with horror and disgust. Like a naughty child having his mouth washed out, Mr Scobie is subjected to a humiliating shower which fixes him within the power and control of the abjecting mother:

> The water had not drained away. He could see that he would have to stand in the dirty slimy water. (*Mr SR* 121)

The dirty water that does not drain away suggests that he is unable to separate from the mother's control. He is subjected to an uncontrolled release of steaming hot water and an outpouring of signifiers of abjection from the mother:

> 'Damn and Blast! Oh Shit! and Damn! Damn! Damn!' Matron's voice climbed even higher. 'Oh Lord! For God's Sake! My Water!' (*Mr SR* 122)

This abjection does however, release the writing of a long letter by Mr Scobie, a confused account of his desire for his home.

Mr Scobie wishes to return home. His desire coils through the text, curling into
the central episode of Miss Hailey's and his escape from the nursing home. It is echoed in
his choice of biblical texts and his music. Harvey keeps offering other places, substitute
sites of desire, but the core of Mr Scobie's desire is conveyed in his dream walk where he
meets a woman with a rich, throaty laugh who has a spare room in her house, kept
especially for her son:

Quietly Mr Scobie set out for his walk. He walked along the quiet side
roads and through lost lanes... He was comforted during his walk by the
early morning serenity and the possession of the sun's warmth. He felt as
if he was walking inside a halo of blessings.

'Who can mind an old man having a rest?' he said to himself,
remembering a house where a woman offered him a cup of tea.

'Have you a spare room?' he had asked her. She lived in the house alone
she told him and, yes, there was spare room. She was expecting her son to
come home any time. The spare room in the house was her son's room.
(Mr SR 162)

The lady wants him, but the young students take his place in her house (Mr SR 164). Mr
Scobie desires to return to his own house, to the room prepared for him by the Mother.15
Nearing death, Mr Scobie remembers how his Mother 'was an angel,' caring for his dying
father (Mr SR 188). Facing death, Mr Scobie desires to take the father's place, to be the
object of the Mother's desire. Like his father, he wants to feel the rain on his face and the
Mother's caresses (Mr SR 187–8). Thus he enters death through the semiotic smiles and
tears of his memories, unable to write his name for Matron Price:

Mr Scobie could no longer hold the pen. It slipped from between his
fingers. He was not able to hold the pen. (Mr SR 195)

His inability to write his name suggests that Mr Scobie is represented as castrated and
silenced in the symbolic order and retreats to the maternal chora. However, it is his
inability to write his name which maintains his possession of his land, thus establishing it
as a maternal site.

Within the nursing home there is another possibility of establishing a thoroughfare
between the semiotic and the symbolic. Miss Hailey represents the artist figure who
desires maternal jouissance, who has access to the semiotic, but who attempts to situate
herself within the symbolic, who wishes to activate the maternal thoroughfare with poetic
language. In Kristevan terms, to claim a speaking position Miss Hailey must separate
herself from objects of desire in order to designate them, but, as artist, this designation is
ambiguous, heterogeneous and unfixed.16 Miss Hailey could be said to function as a
disruptive, heterogeneous, parodic mpture in the text.

Miss Hailey's concern with the structure of language, such as the placement and
function of features like brackets and hyphens; "Proust in parenthesis excuse the
footnotes," she added with a little self-conscious laugh' (*Mr SR* 25), and her search for 'Le bon mot,' may be read as representing a parodic attempt to contain and control language. Her parodic challenge to the structures of the symbolic is revealed in her first appearance in the text:

'Don't, but do not take everything I say *au pied de la lettre.*' (*Mr SR* 13)

Playing the Freudian game of calling *'un chat un chat,'* Miss Hailey's language both hides and reveals her semiotic desire.

Miss Hailey is formidable in her dressing gown and hat. She wears a Canadian Mounted Police hat and badge which could be read as a symbol of the Law of the Father:

Miss Hailey's eyes glowed, the hat made her feel efficient and knowledgeable. She would be able to tell someone the way if someone asked her. (*Mr SR* 13)

Yet the semiotic irruption of her desire warns us not to take her too literally. Her presence challenges the social and signifiable structures of Matron Price's hospital. Miss Hailey's desire is not for the phallic mother, Matron Price, but for the body and friendship of her school chum, Hyacinth.

Kristeva suggests that a successful completion of the thetic phase, a resolution of the Oedipus complex, is necessary for signification. Fear of castration maintains the phallic mother and fails to prevent the constitution of the symbolic. We have seen the effect of this with Mr Hughes, Mr Privett and Mr Scobie and, of course, Matron Price wishes to maintain her position as phallic mother. But Miss Hailey challenges the representation of the mother as castrated or as guardian of phallic power.

Miss Hailey is constituted in the text as without a family 'She had not been at the place she had once called home for a very long time' (*Mr SR* 133) hence she is not implicated in any Oedipal positioning. Her relationship with Matron Price is not based on a mother/daughter pattern – she often insists that they are the same age and were at school together: *'Three little maids from school are we'* (*Mr SR* 83–4).

Miss Hailey also challenges the position of woman as castrated with the parodic phallic substitute of her towel and sponge bag, which she carries at all times on her wrist, much to Mr Scobie's horror, for he is embarrassed by the display of such 'intimate' objects:

Miss Hailey waved her shameless sponge bag (*Mr SR* 103)

Miss Hailey loosened the string of her twirling sponge bag. She laughed. (*Mr SR* 189)
Miss Hailey's encounter with 'the real thing' when she collides with Mr Scobie sets up a great discord:

She screamed. The discords of all music, ancient and modern, were contained in and let loose in her scream. (*Mr SR* 136)

For Mr Scobie the encounter functions to cause him to retreat further into the semiotic, to dream of his hill and the Virgin Lady. For Miss Hailey the encounter appears to cause some confusion about the function of her sponge bag, which does prove amazingly versatile. She takes it to the caravan encounter with Frankie, uncertain about whether she needs it (*Mr SR* 146). When she realizes she has been 'set up' in a repetition of an incident from her past she produces a flask from the sponge bag and she and Matron Price get drunk and reminisce in a kaleidoscope of dreams, desires and fears (*Mr SR* 148–59), which include Miss Hailey's desire for Hyacinth Price and Hyacinth's love of a worthless husband.

At another point Miss Hailey flings her sponge bag with great abandon into the garden (*Mr SR* 212). She later retrieves it and uses its contents to engage in another drunken, possibly sexual, encounter with Tin Tin. The toilet bag can represent the fetishized object, but its parodic versatility suggests a carnivalesque questioning of the traditional Freudian reading of the resolution of the Oedipal complex. It suggests a fluid, polymorphous representation of sexuality and a linguistic transformation achieved through artistic practices.

Kristeva suggests that the artist figure disturbs the rigid, fixed castration theory:

> [O]nly the subject, for whom the thetic is not a repression of the semiotic *chora* but instead a position either taken on or undergone, can call into question the thetic so that a new disposition may be articulated. Castration must have been a problem, a trauma, a drama, so that the semiotic can return through the symbolic position it brings about. . . . As a traversable boundary, the thetic is completely different from an imaginary castration that must be evaded in order to return to the maternal *chora*. It is clearly distinct as well from a castration imposed once and for all, perpetuating the well-ordered signifier and positing it as sacred and unalterable within the enclosure of the Other.19

Miss Hailey's heterogeneity of subject position and articulation suggests just such a 'traversable boundary,' an opportunity to challenge Oedipal positioning and to offer an articulation of the disruptive semiotic within the symbolic.

Miss Hailey, as artist, threatens the rupturing of the thetic with heterogeneity of meaning and multiple subject positions. She delights in constructing a variety of subject positions for herself and her novel challenges symbolic structures through its form as an untidy, loosely bound collection of papers held together with bits of ribbon and written in
green and purple ink (the suffragettes' colours). On its title page it reveals a healthy but languid naked woman, and it has the suggestive title 'Self Stoked Fires' (Mr SR 23). Miss Hailey refers to it as 'the child of my brain' (Mr SR 204), a reappropriation of the appropriated male metaphor of creativity. But she is an unpublished author, her work is not situated in the symbolic social structures, it has been rejected forty–two times (Mr SR 218). She is still searching for a thoroughfare.

The irruption of semiotic desire, revealed in Miss Hailey's rendition of 'The Flying Dutchman' in the park, is structurally in the centre of the text and therefore could be said to be nestled in the maternal *chora*, and linked with Mr Scobie's attempt to return home. However, Miss Hailey's concert could also be read as a parodic challenge to semiotic and symbolic positioning. She is both in control and yet also totally unaware of the situation. Miss Hailey is trying to give voice to the music in her head, phallically encoded as 'horns' (according to Lacan the phallus is the obligatory signifier). Miss Hailey needs a vehicle, a thoroughfare, to encode the rhymes and rhythms of the semiotic in the symbolic:

> She would have liked to simulate the storm. It was there in her head but it was not possible to know how it would emerge. (Mr SR 115)

As she experiments with the horns she 'produced a sound so remarkable she became more ambitious' (Mr SR 115). Disrupting the phallic positioning of signification and the social encoding of behaviour, yet 'keeping her balance admirably on the grassy slope' (Mr SR 116), Miss Hailey is able to produce a truly amazing carnivalesque rendition of Wagner:

> Singing under her breath, she produced sounds quite unlike anything within the range of human possibility. (Mr SR 116)

Is it possible for these sounds to be heard in the symbolic? Does the text suggest a maternal thoroughfare to enable a birthing of Miss Hailey's 'brain child'?

There is a birth in the text. Frankie's baby, even if it is 'a white–faced skinny baby dressed with simplicity in a grimy napkin' (Mr SR 206), offers the promise of new life. Born by 'natural childbirth,' Miriam is the grand–daughter of Mr Scobie who has left her an 'everlasting legacy' of pine trees and his secret hill (Mr SR 210).

Frankie and Robyn have been a disruptive, transgressive and lively intrusion at the nursing home. Motherless girls from an institution for the homeless, they challenge the Oedipal family structures, as does Miriam's birth, since she is Hartley's child, although Frankie is married to Horry Briggs. The suggestion of Frankie and Robyn's sexual relationship also challenges the phallic positioning of desire. Frankie and Robyn have established a commune on Mr Scobie's land and they want Miss Hailey to join them. This evokes Miss Hailey's joyful response: 'Hailey's Dance. An Idyll' (Mr SR 212).
birth has opened up a maternal thoroughfare, enabling Miss Hailey to compose a pine tree dance (*Mr SR* 211–12). The dance includes the site of Mr Scobie's desire, the secret holy place of the hill, which is silent, mysterious, contained, suggesting a maternal jouissance which Kristeva speaks about as being untouched and waiting for transformation.20 Life is also active at the foot of the hill, at the threshold of entry into the house. It is the site of childbirth and fruitfulness. This suggests a birth passage, a site of fertility for planting and picking of fruit and vegetables. Miss Hailey's dance becomes a celebration of new life, a celebration of her discovery of a maternal thoroughfare:

She danced a celebration of the new life, that of the child, and of the people engaged in their new found way of living. The celebration included her own joy at being about to take part in the new life. (*Mr SR* 211–12)

So great is her excitement that she throws away her ambiguous sponge bag. She has found her desire. She has received a golden shining card with a message of love and peace (*Mr SR* 197–8). She has had a visit from the new mother and her baby. She has been invited to join their commune, to live off the land and engage in poetry readings and singing (*Mr SR* 209). This could be called an epiphany (*CM* 16–18). It enables Miss Hailey to claim her dance as an artistic mpture, as a site for the semiotic infiltration into the symbolic, so that phallic lack can be transformed into an opening of desire, by 'reinvesting the maternal *chora*' in the symbolic through the processes of poetic language.21

Kristeva claims that the artistic representation of jouissance converges with fetishism, but the artist seeks to fully articulate the elusive 'unrepresentable.'22 This process is suggested in Jolley's text by the still unarticulated, mysterious secret 'hill' of maternal jouissance which needs to be located in the maternal thoroughfare to be given signification:

She had not, in her dance, been able to represent the hill clearly enough. Mr Scobie himself had said very little about it. (*Mr SR* 213)

The artist continues to try to fully represent the semiotic within the symbolic, to transform the symbolic with the semiotic. To attempt to do so entails answering Mr Scobie's riddle with the multivalent possibility of death and birth. Kristeva claims that the artist writes in the thoroughfare of birth and death:

In returning, through the event of death, towards that which produces its break; in exporting semiotic motility across the border on which the symbolic is established, the artist sketches out a kind of second birth. Subject to death but also to rebirth . . .23
As artist, Miss Hailey is positioned at this threshold, transfiguring death with birth.

Writing at this rupture is difficult, it requires the discipline of conforming to symbolic structures even while transgressing them:

She sighed. It would not really be easier on paper. Writing she knew, even when it was what she wanted most to do, was an act of will and, as such, required tremendous determination and discipline. She was afraid of failing to be determined and disciplined. (Mr SR 213–4)

It might be easier for Miss Hailey to return to the semiotic world of the nursing home, the pleasure of the maternal *chora* in Hyacinth's bed, to return to Matron's control, in 'the dark familiar airlessness of Room Three' (Mr SR 224–5) - the room occupied by Mother. Perhaps she loses her chance for rebirth when the front door is closed (Mr SR 225), so that she remains trapped in the semiotic. However, the open door may represent her death and a moving into the thoroughfare which promises entry to a new life where, in death, she finds the numinous. Or, she may go out that open front door, to join the group with their transformed bright new tents. Is the answer to Miss Hailey's riddle birth or death?

Julia Kristeva's 'Revolution in Poetic Language' insists on the necessity of acknowledging the dialectic of the semiotic and the symbolic as a means of giving voice to the polyvalent experiences of the fragmented subject. Miss Hailey's experience suggests this. Jolley's focus on death makes us aware of the threat of slipping into either the rigid linguistic structures of official emptiness or the semiotic nonsense of childlike babble. Mr Scobie's riddles and his music, and Miss Hailey's disruptive, creative actions and language offer a tentative breach of the semiotic and the symbolic. The text offers a reading that searches for a maternal thoroughfare and which speaks of desire in life and death.
NOTES

1 Kristeva, 'Revolution' 93.

2 Kristeva 91.

3 Kristeva 98.


5 Kristeva, 'Revolution' 101.

6 Kristeva 103.

7 Kristeva 102.

8 Irigaray, This Sex 28–29.

9 Kristeva, 'Revolution' 103.

10 Kristeva 118–9.

11 Kristeva 118


13 Kristeva, 'Revolution' 119.


17 Freud, SE 7: 48.


19 Kristeva 104–5.


21 Kristeva, 'Revolution' 115.

22 Kristeva 115–16.

23 Kristeva 120.
Chapter 6: The Melancholia Of Milk And Honey

*Milk and Honey* is a story about memory, desire and suffering. The narrator, Jacob, views his life in terms of a profound sense of melancholia. In a reflection early in the text the 'real' coffee and the movement of the sea arouse a mood of melancholy which he associates with memories that intertwine desire and suffering; memories of the land, lovemaking, music, the big house, Waldemar and the mulberry tree. This melancholia establishes a motif for reading the text:

Sometimes, after my cup of real coffee in the Beach Hotel, I sat outside on the small, sandy cliffs looking down on to the sea as it came up in long, slow waves to the rocks and sank sighing back down the beach and I felt the profound melancholy that all my life has come over me from time to time. It was the melancholy of dark trees standing alone and the quiet sadness of the colours of the land, dark greens and browns and the sand subdued. As I sat, the colours deepened, tawny, dun coloured blending beneath the low grey sky. And from somewhere hidden, the sun lit up the sea.

This same melancholy was mine after loving Madge, when I was exposed, stripped, sad in the relaxation after desire. It came to me too in the long sustained notes of the cello, the second movement of the Haydn cello concerto; always when I played this something wept inside me. I felt it when the big house was dark and hushed, years ago, at the time of Louise's illness, it was relieved only by the excitement and happiness of knowing Madge more and more.

And the mulberry tree which had been Waldemar's favourite place was sad too, desolate, in the winter the dry leaves were like sad, slow footsteps and slow tears falling. (*MH 7*)

Jacob's melancholy, which is associated with memories of childhood, sexuality and death, is characterized by inactive reverie and sorrow. Dark, desolate memories overwhelm him.

Melancholia is the object of analysis in Julia Kristeva's *Black Sun*. The description she gives of melancholia in her introduction could be an outline of *Milk and Honey*:

I am trying to address an abyss of sorrow, a noncommunicable grief that at times, and often on a long-term basis, lays claims upon us to the extent of having us lose all interest in words, actions, and even life itself.

The wound I have just suffered, some setback or other in my love life or my profession, some sorrow or bereavement affecting my relationship with close relatives... A betrayal, a fatal illness, some accident or handicap... An infinite number of misfortunes weigh us down every day... All this suddenly gives me another life. A life that is unlivable, heavy with daily sorrows, tears held back or shed, a total despair,
scorching at times, then wan and empty. In short, a devitalized existence that, although occasionally fired by the effort I make to prolong it, is ready at any moment for a plunge into death.1

The melancholic's misfortune in work, love or family is characterized as a 'wound' which functions to separate the subject from meaning, which acts as a bar between signifier and signified, semiotic and symbolic, and thus traps the melancholic in an abyss of sorrow, separated from the desired object. According to Kristeva, who is using psychoanalytic theory based on Freud, Abraham and Melanie Klein, melancholia is a mourning for the 'Thing,' the so-called real object beyond signification, origin of desire, the centre of attraction and repulsion.2 Alan Sheridan in his Translator's note to Lacan's *Ecrits* tries to define what the real is, as used by Lacan (and Kristeva):

The 'real' emerges as a third term, linked to the symbolic and the imaginary: it stands for what is neither symbolic nor imaginary, and remains foreclosed from the analytic experience, which is an experience of speech. What is prior to the assumption of the symbolic, the real in its 'raw' state (in the case of the subject, for instance, the organism and its biological needs), may only be supposed, it is an algebraic x. . . . 'The real is that which always returns to the same place' . . . that before which the imaginary faltered, that over which the symbolic stumbles, that which is refractory, resistant. . . . that which is lacking in the symbolic order, the ineliminable residue of all articulation, the foreclosed element, which may be approached, but never grasped: the umbilical cord of the symbolic.[italics mine]3

The term 'real' is an attempt to describe that which appears to be prior to signification and representation, the origin of desire, the state of unseparated, oceanic bliss. In classical Freudian theory, the 'real,' also referred to as the 'Thing,' is the lost maternal object.4 It represents the loss of the Edenic unity of mother and child in what Kristeva terms the 'choric' space of the womb and early childhood. In this severing of the umbilical cord, which is the original 'castration' experience, the loss of the Mother is experienced with such devastating effect that a profound sense of loss or lack is felt. It is this lack which gives rise to melancholia, an impossible mourning for the maternal object.

In psychoanalytic theory the real is termed 'Thing' because of the preverbal nature of the experience. It is, however, interesting that the focus is on the child's loss and that consequently the mother is degendered and her experience of loss and plenitude, as mother and other, is silenced. The emphasis is on 'the child king':

The child king becomes irredeemably sad before uttering his first words; this is because he has been irrevocably, desperately separated from the mother, a loss that causes him to try to find her again, along with other
The loss of the mother leaves a yearning which the child tries to satisfy through a continual search for substitute objects in an attempt to fill the hole, close the gap. Kristeva characterizes the 'Thing' as 'an imagined sun, bright and black at the same time.' The 'Thing,' the 'black sun,' is a light without signification or representation, the shadow of the sun hiding some far greater light. It is there, but covered, negated, castrated, suggesting the psychoanalytic model of the Mother. The black sun is an insistence of presence, but an absent presence, a hole filled, but remaining empty, the centre of attraction and repulsion. The loss of the mother, this hole is then covered or substituted for by objects of desire. In a footnote explanation, Kristeva distinguishes between the archaic 'Thing' and the objects that stand in for it:

I shall speak of the Thing as being the "something" that, seen by the already constituted subject looking back, appears as the unspecified, the unseparated, the elusive, even in its determination of actual sexual matter. I shall restrict the term Object to the space–time constant that is verified by a statement uttered by a subject in control of that statement.

The elusive, unseparated mother/child relationship is lost and substituted for with objects of desire.

Jacob's melancholic reflection can be seen to be situated within the frame provided by Kristeva's definition of melancholia. His memory is evoked by 'real' coffee which is associated with childhood memories and the ocean, evocative of the maternal chora; it is characterised by images of dark and light, a 'black sun'; and he searches through the incidents of his life, locating objects of desire, objects of love and hate, objects of merging and separation, objects in search of the 'Thing.'

Melancholia is caused not by the absent mother, but by the more extreme denied, repressed and silenced mother. In Milk and Honey the denied mother is silenced, hidden, erased, yet continually sought after through other objects of desire, which become objects of both delight and fear, attraction and denial, articulation and silence, desire and death, a deadly desire, like a bee drowning in honey (MH 10).

The opening scene of Madge searching for her Tampax can be read as a comic signal that the text is engaged in a search for the hidden mother, given the association of menstrual blood with maternity, fertility, abjection and death. Menstrual blood has powerful, evocative implications. Kristeva, in Powers of Horror, writes that blood becomes 'a fascinating semantic crossroads, the propitious place for abjection where death and femininity, murder and procreation, cessation of life and vitality all come together' [italics Kristeva's]. Thus Madge's concern that she has failed to stop the hole suggests the alluring, yet dangerous site of this text, a search to find the mother's hidden
jouissance, with the resultant unleashing of desire and death.

Jacob desires, yet denies his mother. His mother is dead; his childhood memories are fragmentary and confused. He remembers a singer with an untrained voice, whose voice he wants to deny:

'... You can remember your mother singing?'
'No! Well, yes I can.' My tears starting to come again. (MH 16)

Behind his denial is knowledge; beyond the memory is the silenced maternal voice. Jacob's childhood memories reveal that his desire is to stay a child, warm and protected in the dark shed, a desire he transfers from the maternal associations of the *choric* space to those of being near his father and playing in the sunlit vineyard (MH 16), perhaps in an attempt to locate the unsignifiable 'Thing' in the symbolic. His mother's voice he transfers to her relatives where it becomes the speech of foreigners who try to substitute English for their mother tongue, obliterating the words but retaining the trace of the mother in the accent (MH 27). His dreams of his mother are an attempt to recapture what had ceased to exist, what never really had been:

I kept thinking back and trying to recapture moments which had really ceased to exist before I had left there. In my dreams of the vineyard I pictured myself going out among the vines to the place where my mother always stood in the tranquillity of the afternoon, shading her eyes with her hand and looking over the long lines of vines across to the low hills. When I stepped into this dream I allowed myself to forget she had been dead for some years. (MH 26–7)

Jacob's desire is a desire for the mother who is already dead, who has left him desolate, alone. His memory is of a shadow in the sunlight, a black sun, an absent presence.

In a sliding transfer of desire he plays the cello and imagines a conversation with Madge about his childhood where he desires to penetrate the secret magic place covered over by the vine leaves in order to know the tiny fragments of messages the leaves whispered to one another:

'Madge I must tell you, when I was a boy ... the aching domes of my childhood were vaulted in brown linoleum and weatherboard and when the crumpled leaves of the vines were drying and turning yellow they were like shaking profiles of little well bred faces, silhouettes in the damp evening, nodding and shaking towards one another and away as if whispering, shaking again and sighing tiny fragments of messages which could never be communicated in the tremulous movement. If only you knew the leaves of the vines!'

Cello phrases allegro. 'Madge I must tell you how I watched the leaves for hours. When I was a boy Madge I peered into the vine leaves as if I
could go through them into some unknown magic place and find out, in the end, what it was they were trying to say to each other... (MH 94)

These vine leaves and their secret, silenced message from the mother become a recurring motif in Jacob's attempt to give articulation to other objects of desire as he tries to return to the song of the mother. Listening to his mother singing is associated with the vine leaves caressing his face (MH 171), and his childhood image of his mother is of her standing in a black dress in sunlight, in the midst of the vine leaves (MH 61). His fear of Waldemar is likewise associated with Waldemar appearing from amongst the leaves of the mulberry tree or shuffling through the fallen leaves (MH 90).

In another metonymic transfer of memory, Louise's illness evokes a memory and image of Jacob's own childhood illness and desire for his mother:

The lampshade, white fringed, in the darkness inside the window of Louise's room suggested the loneliness I felt... I looked up at the white lampshade every morning and remembered the solitude of illness in childhood. Sullenly I took medicine from a spoon held out to me by my father. I remember how, wishing for my mother, forgetting that she was dead, I refused to look at my father. (MH 91)

Jacob's memories of childhood are of the dead mother, that is, of a mother who the child perceives as having deserted her child, who has left him alone, miserable in the midst of sunlight, a foreigner not speaking the mother's language, dissatisfied with the paternal gaze and comfort.

The child's impossible mourning for the absent, silenced mother is evoked by memories of a mother who stands in a black dress in the midst of sunlight, who knows the secret of the vines but doesn't share it with her child. At the end of the narrative Jacob is still desiring and denying his mother's voice, as he listened to an old record of her singing:

As I listened the vine leaves fresh and young and green bursting from the gnarled wood seemed to caress my face.

Come down, O love divine
Seek thou this soul of mine
And visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O comforter, draw near,
Within my heart appear
And kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing

I remembered my mother's voice then; her cradle songs and the singing games... No one took any notice of her singing. No one listened to her
songs or remarked on her voice...

'She could have been a great singer,' Norman nodded his head wisely.

'But she wasn't.' I took off the record before it was finished. . . . It was too late to wish I had known my mother more. There was no one to turn back to now; no one to tell things to.

Listening to my mother's voice I thought of all the houses, the dark half-remembered rooms of my childhood . . . I had actually thought it would be possible to put people neatly into places convenient to me . . .

I wanted to be alone to tear up the old photographs, to break the record. I wanted to destroy and spoil. (MH 171–2)

But now Jacob is trapped in his abyss, it is too late to know the song of the mother. Death and destruction are all that are left.

The melancholic experiences a loss of signification, a loss of meaning. The abyss of sorrow created by the absent mother is an abyss of Nothing, a loss of music and speech. Kristeva claims that for the melancholic loss of the mother means loss of language. Although normally language is used as the subject's attempt to fill the void, to reclaim through words the lost object, this is not possible for the melancholic, who is so overwhelmed with sorrow and loss that s/he is trapped in the abyss. The 'untimely' severing of the umbilical cord has foreclosed the maternal thoroughfare, so that the melancholic has no means of articulating maternal desire in the symbolic. Language thus becomes an empty signifier:

They have lost the meaning – the value – of their mother tongue for want of losing the mother. The dead language they speak, which foreshadows their suicide, conceals a Thing buried alive.9

For Jacob the loss of meaning is represented by his speaking English as an alien tongue, by his denial of his mother's singing and, ultimately, by the loss of his own ability to play the cello. The semiotic maternal singing, the rustle of the vine leaves, the murmur of the sea, have been denied, silenced, foreclosed. The abyss gapes as a huge, empty hole, the maternal thoroughfare has been abandoned. Denial of the maternal voice means loss of the maternal thoroughfare, resulting in unrepresentable desire, unlocated semiotic memories and rigid, empty symbolic structures.

The melancholic is unable to use language as a metonymic transfer of desire, as a substitute for the mother, because the maternal thoroughfare has been lost, the umbilical cord to the symbolic has been severed. The absent mother, desired by the child, but unattainable, is experienced as loss or rupture which is mourned by the child. Seeking to continually cover over the gap, the child searches for an endless trail of substitute objects of desire that trap the child in the semiotic. The maternal thoroughfare is blocked by the child's denial of the mother's language, thus the melancholic experiences an abyss of
sorrow and can only desire death in order to be reunited with the mother.

Louise and Waldemar's mother is also silenced and denied. She is the mad Jewess, an exile, locked away in a mental institution, not remembered or talked of in the house, referred to as 'her' in Aunt Heloise's drunken reminiscences (MH 121). She is the mother of Louise, but also of Waldemar, mother of beauty and horror (MH 22–23). She loves Waldemar (MH 53), but she is locked away and her place is taken by Louise, the substitute mother/lover 'almost as if she replaced his mother' (MH 22).

Madge's mother is also silent. Madge remembers her in the time of melancholy following the jouissance of her first lovemaking with Jacob. In this attempt to fill the gap left by the absent mother the rupture is even more obvious:

'It's very rare, it hardly ever happens to anyone like that.' And then she was sad.
'I don't want to give you up Jacky,' she said in such a low voice I hardly heard her, 'I never had anyone I really loved,' . . . 'When I was a girl,' Madge said, 'I wrote a letter to myself from a made up mother. My mother never wrote, I sent myself this lovely letter, so that the girls would see the things my mother promised me.

She hadn't anything for me really and she never wrote and later I never saw her −' (MH 93)

Madge uses objects of desire, such as lovemaking with Jacob and the substitute letter from her mother, to cover the gap caused by the silent mother, the black sun of desire. The letter is representative of the empty symbolic signifier of desire, full of unlocated yearning, suggesting Madge's attempt to locate the maternal thoroughfare and claim maternal jouissance.

Because the mother is not just absent, but denied, repressed or silenced, the melancholic engages in an endless search for substitute objects to replace the irreplaceable 'Thing' in an attempt to improvise, compose, finish the song. Jacob's inability to replace the lost mother is indicated in a line from the Rilke song which Leopold wishes him to finish: 'because I never held you, I hold you forever' (MH 131).

Kristeva explores the melancholic's state, explaining the need for a constant search for objects of desire as a continual displacement of pleasure in a metonymic sequence in an effort to approach the unrepresentable archaic 'Thing.' The melancholic, desiring to merge in an oceanic unity with the mother, has great difficulty in achieving a position in the symbolic. An attempt is made through an identification with 'the father in individual prehistory,' or through poetic language, which because it is achieved by virtue of the maternal thoroughfare, is a desirable yet precarious path.10

However, the melancholic can find no satisfaction in the substitute objects of desire and becomes engaged in an endless transfer of desire. I have discussed the
concept of 'the father of prehistory' in my chapter on Palomino. In Jacob's case, the
father of childhood has been used as a substitute object and, although his image has
become part of the child's desire for the choric security, revealed by Jacob's memories of
both his mother and father in the vineyard, Jacob's unsatisfied longing is centred in the
mother's voice. The father is dead, but the sale of the vineyard offers an opportunity to
enter the symbolic, achieved through Jacob's transfer to Leopold's house for music
lessons, which could be read as an attempt to create a thoroughfare between the semiotic
and the symbolic through music.

Jacob becomes engaged in fragile, wandering attempts to 'recompose signs'
through his music, his loves, the various houses he attempts to live in, his obsessive
search for hidden objects in secret rooms in those houses, and his fear of the idiot
Waldemar. Waldemar's bizarre question, "Which hend you hev?" (MH 12) suggests
that the metonymic signifiers of desire slide from one hand to the other, from one love to
another, from one house or room to another in a desperate, melancholic desire to hide the
absence of the 'Thing.' Louise, Waldemar and Madge also engage in the melancholic
shifting of signifiers in a metonymy of pleasure and fear, a displacement of desire.

Jacob, precariously situated in the symbolic by his economic power, achieved
through the sale of his father's vineyard, uses the semiotic elements of his cello playing
to attempt to locate and satisfy his desire for his silenced mother who has bestowed on
him her 'gift' of music: "you have the gift, it is from your mother" (MH 16). For Jacob
the cello is an object of love and of sorrow (MH 34–35), and is itself a substitute for
Jacob's expressions of love: 'I played as I wanted to love, delicately and with
understanding, with restraint and yet with power' (MH 76). His love for the cello, and
Louise and Madge slide and intertwine as he plays his desire:

I felt a deep love for the cello and I loved Louise. I loved Louise deeply,
my love for her was interwoven with the pure sustained love I had for the
cello. (MH 40)

and:

In the tenderness of the playing of the cello it was as if I spoke to
Madge and made love to her. I was exhausted and trembling. (MH 95)

As he plays the cello he finds a voice, a story. The cello is likened to a baby (MH 43), it
becomes the child he was never able to be, a child loved and nurtured and caressed by
the mother. The empathy between player and cello is like the maternal thoroughfare, a
passage of the semiotic into the symbolic. He, as mother, plays, and gives voice to the
child who sings of childhood memories, love and pain (MH 94–5). But objects of desire
can never replace the 'Thing,' Jacob's cello playing becomes empty and discordant:
At the foot of the flight of unvarnished stairs I played without care, with discord and noise. Ugly cello. Either I did not disturb anyone or they chose not to reveal that they were disturbed. (*MH* 123)

Jacob plays at the very gap of fear and desire, the foot of the flight of stairs leading to Waldemar’s room. The discordant playing is associated with the realization that the child of Louise’s is not his; that Louise desires Waldemar. On another occasion when he is unable to play he is reminded of the unattainability of desire for the desired mother: *because I never held you, I hold you forever* (*MH* 131). Ultimately his playing is silenced, his hand becomes like a claw, the result of the fiery holocaust at his house which destroys his dreams and ambitions. There is no desire, no music left: *No Madge and no music, for I could not play my cello now with my damaged hand* (*MH* 4). The loss of the mother is a wound which ruptures all the substituted objects of desire. Jacob experiences the loss of the mother and the loss of her gift as a castration, where he loses not the phallus of the Father but the story and song of the mother.

Jacob’s love for both Louise and Madge is indicative of the metonymic sliding of desire. Unable to resolve his desire for the mother, or to speak through the maternal thoroughfare he slides irresolutely between the two women, like his biblical namesake who desires both Leah and Rachel.

There is a dream-like, fairy tale quality to Jacob’s love for Louise. Like many fairy tales the fantasy is founded on the repressed desire for the dead mother. The ‘Prince of a Fellow’ has a magic charm of the cello, gift from the maternal fairy godmother, to be used to rescue the maiden from madness and poverty; but this melancholic Prince cannot activate the maternal thoroughfare and the maiden herself is torn by a desire for both Beauty and the Beast.

Jacob’s love for Louise is a love for a virginal young woman, but the images associated with his love, those of hair and fire, suggest a repressed sexual desire. In the scene of their wedding night there is a confusing array of signifiers. Desire seems to work like a dream which reveals the unconscious drives and desires of the dreamer (*MH* 73–5). The images slide from phallic representations to feminine ones, which seem to lead ultimately to the big, high white bed, which suggests the bed of the mother and the child’s forbidden desire for the mother.

On his wedding night, before he goes to Louise, Jacob writes a letter to Madge and plays his cello. The implements of the letter and the cello can be said to function as phallic objects, representations of Jacob’s desire to fill the gap left by the absent Mother. However, both the letter form and the music of the cello constitute a maternal influence in his attempt to situate himself in the position of the Father. The cage-like room, the mirrored wardrobe like a coffin and the blood split on the white sheet by Jacob’s nose—
bleed position the lover as a virginal young woman. A Derridean reading might read this as 'the hymen that desire dreams of piercing, of bursting, in an act of violence that is (at the same time or somewhere between) love and murder'.

Jacob's desire is represented in both phallic and vaginal images because desire ultimately leads back to the polymorphous child's desire for the mother. The equivocating representation of the lover is because the lover is a child desiring the forbidden, the unattainable, the unspeakable, that is desiring the mother. The child with such a desire fears castration, represented in this passage through the images of being the horse without a rider, and the fear of 'that grotesque piece of battered jewellery . . . false teeth on their crooked, dislocated wire' (MH 74). The 'battered jewellery' of Waldemar's false teeth functions as a revealing signifier of the castrating, fearful vagina of women, the Medusa's head of the castrating phallic mother, a monster escaped from the lair. The same fearful image of the castrating teeth, the vagina dentata is associated with Louise's and Waldemar's incest where the phallic mother winds her sharp, piercing high-heeled passion, her mulberry coloured boots around the child-like monster, immobilizing, castrating him:

With a shock I saw that what I thought was a smooth, dark, silky beard under his full, wet mouth was the long, dark hair of a woman. She lay as if crushed under the weight of the huge body. Her legs, in knee-length, mulberry-coloured, leather boots were crossed over the fat, white buttocks. The long, sharp heels of the boots seemed to pierce his flesh as though, by her act, she had pinned him to her. A mixture of disgust and fear, sadness, horror and pity filled me for it was Louise lying there with Waldemar. (MH 144).

It is this image of the sharp piercing passion of the mother/lover that haunts Jacob as mulberries, boots and wire teeth braces as signifiers of dread and desire recur in the text, including the ominous presence of the sharp wire braces with Madge's dead body. The bed and boots of the dead mother/lover are associated with Jacob's melancholia at the beginning/end of the narrative:

Kicked up on the end of the bed, as if with some life of their own, was a pair of knee length leather boots. The long sharp heels, as if obeying some cruel passion, where caught in the white bed-cover . . . The bedroom door would not stay latched, with a tiresome click it swung open. On the bed the boots kicked. (MH 9)

These images intrude into the wedding night scene so that Jacob, the child in the wedding night fantasy, desires the 'virgin mother' (although their lovemaking is not consummated Louise is already pregnant to Waldemar), but, fearing castration, he loves
but cannot satisfy the mother/lover:

I felt the longing in her body. I kissed her and wanted to please her but my trembling body failed us both. (*MH* 75)

The melancholic is unable to realize his desire. Louise herself, as a subject of melancholy, is trapped in the search for objects to replace her silenced, locked away mother. Fear of maternal madness causes Louise to deny the mother, but also to take her place, similar to the daughter in Duras' *The Lover* which Kristeva analyses in *Black Sun*. Louise also becomes Waldemar's mother/lover, producing a child/phallus for the men she castrates.

Louise's never-ending search for signifiers of desire has emptied the signifier of meaning, trapping her in silence. She could be described, in Kristevan terms, as a melancholic who is caught in an abyss of sorrow and silence:

Depressed persons . . . give up signifying and submerge in the silence of pain or the spasm of tears that celebrates reunion with the Thing.

Louise has, throughout the text, kept silent. Her soft laughter teases and mocks and evades Jacob:

I ran downstairs trying to catch her, but all I caught was her laughter as she disappeared first through one door and then another. (*MH* 55)

Louise's laughter takes on the characteristics of the whispering vine leaves, tantalizing and elusive:

Her whispering was a delight, it had a dream-like quality and the evening was wonderful with Louise's soft laughter. (*MH* 34)

Jacob is attracted and mystified by Louise's laughter and whispering, which functions in the text in a similar way to the secret unattainable message of the leaves:

Often there were leaves in my room, sometimes crumpled dying and yellow and sometimes fresh leaf-green leafiness in the damp evenings, shaking profiles of little well-bred leaf faces, silhouettes, nodding and shaking with quiet laughing, and sighing tiny fragments of messages which could never be understood in the tremulous movement. (*MH* 14)

Louise is silent and still on their wedding day (*MH* 70–1), her desire slipping past Jacob to continue to search for the 'Thing.' Kristeva claims that, for a woman, melancholia
represses her pleasure:

For the loss of the object seems beyond remedy for a woman and its mourning more difficult, if not impossible. So, substitutive objects, perverse objects that should lead her to the father, seem derisory to her. She often reaches heterosexual desire by repressing archaic pleasure, even pleasure itself – she yields to heterosexuality in frigidity.\(^{14}\)

Louise's passion is transferred to objects such as the boots and the man/child Waldemar. Jacob traces the delicate pattern of veins on Louise's breasts (*MH 76*), breasts she offers to her child in a scene that excludes Jacob, who positions himself as the child separated from father and vineyard and (unmentionable) mother: 'Why couldn't I be part of this *bonheur* (*MH 129*). But Louise's milk, like her speech, dries up (*MH 141*). After the fire she does not laugh or complain, she hardly speaks at all (*MH 3*). She dies silently, without protest (*MH 158*), facing the void that, in spite of the substitute objects, is still empty until death reunites the mourning child with the denied Mother.

Jacob's desire for Madge is aroused through a displacement of his memory of his mother onto his image of Madge. He is attracted to Madge because of her black dresses, and her voice, which he hears in 'fragments of talk behind the flaps of music' (*MH 52*). On his first evening with Madge he intertwines memories of his mother in her black dress with his desire for Madge:

I tried to explain about the barrels and the vines and the quality of the grapes and about my mother, who never learnt to speak English, and about her standing in her black dress in among the yellowing leaves of the vines in the middle of the long sunny afternoon. Madge listened to me eagerly.

'Funny,' she said in her husky voice. 'It was always sunshine when I was a kid too,' (*MH 61*)

Jacob is aroused by Madge's hoarse voice: 'It was at once intimate and revealing, the sound of her real voice' (*MH 84*) and by the excitement and safety of her body:

There was something exciting and yet safe about being close to her. I longed for that forgetfulness which her wonderful body could give. (*MH 125*)

Desire for Madge, as another man's wife, is forbidden, just like desire for the mother: 'She had become for me something forbidden, and so I thought, I must have her' (*MH 57*). Madge's sexuality, like her house with 'a front door which opened straight into the sitting–room' (*MH 60*), is open, warm and inviting. Jacob responds to 'the warmth and vitality and the generosity of this woman' (*MH 77*). Yet juxtaposed with the desire for
Madge's body is Jacob's awareness that he is violating another man's property. "'Where is He?' I was uneasy' (*MH* 60).

Desire is situated in the gap, the hint, the opening of the petals, the promise of something more:

She created an atmosphere of intimacy and tenderness which was out of reach and yet was offered. It was like seeing the hint of the colour of petals in an unopened bud. There was always the promise of something more. This promise was sweet and wonderful and I waited for my happiness delicately. (*MH* 2)

The secret nature of the relationship means that there is a continual displacement of desire, such as when Jacob walks under the mulberry tree thinking of Madge, but expecting Waldemar to drop from the tree (*MH* 96), or when he drives down streets remembering Madge (*MH* 1).

The signifiers of music, laughter and conversation slide over the gap of desire in a search for the erotic object to replace the lost mother while recognizing that nothing ever will:

Longing for her became the most important part of my life. I planned meetings which never took place and lived with the joy of meeting and the sadness of parting, all in my imagination. (*MH* 97)

Jouissance is itself a realization of loss.

Madge fears losing Jacob, because he functions as the substitute desire for the mother who left her, the mother who was replaced with the letter written by the forsaken child (*MH* 93). As Madge follows the signifiers of desire they lead to the mother, revealed in the letter which promises pleasure and acceptance. Madge also attempts to retain the mother as love object through eating her; her lovemaking with Jacob is associated with eating (*MH* 61, 86, 113, 125, 132–3). Jacob says: 'I loved Madge for her eating' (*MH* 86). Kristeva discusses the desire to eat the loved one as an example of 'melancholy cannibalism,' a desire to hold in the mouth the intolerable other, or a substitute object, so as to possess it, ingest it, contain and keep it.15

The only way to retain the love object, to attempt to retain the 'Thing' is to be united in death. Jacob desires the death of Louise (*MH* 98) and Madge (*MH* 102). Death for Jacob means being comforted, a return to the real, a merging with the earth where self and other merge and the object is retained in a permanent embrace:

[T]he graves were clean and flat like neatly made beds, . . . I thought of the bodies being comforted in the earth, returned to the earth, buried deep in clay. Sometimes I longed for the real and the last burial. (*MH* 132)
Jacob's desire for death is intertwined with desire for Madge and the sound of the leaves. Among the trembling leaves in the cemetery is Madge, parting the bushes, pushing her way through, revealing the secret of the leaves which were silenced so long ago in the vineyard. The secret song of the cello, the whispered song of the vine leaves, Jacob's love for Louise and Madge, lead back to the secret silenced song of the mother in the vineyard (MH, p. 94). Jacob has exchanged his birthright of song and the vineyard for money in an attempt to position himself in the symbolic, at the expense of the song of vine leaves.

Kristeva claims that the death drive is represented in the symbolic through either silence or a cascade of sounds. Louise dies silently, the cello is played discordantly, then silenced. Madge plays with the empty signifiers of desire in a cascade of sounds:

'Land for sale. Six foot of land cheap.'... 'Still a few blocks left, pick your choice!' the hoarse voice changed into a smothered laugh...

'Colour of pig!' she grunted and panted and scuffled about on the dry grass. (MH 132)

But when death comes it is silent. The unrepresentable nature of death is linked to the dissociation of form:

[When form is distorted, abstracted, disfigured, hollowed out: ultimate thresholds of inscribable dislocation and jouissance...]

Jacob falls over Madge's dead body which is rolled in carpet, covered with leaves and dirt. As he uncovers her body she flows out, distorted, disfigured, bloodied, bloated, spoiled and dirtied (MH 145).

The different houses act as objects of desire for the characters attempting to fill the gap left by the denied mother. Jacob has pleasant childhood memories of his vineyard home. Jacob's memories of his childhood link associations of darkness and light (the black sun), mother and father. Images of the sunlit vineyard associated with the mother singing and the dark shed, associated with illness and death are intertwined with Jacob's childhood memories of the father:

I wished I could be little for ever, playing in the dark shed, near my father and able to rush out into the sunlit vineyard whenever I wanted to. (MH 16)

This image suggests an easy thoroughfare between maternal and paternal functions,
between semiotic and symbolic modalities. But when the land is sold, the vines and house burnt and the fertile land turned to building sites, Jacob cannot face returning to the place of desire. Instead he vomits out the abject mother from whom he has been separated and replaces the image with the melancholic one of the burnt, dead house where the black sun is filtered through the burnt-out house, so that the house is situated as a lost object of desire which slides with a metonymic movement through forgotten memories:

There was an extraordinary beauty in the burned house. Sunlight came through the blackened rafters and patches of light and shade made secret dwellings for memories in rooms which no longer resembled any I had known. *(MH 47)*

The description of the house, suggestive of the black sun metaphor, traps Jacob's memories in a hollow shell, drawing him back to the imagined bliss of lost maternal plenitude.

*Leopold's house, as an object of desire, is a place of fear and beauty. Jacob's first sight causes him to shiver, but the house is then lit up by the last light from the sun:*

*As we walked around to the back, all the corners and edges of the house seemed to soften in a sudden last light from the sun. A final caress, perhaps even a blessing. *(MH 11)*

In Jacob's attempt to locate his desire the sites of beauty and fear move from room to room; from the music room, to kitchen, from his bedroom to Louise's bedroom, which is guarded by the two Aunts' rooms, and which become the site of confrontation and destruction on the night of the fire. The mulberry tree functions as the site of repressed sexuality, with its fermenting fruit and its association with Louise' mulberry coloured boots. The tree's canopy of leaves functions as an echo of the vine leaves of childhood memories. The sound of the leaves hints at a presence, a presence desired yet feared, the presence of an absence:

*When I walked like this in the damp morning, the rustling sound of the mulberry leaves detaching themselves and falling made me look up quickly to see if someone was there. Perhaps Waldemar would come shuffling through the fallen leaves and stand before me. But no one was there, only the leaves falling to gather with those already fallen. *(MH 90)*

The mulberry tree functions as the site of fear because of its associations with Waldemar:

*It was time for the mulberries. At the end of the garden was the tree; it was as big as the house. The leaves were thick and green and the old*
branches were gnarled and twisted like branches in the pictures in fairy tales. There was a strong scent of fermenting overripe berries. Up in the tree was an enormous boy. He was bigger than anyone else in the house. He was fat and had fair hair. He was Waldemar. (*MH 12*)

The exaggerated size and the fairy tale associations situate the tree as a significant site for Jacob. The tree as a traditional metaphor for self and site of temptation is intertwined with Jacob’s desires and fears associated with Louise, Waldemar and Madge.

Leopold’s house attracts and repels Jacob. He feels tied to the house: 'I felt tied into the house, joined to the people by invisible cords' (*MH 56*). Like a baby in the womb, he is merged in oceanic oneness, trapped by the maternal power, unable to separate:

I felt something must be done to enable me, in spite of the invisible, inescapable power drawing me deeper into the household, to make some kind of re-entry of my own. I wanted to start my married life with my own feelings. (*MH 72*)

Jacob fears the power of the house to trap him in melancholic inactivity and loss of identity.

One site of desire, Louise’s room is protected by the two Aunts’ rooms. Jacob tries to possess the object of his desire, in terms which suggest the phallic:

Penetrating the two guarding rooms I felt excited. I looked with delight at her room. (*MH 54*)

But he is defeated: 'I seemed to be trespassing' (*MH 54*). Perhaps his defeat is caused by the fragrance of the two trees outside her window, or by the ominous sign of the two trees/desires 'grown together,' perhaps by the sense of enchantment and unreality which pervades Louise’s room and which overwhelms him, as on another occasion when Jacob confesses that 'my trembling body failed us both' (*MH 75*). Or he may be defeated by the melancholic representation in the postcard on Louise’s wall, of *Kreuz im Gebirge*, a painting of dark pines and a 'tiny Christ figure on the cross hanging with suffering and humility against the setting sun' (*MH 54–5*). Louise knows that he is defeated, that he will never locate the object of his desire:

'And quickly I ran downstairs trying to catch her, but all I caught was her laughter as she disappeared first through one door and then another. (*MH 55*)

Laughter, according to Kristeva, has the power to establish a thoroughfare between the
semiotic and the symbolic, but it eludes Jacob, who is left at the foot of the stairs, unable to penetrate the secret place.

Madge's holiday hut is also a site of desire. Set by the sea, it resonates with maternal associations: 'The world unfolded in a bluish mist' (MH 63). The house is built like a boat, and a warm fragrance of cooking draws the occupants together (MH 86). It is the site of Jacob's desire for Madge, but also the site of Louise's illness. The warmth inside is offset with the cold wind which sighs and wails outside:

All night the wide sweep of water sighed alone the narrow shore. I thought I could hear someone weeping. Sometimes I thought it was the wind, and at other times, I seemed to recognize the hoarse voice. A woman, alone in the night, weeping. (MH 88)

Jacob hears the voice of a weeping woman outside the hut, an image of an absent presence, the fantasy of the women suggested by the sound of her weeping.

The love that Jacob experiences with Madge is one in which he loses himself as he finds jouissance (MH 94), in an endless deferral of desire. In an attempt to recapture the desire he and Madge rent a number of houses in an effort to situate and satisfy their desire.

The house by the river offers such a possibility. It is secluded, protected, walled, enclosed. Secured by locks and bolts, it allows Jacob to attempt to hide his secret desire within. Here it appears to be possible to interweave his desires, perhaps even to find the lost maternal comfort of childhood:

Rooms reminiscent of the warmth and safety of childhood without a hint of the shuddering, muttering, mocking nightmare which belongs with childhood. (MH 106)

But Jacob knows that another part of childhood, the nightmares, cannot be ignored. The childhood associations lead him to Waldemar, 'Waldemar would have more room.' (MH 106). The interplay of desire that Jacob indulges in, the layering of his various objects of desire, is like a 'grimacing, leering twitching . . . tunnel of faces in the mirrors' (MH 107), which evokes the childhood memory of the shaking profiles of the faces in the leaves shaking with laughter and mysterious messages (MH 14). While Jacob plans to enjoy Madge in the secret, curtained room, he also plans to allow Waldemar to hide in attic. Jacob's scheme appears to free him, it offers a way of enjoying and hiding his secret pleasures and guilt. If it were possible to have all of one's desires situated and satisfied in one house, would one be free of the mother, able to cast off the objects of abjection that prevent one from separating from the mother, just as Jacob can throw out into the darkness the burnt kettle and the bits of uneaten food (MH 114)? Would the
acknowledgment of his co-existent desire for Madge, Louise and Waldemar provide the same sort of relief as that experienced by a secretly crippled man if he were able to roll off his stockings and reveal his deformity (MH 108)? These objects of abjection from which Jacob desires to be free in order to be a 'clean and proper' separate individual18 function to trap him in the semiotic.

Even on his first night at the house by the river the leaves of his childhood, the silenced, maternal voice warn him that his dream, his desire is not possible:

Exhausted with the day, too tired even to mind leaving Madge at the corner of her street, I stood in a yellow pool of lamplight and watched her disappear. Leaves rustled along the pavement, chased by the restless wind. White moonflowers, hanging in clusters over the boards of a fence, gave off a sweet scent. The white flowers shook and nodded. Melancholy of the most profound sort settled on me. (MH 115)

Jacob is fearful that secret desires, like the unwanted servants, are hiding in his rooms. The secret desire which has not been dealt with is Waldemar, who functions for Louise and Jacob, and, if he is Madge's killer, for her also, as the object which becomes the substitute for the denied mother. According to Kristeva, the object of desire is also the object of horror:

My necessary Thing is also and absolutely my enemy, my foil, the delightful focus of my hatred. . . . - it is a waste with which, in my sadness, I merge. It is Job's ashpit in the Bible.19

The object of horror, the abject Mother, is that from which one must separate, which one must expel, spit out if one is to be constituted as a subject. But the melancholic is unable to separate. Because he perceives the mother as rejecting, isolating, separating, leaving him to face a void, the melancholic clutches at objects of horror in a desperate attempt to contain, retain and merge.

Waldemar functions as an object of horror for Jacob. Jacob is overwhelmed by the size of Waldemar, his gross fatness, his fat balls of fists, his demand that Jacob choose 'which hend you hev?' He constantly fears Waldemar dropping from the mulberry tree. Jacob searches the house, desiring, yet dreading to see the scene he finally sees, the primal scene of Louise locked in Waldemar's embrace. Louise's and Waldemar's incest is the scene that Jacob desires and fears, prowling the house looking for it, yet denying it. It is a scene where mother and child merge, something which Jacob desires and resists. Because it is enacted by brother and sister it denies the child his place and discards the parental embrace. It is a scene of castration which, through Jacob's identification with it, prevents him from taking up an effective position in the
symbolic.

Jacob is repelled and attracted by Waldemar. For Jacob, Waldemar functions as the mother from whom Jacob must separate and yet with whom he desires to merge. He also functions as the child whom Jacob is doomed to be for the rest of his life because of an unresolved separation from the mother. As child, Waldemar is associated with the magpie baby bird from which the mother cannot escape, but who must put up with the endless wailing of the child (MH 11, 182).

For Louise, Waldemar also functions as child and mother. As her child Louise cares for and protects him, as a mother figure he replaces the mad mother locked away in the institution. As child/mother/lover Waldemar is desired by Louise and she desires to have his child, so that the signifiers of desire continue to slide from child/mother/lover in the person of Waldemar to mother/Waldemar/Elise.

For Madge desire is finally silenced, satisfied in death, in a return to the mother represented as an embrace by Waldemar. In death she is surrounded by the wire braces, leaves and blood, objects of abjection which Jacob cannot vomit out (MH 145–6).

Kristeva has two metaphors she associates with melancholy that are interesting in relation to Milk and Honey. One is the image of mutilation where the subject internalizes the rejection by the mother:

I live a living death, my flesh is wounded, bleeding, cadaverized, my rhythm slowed down or interrupted, time has been erased or bloated, absorbed into sorrow . . . 20

This sensation is characterized by a desire for 'melancholy cannibalism' in an effort to retain, or return to the mother:

[T]his passion for holding within the mouth (but vagina and anus also lend themselves to this control) the intolerable other that I crave to destroy so as to better possess it alive. Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested . . . than lost.21

Milk and Honey is replete with such images, in particular the devouring vagina dentata of the mulberry boots and false teeth. Waldemar's teeth, the castrating, jewelled genitalia of the mother, keep appearing in Jacob's room, indicating his desire to be torn, swallowed and digested by the mother, a fate which Madge meets. The description of the incest scene is one which fragments and amalgamates bodies, engulfing Jacob, Louise and, finally, Madge. Leopold's house is dominated by illness; Louise's, Aunt Heloise's sore legs, Tante Rosa's headaches, Leopold's swollen legs, the mother's hidden madness, position the family at the frontier of life and death, at the void, searching for
the Mother. Waldemar's apparent death retains him in the house as 'the intolerable other that I crave to destroy, so as to better possess it alive.' Jacob's vomiting, his nose bleed, his fever and accident in the motel room, his burnt claw of a hand, which can be interpreted in Kristevan terms as signs of melancholic behaviour, all situate him on the verge of collapse of meaning, they silence him, emptying the signifiers of meaning and desire, indicating an empty, endless search for the lost 'Thing.' Fire devours and destroys Jacob's vineyard home, and Leopold's house and Jacob's money which signifies efforts to hold and retain any trace of the mother who has been emptied of meaning.

The other interesting metaphor associated with melancholia and related to the concept of fragmentation, is that of establishing a sense of identity. Since the melancholic has been denied the primordial relationship with the maternal object, s/he has never had a chance to separate from the mother, to engage in the process of individuation and the formulation of an image of self. There is a shadow cast on the construction of self by the missing other:

Depression is the hidden face of Narcissus, the face that is to bear him away into death, but of which he is unaware while he admires himself in a mirage. Talking about depression will again lead us into the marshy land of the Narcissus myth. This time, however, we shall not encounter the bright and fragile amatory idealization; on the contrary, we shall see the shadow cast on the fragile self, hardly dissociated from the other, precisely by the loss of that essential other. The shadow of despair.

When the child has not seen itself mirrored in the mother's eyes other mirrored representations tend to be distorted and fragmented by the shadow of the [m]other. The mother's eyes mirror the unity of mother and child. Without this image the child experiences him/herself as fragmented and alienated. The unity with the mother having been ruptured, the child experiences lack of being. With no reflection from which to construct an image, the child has trouble assuming an identity. The mirror, according to Lacan, allows an identification, albeit a misrecognition, which allows the subject to assume an image, take up a subject position. If the child has no sense of permanence from the mother's gaze, then the child may experience itself as fragmented and alienated, an unstable subject in a constant search for objects of desire.

In Milk and Honey characters have difficulty establishing a stable sense of identity. They constantly overlap and merge with one another and the representation of oneself in a mirror is problematic.

The first motif, in the prologue, represents the experience of exiles, who, in being forced to separate from the mother land, collect into tight rocks that attempt to merge with one another to provide protection:
Even as they fell they pressed closer and closer into themselves as if this was their only means of surviving. (*MH* prologue)

As exiles the alienated characters in the text turn inward and intertwine their lives in an incestuous pattern of desire and fear, in order to protect their way of life.

Separate individuation is difficult. Norman asks a joke about difference, establishing a motif of the importance for social survival of constructing a stable identity (*MH* 8). But within the text the fragmented characters mingle and merge in a 'Danse Macabre.' Waldemar copies and mocks Jacob (*MH* 26), Madge had puffy eyes like Waldemar's when Jacob punches him (*MH* 67, 125, cf. 27). Jacob wears Madge's jumper, 'Now we're both Madge' (*MH* 65) and he wants to change clothes with the taxi driver (*MH* 46). Madge talks or laughs in a voice 'so unlike hers I thought someone else was there laughing' (*MH* 67). Aunt Heloise and Leopold both have leg pains (*MH* 22). In his dream Jacob sees Aunt Heloise spinning in the chair, superimposed on his image of Madge spinning, which then becomes himself (*MH* 165).

Jacob's images of desire slide in a chain of signifiers which trap him. When he is dancing with Louise he transfers his desire to Madge (*MH* 71), when he is with Madge he interweaves stories of his Aunt Mitzi and his mother (*MH* 94–5), his fear of Waldemar (*MH* 96) and images of Louise and Waldemar (*MH* 127). The pink legs of Madge and Louise are both imaged as twined around the body of their lovers (*MH* 133, 144). After seeing Waldemar's body on the body of Louise: 'She lay as if crushed under the weight of the huge body' (*MH* 144), Jacob runs outside and falls over Madge's dead body: 'my body on the body of Madge' (*MH* 145). Grotesque, fragmented, mutilated body parts, form a tunnel of reflections, 'a tunnel of faces in the mirror' (*MH* 107), a crazy spinning of images (*MH* 165), the shaking profiles of the laughing leaf faces (*MH* 14).

At the mental institution faces and bodies lose identity and merge into one:

It was hard to distinguish where one man ended and another began. Faces, one after the other, loomed in front of me as I peered to find the one I wanted. Eyes were as if without sight. No one recognized anyone. (*MH* 176–7)

Melancholia has engulfed the desolate in the void, the *choric* space.

Traditional Freudian dream analysis interprets houses as representations of the self. Lacan, when discussing the formation of the 'I' comments that the self is represented in dreams by a fortress, or more generally, a house.24 Houses are important for Jacob, as sites where he attempts to establish his identity. But Jacob's houses are characterized by secret hidden rooms, sites of desire and fear. Lacan also suggests that marshes and rubbish-tips represent an attempt to establish a boundary for the self.25
Kristeva, in *Powers of Horror* outlines the objects of abjection, such as refuse, death, decay, wounds, excrement, blood and vomit which become a means of separating from the mother in the process of forming an identity. In *Milk and Honey* the route from Leopold's house to the mental institution passes the rubbish tip with the sightless tractor driver and the cemetery. For Jacob it offers not the desire to separate but the longing for death, merging with the earth and the mother: 'Sometimes I longed for the real and the last burial' (*MH* 132).

Without the primary reflection from the mother's eyes the child has difficulty constituting itself as subject. Tante Rosa requires that all the mirrors in the house be covered to prevent the glare (*MH* 26), and the mirror scavenged at the rubbish tip is cracked (*MH* 38). This lack of image functions to alienate Jacob who is unable to establish his own identity as all the occupants of the house take part in his life (*MH* 13). On the night after he has visited his now burnt, cut up, parcelled out farm there is a storm, and, unable to sleep, he prowls around the house until he finds Waldemar's fat sleeping body. The effect of both these incidents on Jacob's own self concept is reflected in his comments about his face in a mirror:

I was afraid of my own face in the mirror. At first it was unrecognizable, shining with sweat and with an expression in my eyes quite unlike what I believed myself to be. (*MH* 48)

The mirror reflects the alienated, fragmented child. On another occasion the multiplicity of images of his face make him afraid:

I was suddenly terrified of my own face grimacing, leering, twitching, a tunnel of faces in the mirrors. (*MH* 106-7)

For the melancholic, trapped in the semiotic the maternal thoroughfare becomes a mocking impasse. In Madge's house, a house where the front door opens straight into the sitting room, suggesting an openness and a sexual willingness, Madge examines herself in the mirror in the main room and uses the mirror to lure Jacob: 'From the mirror her grey eyes, slits in their puffy beds, looked at me wickedly' (*MH* 60). Unlike Madge, Louise will not look at Jacob:

If she would look for one moment so that we could know each others' eyes perhaps everything could be changed. (*MH* 71)

An interactive reflection of self/other/self is necessary if the fragmented self is to function as a subject.

When Jacob sets fire to the house he screams out to Louise to cover up the
mirrors, to hide the terrible image of himself which is revealed:

Everything reflected the flames. We were surrounded by fire.
'Cover up the mirrors!' I screamed at Louise. My own reflection, twisting and grimacing and distorted, frightened me. (*MH 147*)

The melancholic's image is distorted and fearful.

The end of *Milk and Honey* suggests an attempt to establish a reconciliation and an identity. Jacob stops and listens and acknowledges the singing of the old lady 'like the thin, sad voice of my mother' (*MH 179*). As a cleaner at the mental institution his attempt to clean up the mess, creating some sort of order can be seen as a way of establishing the boundaries of self, a process of individuation: 'it's the first time in my life I am not living on or through somebody else' (*MH 183*). But, as a melancholic, he is positioned very precariously, searching for meaning at the edge of the void, mourning the denied mother.

In *Milk and Honey* the denied mother is silenced and hidden, yet continually sought after through other objects of desire, which become objects of both delight and horror, desire and death, a 'black sun' of longing. Silencing the maternal voice and covering the maternal gaze traps the child/artist in the semiotic. This unresolved yearning leaves the child/artist searching for substitute objects in an attempt to sublate the void. The loss of the maternal thoroughfare gives rise to melancholia, a mourning for the unrecoverable maternal object.
NOTES


23. Kristeva 5.


In 'Stabat Mater' Julia Kristeva presents two discourses on motherhood, in two columns. One is a 'poetic,' apparently personal account of her own experience of maternity, suggesting a [M]other voice which is placed alongside the historical, religious, patriarchal discourse on motherhood as it is represented by the symbolic construct of the Virgin Mother. In Kristeva's text the two accounts could appear to stand as two separate but related versions, a typographical fragmentation of the page which Toril Moi reads as a parallel discourse. Moi suggests that 'Kristeva's study of the Virgin Mother coincides with her own experience of maternity, recorded and reflected in the personal observations which break up the main body of the text.' Moi's comment seems to accept that the personal can sit alongside the 'main body of the text' without causing too much disruption or need for refocussing. In Moi's reading the parallel texts could be said to 'co-habit' the same page, although the fragmented nature of the writing hints at the sacrificial nature of the intercourse.

Kristeva's introductory focus which continues in the dominant right-hand column concerns the Christian idealization of maternity, the Virgin Mother and society's need for either this traditional representation or a new discourse of motherhood. Kristeva believes that the Virgin offers a way of encoding the feminine in the symbolic social structures and that the Virgin's deathless status suggests a recognition of maternal power, but only within masculine constructs and through the son who provides access to the symbolic. Thus the 'epiphany' or 'sublimation' that the mother offers by being the 'bond' or middle' ground for the meeting of nature and culture, body and word, humanity and divinity, semiotic and symbolic becomes the basis of the son's capacity to claim the maternal territory and could be interpreted as 'no more than a masculine appropriation of the Maternal' in which the mother becomes dependent on the son for a legitimate expression of her maternity. 'Our Lady' can be said to function as an ambiguous representation of denied or repressed power, a way of encoding the body, the erotic, the non-verbal in a symbolic construct which provides entry to the symbolic for women, through the 'immediately universal' of one who is 'alone of her sex.' Therefore, Kristeva's personal account, while it ruptures the paternal discourse must sit inside it, be contained by it, hence her cry 'I yearn for the Law.' Kristeva suggests that her personal experience of motherhood had silenced her, by returning her to the pre-Oedipal chorific state and experiences of forgetfulness, absence and the void. Although she enjoys in and desires this blissful state she also yearns for the Law, for language, for legitimation, in order to be inscribed within the symbolic structures, to have a voice and an identity in the Law. The male, by virtue of his assured position in the symbolic, may translate his desire for the maternal body into legitimate artistic or mystical pursuits, but Kristeva's
representation of woman is one in which woman, by being the 'middle' or thoroughfare, becomes the passive means of enacting the process but having no identity of her own.\textsuperscript{7}

At the sites of birth and of death it may, however, be possible to escape paternal symbolic encoding. In this essay Kristeva focuses on death, the site of 'Stabat Mater,' where the mother stands weeping. Here language and identity collapse and maternal love attempts to shield the speaker from death through the non-verbal elements of maternal tears and milk.\textsuperscript{8} The impotence of language reveals the void of loss and the desire for the mother's body which is conveyed by either silence or an excess of language. The mother is represented as passive and silent, the Stabat Mater by whom 'Man overcomes the unthinkable [silence] of death' through 'the reassuring wrapping' of 'maternal love.'\textsuperscript{9} [I am here deliberately mixing and combining Kristeva's two discourses]. Both discourses, the maternal and the paternal, the right and the left hand one, recognize 'the weakness of language,'\textsuperscript{10} 'the tremendous territory hither and yon of the parenthesis of language.'\textsuperscript{11} It is at this site, the maternal thoroughfare, the 'Stabat Mater,' site of ecstasy and anguish, that the breakdown of language occurs. Birth or death confronts the speaker with 'the roar of a silence.'\textsuperscript{12} Here communication may be achieved by the saint, the mystic or the writer who identifies with love in what could be described as an act of incest, a reclaiming of the maternal body:

Such a love is in fact, logically speaking, a surge of anguish at the very moment when the identity of thought and living body collapses. The possibilities of communication having been swept away, only the subtle gamut of sound, touch and visual traces, older than language and newly worked out, are preserved as an ultimate shield against death. It is only 'normal' for a maternal representation to set itself up at the place of this subdued anguish called love. No one escapes it. Except perhaps the saint, the mystic or the writer who, through the power of language, nevertheless succeeds in doing no better than to take apart the fiction of the mother as mainstay of love, and to identify with love itself and what he is in fact – a fire of tongues, an exit from representation. Might not modern art then be, for the few who are attached to it, the implementation of that maternal love – a veil of death, in death's very site and with full knowledge of the facts? A sublimated celebration of incest. . .\textsuperscript{13}

At this site, where symbolic constructs have collapsed, a new language, a 'fire of tongues' attempts to speak the [m]other tongue. For Kristeva this language is spoken by a male voice. However, in both her discourses she is engaged in finding if it is possible for a woman to go beyond the paternal discourse in order to claim a speaking position as 'I,' outside of the Virgin's discourse.

Elizabeth Grosz' comment on the function of religious discourse in Kristeva's work suggests that:
Kristeva's continuing fascination with religious discourses is directly related to her interest in the poetic text. The religious and the poetic are inverted reflections of each other: poetic discourse challenges, traverses or transgresses the present 'bounds of sense'; its open-ended deferral of meaning and its refusal to coagulate into a symbolic identity is the converse of the sacred. Where the poetic text signals a language to come, the sacred text attempts to stabilize a situation in decay or breakdown; where the poetic engenders a semiotic breach of the symbolic, the religious is a semiotic recoded in symbolic terms; where the poetic is naming, speaking the unnameable chora, the religious is its 'revelation'. Religion is the recoding of what is becoming uncoded in the poetic or the revolutionary. [italics mine]  

Grosz' comment suggests a reading in which 'Stabat Mater' functions as Kristeva's attempt to claim a speaking position through an academic recoding of the Virgin's discourse and the personal text, included in the essay as the semiotic breach of the symbolic, functions as an attempt to signal a language yet to come. The scholarly version could be read as desire for the legitimacy of the Law, for orderly recoding and control which grows out of a desire for stability and continuity which Kristeva suggests is a 'feminine perversion' with a play on the '[pere—version]', suggesting perhaps a claim for a female appropriation of the Paternal. The personal account, written in poetic language, traverses and transgresses the 'bounds of sense,' using open-ended comments, incomplete and broken statements, suggesting an attempt to speak the unspeakable, to name the excesses of language. To use Grosz' visual image the two columns could be said to provide a mirror image which is reflected and refracted in the space or void, the gap between the two discourses which could be read as the maternal thoroughfare. If we were to allow the two versions to mingle they could be said to work together to construct a discourse of identity and meaning that is based on an interactive model of self/other/self which grows out of the nature of the mother/child interaction of same and different, separation and merging. But, how would we read such mirror writing? Or, to use Kristeva's image of sound, the two accounts could be said to intertwine and echo one another in a way which sometimes suggests a harmonious strengthening of the argument and at other times a dissonance between the two sounds.

Kristeva's theoretical writing in the right hand column searches for a 'herethics' which will make possible the speaking of a new maternal discourse which incorporates those aspects silenced in the paternal account, such as the economic burden of motherhood, the materiality of the lived experience, the mother—daughter relationship and the necessity for new sexual and parenting practices. The new 'herethics' would need to speak out of the 'weakness of language' and utter a semiotic excess or remainder not contained within symbolic structures. The shape of Kristeva's text insists that there is a semiotic residue, which speaks of 'flesh, language and jouissance.' and which is not
caught or bound by the symbolic. Thus the personal account functions more disruptively than Moi's notion of parallel texts, which is evidenced in the reader's confusion about how to read the two pieces. The text, which begins in a conventional manner, is suddenly challenged by an outburst which acts to rupture and challenge meaning and question the abstract quality of language. The historical, analytical discourse is split open with a 'FLASH' which deals with immediacy, dreams and timelessness: 'instant of time or of dream without time.' The irruption of the semiotic drives and desires into the historical narrative pleads for a recognition of the body, the 'WORD FLESH.' Kristeva's study of the function of the maternal within patriarchal structures, represented by the model of the Virgin Mother, is both challenged and supplemented by the personal narrative which is printed in bold face type and positioned on the left-hand side of the page, suggesting an 'illegitimate' conception which interrupts and intrudes on the ordered argument of the scholar.

The bodily presence of the mother demands a voice which is achieved through the splitting or fragmenting of the mother's body in birth and represented in the splitting of the text which opens out to reveal a text within a text. The text which is revealed or birthed is a small child-like bundle of sensations, an outpouring of feelings, a squalling of sounds. The inner text is one which is concerned with bodily functions as 'metaphors of the invisible.' Carolyn G. Burke, in 'Rethinking the Maternal' offers a reading of 'Stabat Mater' which suggests a subtle interplay between the two accounts, suggestive of the mother-child relationship. Using the image of birth, she suggests the 'parent' text is challenged by the 'child' text, as the coherence of the historical analytical text is opened up by another voice which splits the unitary construction to give birth to a woman's account of motherhood, in a 'mimesis of the creation of meaning,' a rupturing of the traditional canonical text with the birth of new forms of meaning and expression, expressed in the babble of cries, outbursts and flashes:

Unexpectedly, the analysis is interrupted by a lyrical intertext composed of outbursts, cries, and flashes of insight. The intertext ruptures the homogeneity of the main text and forces an opening on the page. The coherence of one discourse, printed across the page, is made to give way to another voice which splits language in two, printed in separate columns carefully juxtaposed in relation to each other. Typographically, the intertext depends upon and echoes the "mother" text; it functions as its child-being-born in a mimesis of the creation of meaning. Commenting upon the more traditional discourse of the parent text, it makes possible an outpouring of the semiotic from within the symbolic. From the constant fluctuation of their dialogue results both an examination of the conceptual and social limits imposed upon "motherhood" in Western culture and a reimagining of that central relationship.
Using Burke's reading, the maternal metaphor can be said to function to enable the filtering or reflecting of semiotic elements into the symbolic through the mother's body. The mother bridges the two accounts, but at a cost. Kristeva says that a woman 'does not give birth in pain,' rather she 'gives birth to pain.' The pain may be the pain of being ruptured by two competing desires, two competing discourses. The mother is torn by desire for the Law and seduced by maternal jouissance: 'It is the pleasure of the damned.' In Kristeva's account the mother's body is split by desire for the father and the son.

Kristeva suggests that what is needed is a maternal discourse that annunciates the maternal body within linguistic structures, which speaks the 'WORD FLESH.' The maternal metaphor acknowledges the need to write the presence and power of the body within discursive structures in order to enable a re-reading of the patriarchal discourse to incorporate dreams, visions, sounds and sensations from the body. The maternal milk and tears function as 'metaphors of non-speech,' representing the need to extend and exceed linguistic boundaries. Such a discourse of 'WORD FLESH' could provide a legitimate speaking position for women, incorporating maternal and paternal elements and effected through the maternal thoroughfare.

'Stabat Mater' suggests that a modern maternal discourse is necessary and possible. The traditional representation of virgin motherhood, which, according to Kristeva, fulfilled the needs of both men and women through a 'skilful balance of concessions and constraints' is now seen to be inadequate and too coercive. In the old discourse the Virgin's deathless status denied the weight of the mother's body. Corporeally and linguistically a woman's body exceeds the traditional maternal encoding. Kristeva's own experimentation with form is one way of approaching a new discourse. While maintaining the maternal metaphor, Kristeva's metaphor of the folds of a woman's body suggests a multiplicity of subject position and heterogeneity of meaning. It suggests the birth experience, but is also suggestive of woman's sexuality and the excesses of her image:

The unspoken doubtless weighs first on the maternal body: as no signifier can uplift it without leaving a remainder, for the signifier is always meaning, communication or structure, whereas a woman as mother would be, instead, a strange fold that changes culture into nature, the speaking into biology. Although it concerns every woman's body, the heterogeneity that cannot be subsumed in the signifier nevertheless explodes violently with pregnancy (the threshold of culture and nature) and the child's arrival (which extracts woman out of her oneness and gives her the possibility – but not the certainty – of reaching out to the other, the ethical). Those particularities of the maternal body compose woman into a being of folds, a catastrophe of being . . .
The maternal body provides a metaphor for a subjectivity that folds self and other back onto themselves in an interactive pattern of merging and separation which is evident in the relationships amongst a 'community of women.' Kristeva represents women as on a see-saw swinging from individual singularity to speaking through a community of women. Her metaphor suggests that woman's experience in birth and maternity of being divided, separated and merged acts to create a sense of self which is divided and multiple and which is unsettled by claiming subjecthood as a singular, unique 'I'. A self/other/self interaction is an inevitable mode of being for a mother who experiences subjectivity as being self but also as containing and being contained by another. The maternal body thus provides a metaphor for constructs of identity and language which attempt to speak this new women's discourse. How can this division of language and heterogeneity of subjectivity be represented?

Part 2 – 'The Treatment'

Elizabeth Jolley's *Foxybaby* also uses the device of a text within a text in a self-conscious treatment of the process of literary production which offers an interesting illustration of the way in which the literary process can function metaphorically like the maternal figure, as a thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic and as a birthing process which creates a division of language and heterogeneity of subject position. Jolley's text is not concerned primarily with presenting a new discourse on maternity, rather what is interesting is how the text ruptures and diversifies conventional unified, controlled narrative structures in a way that could be said to give birth to other texts.

In *Foxybaby* the 'parent' text of the Summer School is ruptured by the 'child' text of the 'Foxybaby Treatment,' and both texts are located within a dream narrative, suggesting the linguistic excess of a discourse which attempts to 'speak the mother.' The folding and unfolding of the swaddling narrative of *Foxybaby* into multiple stories allows for an exploration of diverse subjectivity and heterogeneity of meaning, offering new forms of writing.

The writer figure in *Foxybaby* is named Miss Porch, as a sign of her function in language, that is, at the threshold of the unsettling of discursive structures by the semiotic processes of poetic language. Miss Porch, literally and figuratively, stands at the threshold of the articulation of dreams, drives and desires into the symbolic, at the division of the two narratives. As tutor she strives to situate her text/herself within the socially sanctioned symbolic constructs of specified courses and texts, but, as woman, and as writer, she contests the closure and control of the symbolic structures which she
disrupts with disturbing bodily sensations. Thus the text articulates shifting subject positions for Miss Porch as she rewrites her stories, and it provides multiple readings as the Summer School community rework her text. Figuratively, the textual cohesion of the Summer School narrative is fragmented by the Foxybaby narrative, both of which are themselves ruptured by the dream narrative.

In this discourse, the text, rather than being read in two separate columns, folds in and out on itself displacing 'facts' and 'fictions,' interweaving readers and writer. The multi-layered narratives sit inside one another and rupture the distinction between inner and outer, 'fact' and fiction, writer and audience, revealing the constructed nature of experience. The enclosed, singular and controlled experience of Miss Porch, as the single occupant of her car as she journeys to the Summer School, is ruptured, and a division of flesh and language occurs with the unexpected presence of other cars on the road, which causes her accident and leads to the carnivalesque dream narrative of the Summer School. Likewise her authoritative position as Author is challenged and pluralized by the would-be writing community at the Summer School.

In Foxybaby the maternal metaphor can be said to function as a thoroughfare between the different narratives and the embryonic 'Foxybaby Treatment' can be said to be embedded in the mother narrative. The maternal thoroughfare allows for multiple stories, shifting subjectivity and diverse readings. This is effected by the dream narrative which allows an interplay between constructed 'fact' and constructed 'fiction,' and between writer and audience. It is Miss Porch as writer, and the pregnant woman Anna/Sandy who stand at the threshold, filtering the texts through their various representations. Subject positions change, folding in and out as the characters act out other roles and as the Summer School setting allows an abandonment of their traditional, restrictive roles. The writer, Alma Porch becomes a character in her own dream representation of the events at Trinity College and Sandy's story is re-enacted by the members of the Drama workshop. Personal stories, 'real' and imagined, the various Summer School narratives and the Foxybaby account, mix and mingle, changing shape and perspective as boundaries and dichotomies are moved and erased, and 'fact' and 'fiction,' subject and object, body and text interweave in parodic interplay. In Jolley's text the authority of the parent text is not only challenged by the outpouring of desire from the child text, but by situating the parent text within a semiotic dream construct activated by Miles' seduction fantasy of luring cars into collision. The Summer School narrative is contained within the dream narrative of Miss Porch. The crash of the car accident can be said to function like Kristeva's 'FLASH' which reveals the timeless narrative of dreams and epiphanies in the eruption of the semiotic into the symbolic.

The 'dominant' narrative of the Summer School is inadequate for the expression of the drives and desires of the mother/daughter, Sandy, which are revealed in the inner
'Foxybaby Treatment.' The Foxybaby narrative splits open the Summer School narrative which attempts to constrain it by a parodic mimetic 'treatment' and solipsistic literary criticism, such as Miss Peycroft's facile reference to Freudian symbols:

'This whole concept suggests Freudian symbols and inner psychic conflicts. . . . Bear in mind the Freudian slip and the Freudian construction and for heaven's sake don't lost [sic] sight of the Oedipus and the Electra complexes...'(F 142)

Miss Peycroft's attempt to control the enactment of the drama is frustrated and fragmented by the actors who take on the identity of the characters and who are changed by, and change the characters. In Foxybaby the two discourses slip and slide into one another, so that the Foxybaby story enters East Cheathem, through the re-enactments; Anna and Mrs Viggars have trouble resuming their 'other' roles after the first reading (F 90) and Miss Porch creates stories for the people at East Cheathem, such as her fantasy about Jonquil Castle's home life (F 60) or Miss Peycroft's brother (F 108–9). Subjectivity is revealed as being heterogeneous and constructed by the stories the characters live and imagine.

The figure who functions as the threshold of this intertextuality is the pregnant woman, Anna/Sandy. Anna, the pregnant woman at Trinity College, is represented as standing at the edge, 'apart form the others . . . remote' (F 79), or like the Virgin, 'alone of her sex'. Similar to the Madonna of 'Stabat Mater,' she seems to possess an untouched jouissance, a pleasure and pain which is outside the representation constructed by the Summer School narrative:

[The expression in her eyes as if she was gazing, not at her children, but sadly at some distant place, at an event perhaps belonging to some other time, was most suitable for Sandy. (F 79)

Anna's openness, her permeability, allows her to filter Sandy's experience through the readings and her marginal position allows for the shifting of boundaries. A Kristevan reading would suggest that this represents a maternal ability to split symbolization at the threshold of language and instinctual drive, which can only be represented in patriarchally constructed discourse as a lack, but which also hints at a repressed jouissance, as Kristeva suggests can be seen in Bellini's Madonnas:

Maternal space is there, nevertheless - fascinating, attracting, and puzzling. But we have no direct access to it.32

The writer/son figure who is situated in the symbolic attempts to reach the mother by a 'kind of incest,' using the power of the symbolic to exploit the pleasure of the semiotic.
However, the representation of the mother as herself the artist figure offers an alternative speaking positions for the artist, which traverses the 'WORD FLESH' divide. The experience of the mother is of a division of her flesh, represented textually as a division of language. Hence the figure of woman as mother in a text functions to divide and rupture narrative structures and to posit the mother as fluid and multiple.

That such a speaking position is created in and by language is represented in Jolley's mocking treatment of childbirth. Although Anna gives birth, thus providing "a real baby for Foxybaby" (F 238), the process is based on novelistic representations: "This is what they always do in novels" (F 237). Jolley subverts the childbirth metaphor as a model for creativity. Miss Porch is a literary Virgin Mother. In response to Mrs Castle's question, "don't you think writing poetry is like giving birth?" Miss Porch contemplates inventing a child or two or even three. She creates a life for them, and then disposes of them (F 170). Miss Porch's mother becomes a textual artefact in a story Miss Porch invents (F 72-3). The childbirth/creativity metaphor as an idealized patriarchal desire for a 'child of the brain' (F 74) is mocked. The idealized metaphor does not take into account the lived experience of maternity, the economic and physical burden of caring for children, or the mother–daughter conflict.34

However the maternal body can functions as a fluid, flexible representation of the possibilities inherent in writing using the maternal metaphor rather than using the mimetic mirror image of reproductions of reality, or the literary virgin image. Sue Gillett, in a discussion of the childbirth metaphor in relation to Jolley's work, suggests that the image when reclaimed by woman provides an active subject position for women:

The body dances, grows, changes and creates: it reproduces reality in quite a different way to the eye's reflective manner of reproduction. A favourite metaphor for the creative act employed by nineteenth century realist texts is glass: the writer is a transparent, neutral medium through which reality is reproduced or imprinted as art. According to this metaphor, sameness rather than change governs the relationship between art and reality. Making the female body the reproductive site is an important step in the history of fictional constructions of women since it allows the subversion of the commonplace literary representation of women as passive matter, to be caught in a glass reflection and acted upon. Jolley focuses on women, not as still lifes, as picture portraits, 'realistically' or ideally delineated by the male gaze, but rather as agents of change and changing themselves, eluding the mirror of representation through their relationships with themselves, other women and their own creations.35

Using the maternal body as a metaphor for the creative process allows for the articulation of experiences of being same and different, inside and outside, self and other,
suggesting that the creative process being described is not one of simple reflection or reproduction of forms, but rather an active changing process. Grosz’ mirror image suggests a similar interactive process for Kristeva’s 'Stabat Mater.'

There are no mirrors for narcissistic or mimetic behaviour in *Foxybaby*; all the mirrors seem to have mysteriously disappeared from the rooms (F 57). The Summer School is not interested in reflecting images of reality, or of overweight bodies. The mode of communication is 'Body language' which functions as a semiotic challenge to artistic representation, as Jolley plays with language to create 'Food For Thought' (F 23). In 'Stabat Mater' Kristeva claims that the Church has translated the bodily experience of maternity into a spiritual discourse. In a parodic inversion of the valuing of the stability and control of the symbolic, linguistic structures in contrast to the excesses of the flesh, the Summer School courses erupt with lush excess, while the meals consist of limp lettuce and dry, sour oranges.

The outer, traditional story of *Foxybaby* is parodically modelled on the epic journey form, as Miss Porch sets off on a great adventure in the East. But this journey, over the folds of the farms, to the place where the land and the sea meet, becomes ruptured with dreams, desire and death. The straight road soon twists and turns. The text suggests that identity and meaning will be found in the folds of writing rather than by following the straight path.

Miss Porch’s journey begins with a mirror image of an identical car following her. A Lacanian interpretation could view this as an indication of the text as the narcissistic representation of the writer’s self. The multiple layers of the story would thus represent the fragmentation and alienation experienced by the subject as she searches in language to construct an identity. However, the scene at the end of the narrative offers another possible model for the construction of the self. At the beach Alma Porch’s fictional characters approach her:

‘Look, Alma! Look there along the beach,’... ‘Can you see them?’...

In the distance in a patch of sunlight from between the parted clouds Miss Porch thought she could see two people stumbling in the soft sand coming towards them. Slightly in front there seemed to be a thin girl. The slowly emerging light from the sun shone for a moment on the red gold of her hair. Behind her, close to her, was the well-preserved, middle-aged, well-dressed man.

‘What is he carrying?’ Miss Porch’s whisper was devoured immediately by the wind.

‘See for yourself,’ Mrs Viggars said. ‘He’s carrying a baby,’ she said. ‘Go on!’ she urged. ‘They belong to you. They are yours. Don’t let them go now. Go on! Go!’ (F 258–9)

This scene suggests that 'fact' and 'fiction,' writer, character and reader, word and flesh
are part of the process of constructing meaning and identity. The journey to the sea could be read as repositioning the characters within the unconscious, or the maternal *chora* where the mother–child relationship acts as a model for the construction of meaning and identity. Self can exist as same and different, self and other/self, where the excesses of language create heterogeneity of subject position. Sandy the daughter/mother approaches Miss Porch who is both mother and child in her narrative. The 'objects' in the fiction take on a 'reality' to be 'used' by Miss Porch and Mrs Viggars. The 'objects' become agents involved in the process of change and interaction. This is akin to Winnicott's object relation theory in which the 'transitional space bridges the gaps – between self and other and inner and outer reality. This is the space for the development of culture and creativity, where the object is both same and different, self and other, thus where the construction of identity involves a pattern of self/other/self involving interaction rather than alienation. In this thoroughfare the writer plays, constructing meanings with words which function as transitional objects, which become 'WORD FLESH.' Thus it could be argued that identity is constructed through the interaction of selves and by means of the creative process rather than the self–other alienation and that literary representations become part of the constructed reality of a life. Miss Porch's characters turn to meet her, creating an epiphany of meaning rather than the mirroring of reality. The body must be encoded in language, but language also needs to speak the body. Kristeva's argument for a maternal discourse claims the need for a fleshing out of linguistic structures:

> Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible.38

The *WORD FLESH* functions as a metaphor of birth, suggesting an epiphany of meaning and identity located in the maternal thoroughfare. The movement from body to language is multiple in the multi–layered creative process which Jolley constructs.

In Jolley's text The 'WORD FLESH' experience disturbs the mimetic pattern. The Drama Workshop group subverts the text, creating their own version of the 'Foxybaby' story. Miss Porch, by positioning herself as the subject of her own story through its rendition as a dream, and by allowing autobiographical elements to interweave the various narratives, is able to create her own subjectivity, as a split subject, at the border of fact and fiction.

Mrs Viggars also desires to create her own reality, to reposition the 'words' of the story in her own life and to reinscribe the mother/daughter discourse into the narrative, through a movement from Sandy to Anna, and by repositioning herself as mother rather than as father: "I dearly long to play the rôle I might have had" (F 257). Mrs Viggars
moves the 'Foxybaby Treatment' into her own world, rewriting the story, creating her own subject position.

Is Jolley suggesting a 'real' possibility of change effected through art, or is this another comic distortion? The text delights in revealing the multiple layers of constructed reality. At the end we realize that all the incidents have been imagined by Miss Porch in a dream sequence while in a state of shock as the bus transports her to the Summer School. We have been made aware of the unreliability of the written record at the very beginning of the narrative as Miss Porch fumbles her way through the letters constructing a reality based on confused and changing 'facts' as she gets details about the name, address and school confused. Already the 'facts' of the fiction are slipping away. The letter form uses an interactive dialogue and invites the reader to participate in the narrative, by constructing the 'other' letters. Such a form suggests the 'community of women' which could be said to comprise the speaking subject.

Alma Porch as writer, is engaged with language, the nature of the text and the interplay of fact and fiction. Her early comments to Miss Peycroft concerning her course and her fiction raise the question of reality and fiction by her references to Dr Johnson (F 8). Her own enigmatic statement: "I'm a fiction writer," Miss Porch said, pulling her hat lower over her eyes. "My books are fictitious" (F 129), relies on the constructed nature of the artist's role while suggesting that the fiction hides 'truth.' The intertextuality of 'fact' and fiction is revealed at the conclusion as the multiple layers of the narratives contest their position, value and validity. This pattern suggests that one way in which women may write themselves into language is through the interweaving of these supposedly separate stories and subject positions. As the 'inside' and 'outside' narrative twists, different subject positions become possible with the likelihood of change being effected. The maternal metaphor represents the pregnant figure as distending the outside/inside configuration of self/other to an outside/inside/outside or self/other/self experience. Thus the trope of pregnancy challenges those gaps in language that have been characterized by patriarchal theory as 'hole' or 'lack,' by renaming them as the birth passage or thoroughfare to multiplicity of self and meaning.

Within the text subject positions are not fixed, but rather represent the subject—in-process engaged in new constructions of identity which move indeterminately between self and other. Language is the process by which one separates, while it also creates the desire to fill that gap. Thus the writer stands at the threshold, the thoroughfare between the world and the word, body and sign. Miss Porch lovingly enfolds the Foxybaby narrative in language, both hiding and revealing meaning, disclosing 'meaning under a veil of words' and providing 'metaphors of the invisible.'

Constructed reality is often enhanced by Miss Porch's fantasy, dreams and memories, such as her memory of her home and family where she acknowledges the
desire for a happy family conflicts with the reality (F 116). It is 'The life lie,' the ultimate fiction (F 181). In Jonquil Castle's case, 'the pretence . . . was so habitual it had become, for her, very real' (F 62). The characters are engaged in a variety of subterfuge and fiction which functions to hide the empty or frightening reality of their lives. Foxybaby constructs a narrative where linguistic excess is used to hide the personal. The 'vertigo of language weakness' which Kristeva suggests the writer may try to compensate for with an 'oversaturation of sign-systems' through a baroqueness of language 40 is evident in Foxybaby in the exotic names and excessive course titles, the use of music and the illogical conversations. Playing all the time with the contradictions of a 'serious' narrative under the control of a dream narrative, Jolley mocks the excesses of language through the writer Alma Porch's attempts to control language and her attempt to choose a suitable discourse:

'I beg your pardon.' Miss Porch was immediately ashamed of uttering such banal words. How could she have let 'I beg your pardon,' the language of a bourgeois housewife, a commonplace remark, fall from her lips in a place like Trinity College, in front of Miss Peycroft of all people. Just when she wanted to impress. (F 43–4)

Jolley's own linguistic excess of 'bourgeois housewife' and 'fall from her lips,' and cliches like 'of all people' unfolds the text into a carnivalesque celebration of linguistic excess. Words are constantly failing within the very conversations which use an excess of language, such as Miss Peycroft's conversation with Mrs Finch and Miles (F 50–52), suggesting the inadequacy of language and the need for 'WORD FLESH.'

Bodily sensations rupture the apparent control of social structures. The bizarre events at the Summer School follow a logic of the body rather than reason, with the participants engaged in pleasurable bathing rituals, secret midnight feasts and eccentric sexual encounters. Corporeality and sexuality which exceeds linguistic constraints are suggested by the catastrophic dinner engagement of Miss Porch and Miss Harrow. Sexual disruptions also function to suggest the semiotic excess of women's experience.

Within the text food functions as an image of the desire for and rejection of the mother. The characters are attending a Summer School to lose weight, to deny themselves the pleasures associated with eating. They will achieve this by 'concentrating on the nourishment of the mind to counteract the lamentable results of over-nourishment elsewhere' (F 7). However, semiotic drives and desires are activated in the lavish midnight dinners enjoyed in Mrs Miles' kitchen.

The lushness of the semiotic is pleasurable, but Kristeva suggests it is 'the pleasure of the damned,' trapping women in the silence of the pre-Oedipal. Miss
Porch's fox fur suggests this experience in *Foxybaby*. The fur suggests a powerful overwhelming passion associated with a disturbing childhood memory. The fox links Miss Porch's own story to her 'Foxybaby Treatment':

The fox was perhaps the only autobiographical detail in the fiction of Miss Porch. (F 47)

Memories associated with the fox are transferred to language through the 'matching' mood of the poem by Rilke, but the translation is unable to locate the secrets in the fox's eyes. Miss Porch's dream of the girl walking along the beach also attempts to express the secrets of the fox through the girl's 'red-gold hair' and her eyes, 'the amber-glass brilliance of the eyes of a foxcub, a she-cub, a foxybaby cub, a vixen,' but, at this meeting, the girl's experience and her eyes elude Miss Porch (F 48–9).

While Miss Porch is able to construct her own subject position, while the childbirth metaphor can be romanticized by writers and critics, while motherhood may be a subject for comic exploitation, as in the case of Jonquil Castle, there is another story to be told. The secret 'child text' splits narrative structures. The maternal metaphor, in stretching boundaries, allows the incest story to be told. The rupturing of the text reveals Miss Porch's 'Foxybaby Treatment' as a narrative shot through with desire and pain. The untold story in patriarchal discourse is the story of the father's seduction, the father's desire and the daughter's pain. In a reversal of the fact/fiction interplay, the fact of the father's desire challenges Freud's seduction fantasy theory. The 'Foxybaby Treatment' re-enacts the father's desire for his daughter in an account which is told from his point of view, which reveals his desire and silences the daughter. In the parallel Summer School story, Miss Porch constructs another fiction concerning the father of Anna's children. He also has an 'inability to come to terms with reality' and an unrestrained desire (F 109). The daughter is silenced as mother also, showing no desire for, or interest in her baby. The daughter/mother's desire has been thwarted by the intrusion/confusion of the father/lover into the father/child discourse. Incest challenges the legitimating structures of the symbolic, hence it is appropriate that an incest story should be the interior 'personal' narrative which challenges the legitimacy of the boundaries of fact and fiction in the *Foxybaby* text. The incest story, the father and daughter story, slides from Miss Porch's own experience: 'The fox was perhaps the only autobiographical detail in the fiction of Miss Porch' (F 47), to the manuscript, to the comic psychoanalytic interpretation by Miss Peycroft, to the parodic 'Foxybaby Treatment' all with an interweaving of 'fact' and fiction, but it is this very intertextuality, this fluidity of subject boundaries which offers (or perhaps parodies) the possibility of agency, in the final scene which evokes the childbirth image of creativity:
'See for yourself,' Mrs Viggars said. 'He's carrying a baby,' she said. 'Go on!' she urged. 'They belong to you. They are yours. Don't let them go now. Go on! Go!' (F 259)

Earlier when Miss Porch had dreamt (whatever that means in this narrative!) that she had encountered the girl on the beach she had been unable to establish contact, 'as if a great force was being held in an unseen restraint' (F 48–9), perhaps the symbolic encoding of the semiotic, which acts to restrain and repress the semiotic, was at that point resisting the uncoded *choric* experience, the need to translate the word into flesh:

As the girl and Miss Porch advanced towards each other, the girl kept her head still turned towards the sea and did not look at Miss Porch. (F 49)

At this point in the story the maternal discourse is silenced. Nor has the girl effected a separation from the sea/chora or pre-Oedipal drives and desires, thus she is still caught in the speechless semiotic:

She had first seen the girl on the sands when the sea, no longer at high tide, was still coming in up the sloping beach in lines of dark choppy waves, one line after another with tumultuous energy and, at the same time, was receding as if being sucked back with that strange boiling quality suggesting an unwillingness to give up. It was as if a great force was being held in an unseen restraint. The perpetual sound of the sea and a few bird cries in the wind filled any possible silence of loneliness. (F 48–9)

By contrast the final meeting suggests the possibility of Miss Porch effecting a change, 'some sort of awakening,' in which the two narratives interweave, connecting the 'fact' and the 'fiction,' the personal and the public, *the prose and the passion* (CM xvii). At this meeting the sun is shining and the waves, like the characters, are advancing (F 259). Now perhaps child and adult can meet and pass in the maternal thoroughfare, establishing connections while maintaining a separation, filtering desire through the text, filtering the voices and memories of the past into the present:

There are times, Miss Porch thought, in life when one might be walking towards oneself. Either the child towards the adult or the other way round. Either way it was a passing confrontation, not recognizable until it was over. (F 246)

Being with the other participants in the story, the community of women at the Summer School, may be a factor in her ability to establish contact, to find an active speaking
position which will enable her to locate semiotic dreams and memories in the symbolic.

The repressed, untold story of desire for the mother creates another layer which is enfolded in *Foxybaby*. As is usual in Jolley's earlier stories the central character is a spinster whose mother is absent or dead. This is the case for both Alma Porch and Sandy.

For Miss Porch, as character, the maternal thoroughfare is blocked, hence, while her desires are articulated in the various fantasies she creates at Trinity College, such as the bath scene, Miles' erotic interest in Mrs Finch and the 'romantic' escapade with Miss Harrow, she is unable to 'enjoy' them, and desire is expressed in the forbidden form of incest. She also has difficulty separating herself from the maternal in order to take her place in the symbolic. Adrienne Rich claims that women's desire to be free of the mother is a desire to become 'individuated and free.' According to Rich: 'The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr.' Miss Porch's inability to act decisively, to not let herself be manipulated by others is evidence of her unresolved separation from her mother. Despite having 'disposed of' her own mother without much thought (*F* 73), Miss Porch finds she is unable to escape from the unresolved ambivalence of the mother/daughter relationship, thus she needs to reactivate it in her relationship with Jonquil Castle. Mrs. Castle is the eager-to-please, needing-to-be needed, doting mother, the mother Alma Porch wants to separate from but cannot. Jonquil Castle invades Miss Porch's room, her thoughts, her text. She constructs herself as the 'ideal' mother (*F* 62), an image which is constantly being subverted by her repressed desire to be needed, wanted (*F* 60). She represents the other extreme; the mother who cannot separate. She does not actually 'mother' in the text, but rather creates the fiction of her mothering within the text by talking about her family and writing letters to them. But this constructed story is ruptured by the gaps and silences of her repressed desire and her family's silenced stories (*F* 169–70). Alma Porch enacts her desire for her rejection of the mother in her interaction with Mrs Castle, whom she cannot shift from her room and who provokes fantasies for Miss Porch about her own absent mother.

The textual delight of *Foxybaby* lies in its semiotic play and parody, the fantasies and verbal excesses which evade symbolic control. However, there is not a strong articulation of subjectivity and meaning. Miss Porch stands on the threshold, but the denied maternal does not enable her to articulate clearly the semiotic in and through the symbolic. The text functions as a transitional object, a substituted desire for the mother, allowing access to the play and desire of the child through the recreation in language of the absent mother, and it offers the writer/daughter figure a 'potential space,' a writing site rather than a *herethics* of a new maternal discourse.
NOTES

1. Toril Moi, introduction, 'Stabat Mater,' by Julia Kristeva 160.


5. Kristeva 175.


10. Kristeva 175.


20. Kristeva 162.


22. Kristeva 162.

24 Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater' 167.
25 Kristeva 175.
26 Kristeva 174.
27 Kristeva 181.
28 Kristeva 182.
29 Kristeva 182.
30 Kristeva 181.
31 Kristeva 183.
32 Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 247.
33 Kristeva 249.
36 Grosz, Sexual Subversions 84.
38 Kristeva, 'Stabat Mater' 162.
39 Kristeva 162.
40 Kristeva 177.
41 Kristeva 175.
42 Rich, Of Woman Born 236.
43 Winnicott, Playing and Reality 107–110.
Chapter 8: The Powers of Horror: An Essay on The Well

What is in the well? That tantalizing, disturbing question reverberates through the text of Elizabeth Jolley's The Well. The unidentified, polymorphous intruder, who ruptures the reader's desire for narrative and psychic certainty and closure, functions as a site of Gothic fear. The 'powers of horror,' to use Kristeva's term, lie in the construction of an indefinable thing, object or person in the well which functions as psychic uncertainty and narrative undecidability and, in the rupturing and refiguring of subjectivity, provides a site for the release of powerful drives and desires into the text and for the contestation of power, knowledge, sexuality and identity. The text is structured around the uncertainty of what is in the well because a named fear is a controllable fear, but an unnamed fear exists in the pre-Oedipal chora of the well, the unconscious site of repressed desires and fears. The well operates as a hole, a gap, an absence, a void that becomes the repository for the unknown, the unnamed, the dark 'other' which disrupts Hester's and Katherine's life. As such, the intruder can be read as the irruption of the semiotic into the symbolic and the revolt of being that threatens the boundary between self and other, which is termed the abject by Kristeva.

Kristeva claims that the 'abject' is that space, or void which exists as the boundary between self and other. It is a fluid and unstable territory, the region of 'I' and 'not-I,' the site of the process of separation of mother and child, self and other, necessary in order to constitute a sense of self. The abject is the most fragile and most archaic of objects: 'The abject would thus be the "object" of primal repression,' [italics Kristeva's]¹ the first rupturing of the mother/child dyad, the child's first glimmers of a separation between the boundaries of the other and the fragile collection of impulses and drives which it will come to term self. The child fears, yet desires this separation and experiences a sense of abjection.

As the child separates from the mother a frightening void is opened up. The rupture reveals the desire for the mother, yet also the need to separate from her to achieve a separate sense of self. The threat, the sense of boundary at the edge of the void, comes from both outside and inside, as the borders of mother/child dyad move. The child exists on the border, in an ambiguous state of flux, in 'dark revolts of being,'² attacked from both inside and outside, desiring the mother yet repudiating that desire because maternal attachment must be sacrificed if the yet-to-be subject is to take up a position in the symbolic social world.

Separation from the mother leaves a hole, an absence, which is repulsive and desirable, tempting and haunting. The absence of the mother opens up a gap of longing, a repressed desire which filters into the symbolic through a fascination with the objects of waste and abjection which the child repudiates in the search for the attainment of
independence and selfhood. Corpses, dirt, bodily fluids such as menstrual blood and vomit are objects of abjection that reveal the sense of horror and yet fascination for the abject by the subject who has no certainty of the integrity of her own self, but is continually haunted by the abject which beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, threatening the yet-to-be subject with dissolution and loss of meaning. Proper socialization and sexual identity are achieved by the expulsion of the improper, the unclean and the disorderly to effect a closing of bodily boundaries in order to construct 'one's own clean and proper body,' a separate identity.

Abjection can be said to be the result of a confusion or a challenging of boundaries. The closing of one's bodily boundaries in order to establish a clean, proper sense of self is necessary to enter the symbolic, to take up a speaking position in language, to attain meaning and coherence. But desire for the abject, 'the jettisoned object,' jettisoned in establishing one's boundaries, draws the subject to the void of expulsion and nonsense. To acknowledge a desire for the abject, the excluded other, involves a sickening, a sense of horror, a 'vortex of summons and repulsion,' which must be covered or silenced. Kristeva uses the image of the braids of a rope or of hair to describe the twisted 'affects and thoughts' associated with the unnameable object. She says that the abject is a conglomeration of fears and desires constituted from impulses and memories of the expelled mother who draws and repels the child, trapping the child in a void of the unnameable. The abject, by its nature, its otherness, is an unnameable object and it leaves the child floundering, lost in the void, unable to give name or meaning to 'the powers of horror.'

The textual representation of abjection as a process of individuation by which the subject develops a sexual and social identity and a speaking position in the symbolic is therefore a very interesting study. The rim of the void, which could also be seen as a well, functions as the threshold for language and subject formation but also threatens the subject-in-process with the breakdown of language and meaning. A sense of 'other' appears necessary to intervene or intrude to effect this separation. Freud and Kristeva claim this presence is the 'imaginary father,' an idealized love object who intervenes into the mother/child dyad of merged selfhood. Kristeva claims that the mother's own lack of authentication means that she cannot act as a 'go-between,' or thoroughfare, something that I am engaged in contesting in this thesis. Envisaging the process of individuation as a struggle, Kristeva claims that another figure is necessary to situate, even woo the child into the symbolic:

In such close combat, the symbolic light that a third party, eventually the father, can contribute helps the future subject, the more so if it happens to be endowed with a robust supple of drive energy, in pursuing a reluctant struggle against what, having been the mother, will turn into an abject. Repelling, rejecting; repelling itself, rejecting itself. Ab-jecting.
For Kristeva, because the mother has trouble positioning herself in the symbolic, because of 'the problem she has with the phallus'[4], the mother herself becomes the repellent abject. However, the child still retains desire for the mother, even while wanting to be free of her powerful, stifling presence. The child both fears and desires this separation, for there is jouissance and security within the maternal chora and the emptiness of the void confronts the separating subject-in-process:

The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archaeology, with our easiest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.[10]

The subject-in-process is fragile and fragmented, engaged in clumsy attempts at abjection, attempts to release the maternal hold, to repress maternal jouissance. The 'I' who is not yet an 'I' is at the rupture of the void, desiring to return to maternal security, yet wooed by the promise of the symbolic, the promise of language and phallic potency. Thus the image that the child constructs of itself is fearfully and tentatively held together because it rests on the repression of the maternal abject.

Kristeva's formulation would suggest that a speaking position in the symbolic is only held by a rigid suppression of maternal influence, necessary to establish strong self/other boundaries. However, as Kristeva has argued in 'Revolution in Poetic Language,' subject position is constructed at the thetic point of rupture, where both semiotic and symbolic modalities are evident, where both maternal and paternal elements are recognized.[11] The point of rupture, the opening of the void or well, can therefore be seen as being a significant site for establishing a speaking position. Thus Elizabeth Jolley's text The Well, which resonates with the ambiguity of what is in the well and what is to be done about this intruder, can be read as a representation of the process of establishing a speaking position, which entails claiming social and sexual identity.

The textual presence of the intruder dominates the narrative but, while various hints are offered concerning the identity of 'literal' and figurative intruders, such as the nomadic workman/thief, the suitors for Katherine, and Joanna, none actually 'materializes' in the text, rather they exist in the imagination and the narrative structures used to construct the lives of the other characters. The power of horror lies in their unseen presence, which is an absence, a void around which are constructed stories which function as an attempt to cover or fill the hole. Thus the emphasis is on the stories that women tell and the textual interest is bound up with the multiplicity of stories and
language forms which Katherine and Hester use to construct their representations of reality in an attempt to claim a speaking position. The intruder can be said to function as part of Hester and Katherine's language games and fantasy play. There is 'an ever increasing merging of fact and desired fiction' (*Well* 121) in their lives. Katherine says her conversations with the man in the well are like being in a movie with herself as the star (*Well* 115) and Hester appears to tell the incident as a scary story to amuse children.

The abject, the fear that is both inside self and outside, that which 'disturbs identity, system, order' includes all those objects which need to be repressed if one is to take one's own 'clean and proper' place in society, the ordered, controlled society of the Father. The abject then is associated with sloughing off whatever threatens the boundaries of self, the establishment of the ego, those things that threaten to draw one back to a pre-Oedipal time of maternal interaction, a time before language and meaning, a time and place of desire, drives and death. The void, or well, can be seen to 'contain' both the mother, from whom one must separate, and the 'imaginary father,' the idealized love object who woos the child with tempting goods available to the obedient daughter who moves from the pre-Oedipal, who recognizes her own lack, and who desires to enter the symbolic and achieve acceptance through the correct positioning of herself within patriarchal structures.

The void also represents the hole, the lack, the threat of castration for the child who desires to remain in the maternal presence, or retain within oneself maternal elements. The well thus represents the abyss that ruptures Katherine and Hester's hold on their subjectivity and sexuality and puts into question their position in the symbolic by the rupturing of language and meaning. The well functions as a release of the repressed objects of abjection from which the subject has had to separate in order to enter the symbolic. Its dominating presence in the text forces a recognition that the self is not constituted through a clear demarcation between self and other, and suggests that a maternal thoroughfare is necessary to effect a fluid subjectivity characterized by the interaction of subjects in self/other/self configurations which have moving and connected boundaries. The release of the maternal abjection 'disturbs identity, system, order,' because it 'does not respect borders, positions, rules,' but favours the 'in-between, the ambiguous, the composite,' thus Jolley's text resonates with the undecidable 'powers of horror.'

Katherine and Hester exist in a state of flux, at the border or threshold of the semiotic and the symbolic. They appear to desire a return to the drives and desires associated with the pre-Oedipal maternal and polymorphous sexuality, achieved through a reclaiming of pleasure and domesticity and a resurfacing of repressed sexual and maternal memories; and yet there is also a move towards a denial of, and separation from the mother, represented by the closing over of the well and indicated by their earlier
'something,' an 'outside' that Hester claims is a corpse and which she deposits/hides in the well. The corpse is, according to Kristeva, 'the most sickening of wastes, . . . a border that has encroached upon everything' and, as such, 'the place where I am not and which permits me to be.'15 It is Hester's depositing of the corpse in the well that opens up the void and begins the macabre dance of desire and death which allows the 'return of the repressed' in Katherine and Hester's lives.

The threat from the outside allows for a literal reading of *The Well*. Narrative hints suggest a nomadic traveller, a robber (with all the polysemic resonance and disruption of the swagman figure suggested in Barbara Baynton's short story, 'The Chosen Vessel'16). A literal reading foregrounds Hester's ruthlessness in her speedy dispatch of the intruder and her schemes to retrieve the money. This ruthlessness is characteristic; previously she has dealt coldly with other intruders, suggested by her treatment of the rooster which annoys her by crowing too close to her (Well 50), she has ignored Hilde's cry for help (Well 122), been indifferent to the lonely young mother who came to visit her (Well 29) and, as a child, on a visit to Mr. Bird's, has deserted her doll which had 'slipped down into the deep well of the pram in a most awkward way' and become wedged (Well 163). A Kristevan reading suggests that such actions reveal the abjected subject, who experiences the 'violence with which a body becomes separated from another body in order to be.'17 Hester's sense of self is represented as having been formed in isolation; never having known her mother, she has constructed her identity through a premature closing of boundaries. She is, in Kristeva's terms, 'a child who has swallowed up his [her] parents too soon'18 and who, because she feels all alone, 'rejects and throws up everything that is given to him[her]– all gifts, all objects.'19 Thus, in self-preservation, Hester is figured as closing up her body on itself, insensitive to the needs of others and unable to acknowledge the care and protection, the 'gifts' she has received from Hilde and Mr. Bird (Well 167). By denying these 'gifts' Hester is represented as locking herself into a life of frigidity and loneliness.

A reading which acknowledges the threat from outside suggests a narrative pattern in which Hester tells (vomits out) her guilty secret in her tale to 'Dobby' Borden, which acts as a betrayal of Katherine and which traps Hester in her loneliness and loss. If she 'opens' her mouth,20 tells her tale, names the fear, she locks herself into the paternal encoding of the well being 'filled' by a man. It becomes an acceptance of 'proper' socialization and sexual identity, achieved by the expulsion of the improper, the unclean and the disorderly.

Another reading of the threat of abjection from outside is to see the intruder as Joanna. She functions in the narrative as an intruder – as a threat to Hester and Katherine's relationship. Hester's fear of the loss of Katherine's affection, revealed in her fear of possible suitors, may be triggered by the pending arrival of Joanna. Joanna, as
the absent presence, can also be said to function as the maternal object of desire and the object/abject of separation. Functioning as the one who will separate Hester and Katherine she becomes an object of abjection:

Hester was vague in her mind about the life this other girl could have had but it was dirty and infected and should be kept away from the freshness and purity of their own lives. *(Well 45)*

The threat of Joanna’s presence functions as an external embodiment of the threat to Hester’s desire to maintain an idyllic unruptured relationship with Katherine.

As the substitute absent mother Joanna functions through her letters which, heavy with perfume, promise delights associated with sexual and maternal gratification:

*See!*
*I will not forget you . . .
I have carved you on the palm of my hand. *(Well 161)*

Joanna functions as a forced acknowledgment of the repressed sexuality in Hester’s and Katherine’s relationship, suggested by the pervasive scent of her letter which disturbs and disrupts Hester: ‘the pages of the letter had a sweet heavy scent, something powerful which she could not define’ *(Well 49)*. Fragrance, in both *The Well* and *Palomino*, is used to suggest sexual desire. Hester associates the fragrance of the earth and grass with childhood memories, with Hilde and with her father’s disgust at the weeds *(Well 48)*.

After the accident Hester consoles herself with the fragrances of the kitchen:

*The dark room was filled with the reassuring fragrance of kerosene which slowly gave way to the sharp sweetness of over-ripe quinces. . . . It was pleasant to look forward to the hot fragrance in the kitchen.* *(Well 84)*

Maternal presence, like the fragrance, pervades the text. The threat of Joanna’s visit remains even after the well is closed over.

The fear that becomes associated with the object/abject in the well also suggests a threat from the inside, suggesting the repressed desires and fears of Katherine and Hester. For Hester subjectivity and sexuality are problematic. Hester may be viewed as a hysteric, as a sign of her problematic sexuality. The Freudian explanation of the hysteric is that of a woman who refuses to acknowledge her sexuality and who transfers her refusal to her body as a physical disability. A Freudian reading would suggest that Hester’s desire for her father, her refusal to acknowledge it and her attempt to both protect herself from that repressed desire and her sexuality, and to ward off suitors, possible rivals to her father, are embodied in her limp and her migraine headaches. Hester’s limp, representing her position as one of lack in the symbolic system, is compensated for by her stick which she uses to give her access to and identification with
her father: 'her little crutch dot dotting fast to keep up with his long stride' (Well 46) and her little hat which she uses as a repository for the money, the 'gift' of her father.

Hester finds that if she is to participate in the patriarchal exchange economy it is necessary to function through the men in the story. Her social position is dependant on her father's position, his land and his money. When he dies she loses her status, although Mr. Bird's judicious management of her money maintains her assets. The successful and sexually potent Mr. Borden takes over her farm and Hester is marginalized to the edge of her property. Hester closes up desire within her body, manifesting it in her hysterical symptoms which devalue her within the exchange system. She refuses to inscribe herself within the exchange circuit of patriarchal economy. Although she has the reputation of being a quick-witted and knowledgeable business woman (Well 30–1), Hester refuses to be business-like or to breed. Her humiliation at the Borden's party is partly because of her loss of status; as a woman who has neither property nor babies she is seen to have no social position or function. But Katherine and Hester ignore paternal values. They move to the furthest corner of her land, a secluded, twisted ('dog-leg') piece of land (like Hester's club foot), which is at the edge or boundary of her farm. They retreat to an old stone cottage with a disused well.

In this reading, Hester's guilty, shameful desire for the father can be said to have been repressed, 'killed off' and disposed of down the well, but she finds that the man in the well cannot be ignored, especially when he has stolen her money. The object in the well unleashes repressed memories: 'a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject.' One of the memories that the intruder unlocks is Hester's memory of the primal scene of her father and Hilde together, one night when it was raining:

Later, during the nightmare, as her father and Fräulein Herzfeld hurried along the passage, the double light from two separately held saucers flooded Hester's ceiling and their two shadows, grotesque and tremulous, moving up and down and across the walls, colliding, became one. (Well 141.)

This scene is associated with the stories her father told her, about foxes and midwives. The scene evokes a sense of being on the edge of a deeply repressed memory, is it one of the absent mother, or possibly incest? Either memory would suggest a repudiation of men, hence Hester's desire to keep the man in the well and her desire to claim a relationship with Hilde. Hester remembers her desire to challenge Hilde to 'mortal combat' (Well 142), which could be read as an attempt to reclaim the father, or as an attempt to replace him. Hilde ignores her and Hester, 'as usual, thrust her spear into the sofa cushions,' internalizing her desire.

Hester's hysterical symptoms equate with Freud's convoluted definition/distortion of hysteric:
[H]ysterical headaches rest on an analogy in phantasy which equates the top with the bottom end of the body (hair in both places—cheeks . . . and buttocks . . . lips . . . and labia . . . mouth = vagina, so that an attack of migraine can be used to represent a forcible defloration, ... the whole ailment also represents a situation of wish-fulfilment. [closing bracket missing in the original]22

Thus Hester's desire can be read in her symptoms of migraines and vomiting, as a representation of a desire which she cannot claim with her head and her lips because its symbolic encoding is forbidden, but she can enact her desire through her body and in her fantasy. However, rather than seeing this encoding as an inhibiting gesture, Catherine Clement suggests that such an enacting, in stories, sickness and fantasy, can be read as 'outmaneuvering the Symbolic order, overturning it' through festival and carnival elements which function to invert the body and the symbolic inscriptions written on it.23 Hester's and Katherine's enjoyment of food, clothing and music can therefore be seen as a celebration, a festival of pleasure. The Gothic elements of the text, Hester's subversion of fairy tale narratives, the troll in the well, the fancy dress outfits for the fête and the retelling of her story as a children's scary horror story could all be read as carnival elements. Carnival can be interpreted as challenging the authoritative, univocal 'master narrative' with the release of semiotic elements which function to reclaim repressed, silenced tales and to allow the release of drive energy and desire into the symbolic, social world. Thus Hester's and Katherine's carnival activities can be said to be a reclaiming of women's power, a repositioning of women's desire and the representation of it.

Hester's claiming of a position of power and desire is revealed when she brings Katherine home. Her father asks her what she has brought him from the shops. She replies:

'I've brought Katherine, Father . . . but she's for me.' (Well, epigraph)

This comment has been highlighted by being chosen as an epigraph, probably because of its allusion to Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, but that in itself has significant social and economic implications which position the waif as the intruder without family or property, threatening the status of the landowners in the district, rupturing the established order with desire and abjection. Similarly, if the intruder is the nomadic workman/thief/swagman who steals their money, then the patriarchal economy has been ruptured by the socially excluded other, the repressed abject, jettisoned into the well. The governess functions as another disruptive figure in the economic system. Thus Hester's governess, Hilde, unable to produce the necessary male child for Hester's father,
a (re)production that could validate her position in the paternal system, is jettisoned. Katherine, who has no money or position in the social order, is also a disruptive element. She can choose to respond to Hester's subversive desire to squander the money, or she can steal the money, using it, along with her fantasy of the suitor in the well, to inscribe herself in the symbolic social system.

According to Freud, a character such as Hester can only achieve feminine selfhood if the little girl's desire for the penis is replaced by her wish for a baby. But, Hester retains her walking stick as her phallic substitute and her images of childbirth are associated with animals breeding and Hilde's miscarriage. Freud suggests that hysterics associate sexuality with servitude and defilement, as evidenced in *The Well* by Hester's representation of intercourse between Mr. and Mrs. Borden as like the bull servicing the heifer (*Well* 70), her repulsion at the idea of a man touching Katherine's 'perfectly made and childlike body' (*Well* 152), and her childhood memory of Hilde's miscarriage and her hurried, furtive departure (*Well* 122). Hester's memory of the abjected, rejected Hilde who is cast-off, left to wander, is a disturbing memory to which Hester keeps returning, 'a land of oblivion that is constantly remembered,' a rupturing of the symbolic with semiotic drives that have been repressed by the traditional Freudian analysis. Freud's own story of Dora reverberates with another story, marginalized in Freud's analysis by his footnoted later supplements that acknowledge his too late recognition of and insufficient appreciation of the 'deep-rooted homosexual love' of the women in the narrative.

A feminist reading of hysteria suggests that it is a way of repudiating masculine inscriptions of femininity and the social construction of compulsory heterosexuality. Thus Maria Ramas' criticism of Freud's analysis of Dora suggests that because sexuality 'is created in relation to a woman and the female body, its transfer to a male "object" is problematic.' Ramas' approach suggests another reading of *The Well*. Perhaps the 'man in the well' is Katherine, the 'intruder' who unlocks Hester's repressed sexual and maternal desire. Is the 'bump in the night' the bump of two women's bodies meeting? After 'the accident' Katherine needs to share Hester's bed where both are disturbed by an intruder, 'a poor moth,' and the room is pervaded by the fragrance of over-ripe quinces (*Well* 83–5), both images suggesting an irruption of desire and death. Earlier that night Hester has been aroused by Katherine's dancing at the Borden's party:

Whenever she watched Kathy dancing, Hester, though outwardly showing no signs, moved in a wonderful freedom within herself. . . . In the privacy beneath her strict clothing she knew she was capable of an inner excitement which belonged only to her. It was a solitary experience but she did not mind this, being simply grateful for it. The music, the beat and the rhythm of the dancing filled her with a glow of
satisfaction and a realization of deep happiness. . . . She forgot she was lame and had always to depend upon a stick. (Well 73)

Katherine's dancing unlocks Hester's repressed drives and allows Hester to participate in vicarious bodily pleasure whereby she is able to imagine herself as not being lame, but as free in her dress and emotions. Because of Katherine, Hester has changed from a lonely, frugal housekeeper and farmer to a pleasure-seeking spendthrift who begins to reclaim denied pleasure in her life. However, sexually, her expression is still hidden, secretive and silent, 'an inner excitement which belonged only to her.' The drive home is marked by confused, unleashed desire and frustration, possibly the prelude to a sexual encounter, but the text indicates that Hester seems incapable of expressing herself in overt sexual action: 'The dance was for her the only physical manifestation of physical love' (Well 97).

Hester may be unable to express her desire physically because of her repression of her childhood desire for Hilde. One painful, repressed memory of Hester's is that of Hilde's miscarriage. Does it reveal Hester's jealousy of Hilde's usurpation of her place with her father, or does it reveal her desire for Hilde, as suggested by Hester's imagined representation of her relationship with Hilde, revealed in her parodied reconstruction of an imagined letter by Katherine to Joanna:

'The Herzfeld chick. A TV soapy if you ask me. Big Trouble, like Sister Violetta at the Home d'ya reckon? Joanna--panna Jeez. Squeeze. Huh! eh? Makepeace and whasaname on the shed floor. Remember? Shit! Yuk! I don't hack it, but. Like Hell she musta gone for the Herzy chick. When she talks it's like On Golden Pond her eyes all clouded like as if these little veils of sadness come down. Wowie! Real goolish eh? Embarrassing? And she packs up with whats she's on about right in the middle of a rave. The old man Jeez Joady I've told you about him. Musta made a few. Something musta happened. If I get to know!! I've seen a photo of the Herzy she's a shortie a fattie . . .' (Well 17)

It seems it is necessary for Hester to approach her memory through multiple levels of constructed fantasy. Is this the only way she can express her desire? Does her transference to Katherine's comic representation of the relationship in terms of other constructed fictions reveal the need for stories and fantasy as a means of releasing repressed desire and semiotic elements into the symbolic in order to approach Hester's unexpressed desire for Hilde and Katherine?

The title *The Well* invites us to make associations with the classic lesbian novel, *The Well of Loneliness.* Is Jolley's text a lesbian novel? How do we define a lesbian novel? Catharine Stimpson, in 'Zero Degree Deviancy: The Lesbian Novel in English,' suggests that a physical sexual relationship must be involved, but Adrienne Rich, in 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,' suggests a 'lesbian continuum' that
includes a wide range of 'women-identified experience; not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman.' Katherine's and Hester's relationship could be placed on this continuum. Hester acknowledges that she is very possessive of Katherine and that she is unable to define their relationship:

She did not regard herself as a mother or even as an aunt. She did not attempt to give any name to the relationship. She realized quite quickly that she was possessive. (*Well* 14)

Hester's sexual arousal is presented through the fantasy stories she and Katherine re-enact from the movies, in music and dance, and in her dreams and memories. Katherine's sexual arousal could be seen to be transferred to the suitor in the well. Their desire could be said to be brought to a climax through the intrude who forces them to face their sexuality. A power play results which could be read as involving a sadomasochistic expression of their desire. Katherine and Hester's shared activities of pleasure and comfort now become the sites of struggles for power hence the night of confrontation revolves around the maternal/sexual images of preparing and eating meals and brushing Hester's hair. Hester's repressed sexuality and Katherine's discovery of sexual desire may be represented in Hester's dream of her hair tied to the chair which could be read as a coded representation of their lovemaking. If this is the case, then Katherine recognizes the power their new relationship gives her. The well then functions as the site of their struggle for power.

In *Palomino*, which also deals with an older and young woman on a farm, the relationship between the two women is positive and enriching; images of music and the fertility of the changing seasons are used to convey the harmony of their relationship. I have argued that this is because of the recuperative power of the maternal and the substitution of a female figure for the 'imaginary father' figure in the effecting of separation and identity, resulting in a more fluid, harmonious model of selfhood, which I refer to as 'self/other/self.'

In *The Well* the setting and the relationship are different, the reclaiming of the maternal is more problematic, the senses of self and separation less clearly defined because of the power of abjection due to the denial of the maternal in the text. Conflict and a shifting power relationship between Katherine and Hester are significant elements in *The Well*. Their isolated lives suggests the dangers of intense, closed-in obsessive relationships, which creates problems of individuation.

It may be possible to sustain a reading that suggests a realized sexual relationship between Katherine and Hester, which Katherine displaces onto her fantasy of a man in the well and the repressed Hester transfers to her memories of her governess. In this
reading Katherine uses the man in the well to separate from Hester, thus what is in the
well may be said to represent their competing representations of reality and thus
becomes the focus of a power conflict. Katherine's representation of reality is based on
the fantasy of the man in the well as an idealized love object necessary for separation
and her need to repudiate Hester as the maternal abject. When Hester refuses to believe
Katherine's story Katherine tells Hester that she is over 21, that she doesn't need her
permission to marry or to leave her, she reminds Hester of her twisted back and leg iron
and demands the keys to the car. She uses her conversation with the man to remind
Hester that Hester is old and going through the change of life while she is young and
fertile.

Hester's denial of the expression of her sexuality is revealed in her response to
the intruder. She strongly repudiates his presence and turns to other memories
associated with the release of repressed sexual and maternal desire, unveiled in a
reclaiming of her memories of childhood and Hilde. Hester, on the night of the dream of
having her hair tied to the chair, remembers wading in the rain with Hilde and the
pleasure associated with rain, the sense of forgiveness and renewal (Well 140). She
realizes that she has tried to relive this relationship through Katherine and attempted to
create a romantic fantasy (Well 144). Now the intruder, the 'man in the well' has
disrupted the 'magic practices,' and Hester's repressed sexual desire has trapped her, with
'twisted braid of affects and thoughts,'31 like her dream of her plaits twisted around the
struts of the chair, like her desire twisted around desire for the father, Hilde, Katherine,
but ultimately leading to desire for the absent mother as Freud's analysis of Dora reveals
and as Kristeva's study of abjection suggests.

For there is more to the hysteric's position than refusal of heterosexual love and
marriage. Freud claims that the underlying cause of hysterical symptoms is the
prohibited desire for the mother.32 The hysteric's symptoms, such as migraines and limp,
can be seen as a disguised wish, a pre-Oedipal desire for the mother and for the maternal
body and the hysteric's relationships can be seen as a desire to recreate the original, lost
relationship with the mother. Maria Ramas, discussing attempts to 'explain' the
implications of the Oedipus complex for women, claims that most psychoanalytic
theories acknowledge a continuing desire for the mother:

Because the feminine Oedipus complex is a secondary formation, women
retain more of their original bisexuality. The desire for the mother cannot
be totally renounced [resulting in] . . . an ambivalent attitude toward the
mother, the legacy of which is a crippling ambivalence toward women
and toward the self.33

The 'crippling' re-enactment of desire and repudiation of self evident in The Well can be
said to indicate repressed desire for the mother. The unnamed, the absent in the text is
the mother. Neither Katherine nor Hester had known their mothers. The repression of the mother is the gap, the hole the absence in the text that is 'filled' by the 'unnameable' otherness of the intruder in the well. An interesting illustration of the intruder functioning as the mother is the birth image of separating the money from the corpse in the well:

It was like getting a thoroughbred and possible prize-winning bull calf free from an injured or dying mother. *(Well 107)*

The emphasis in this comparison is on the need to separate from the abject, the dying mother and the economic value bestowed by entering the symbolic social structures. The desire to separate from the mother, to establish one's self as a clean and proper autonomous individual, is also represented in the text by Hester throwing dirty and broken dishes down the well *(Well 32, 40)*.

The desire for the mother is suggested by Hester's reaction to the intruder in the well which is manifest in oral symptoms of vomiting and coughing, indicative of the oral sexuality of the mother/child feeding relationship. During the migraine attack that follows the disposal of the body down the well, Hester thinks of the love and care she received from Hilde:

In her feeling of weakness she thought more and more of Hilde and how sweetly she was able to care and to cherish. *(Well 123)*

Characteristically for Jolley, this cherishing is associated with singing and German, through the carol *'Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht,'* which suggests the possibility of establishing a maternal thoroughfare.

Julia Kristeva's study of abjection in *Powers of Horror* provides an interesting basis for analysing how the well represents repressed desire for the maternal chora which Katherine and Hester both desire and yet need to separate from to establish themselves. The well can represent the boundary between self and other, child and mother, the site of the development of autonomy and separation, but also the desire for connectedness and merging. The well as chora functions as the warm, enclosed space of maternal nurture that Hester and Katherine create on the farm, but it also encloses around the guilty secret, the other. The threat of an intruder causes Hester to react with hysterical symptoms. She imagines that she has had a stroke, making her unable to speak or move and leaving Katherine all alone *(Well 44)*. Her hysterical symptoms can be seen as a response to the threat of being separated from the mother, and they suggest a desire to reclaim pre-Oedipal love from the mother/other woman.

Within the Freudian determined paradigms, the acknowledgment of pre-Oedipal desires and drives excludes Hester from the symbolic social order, thus her retreat to the
old stone cottage, her sense of being a stranger at the Borden's party (Well 68), and the intensification of her hysterical symptoms associated with her 'lack of interest, which amounted to neglect, towards the property as she became more caught up with her life with Katherine' (Well 71). Hester's desire is to be absorbed and comforted by the pre-Oedipal security of her life with Katherine and the seductive power of the well.

Katherine reactivates the repressed maternal for Hester. Losing interest in the running of the farm, Hester becomes more interested in teaching Katherine to cook and sew. Like her namesake, Hester, the Goddess of the hearth, she and Katherine create a domestic haven: cooking gourmet meals, squandering money on luxuries, sewing, weaving stories, making outfits and engaging in fantasy play. 'Their life was all pleasure' (Well 38). They engage in a fantasy life created from films and songs, ignoring the sensible warnings of Mr. Bird concerning their financial affairs. Their indulgence in pleasurable pursuits results in them being cast out to the margins of the property, to a fairy tale stone cottage and a romantic, mysterious old well. The well cover is loose and the sweet smell of deep underground water tempts Hester and Katherine to sit on the edge of the well, sunning themselves and telling stories.

One story we are reminded of is of Oedipus, who, like Hester, had a twisted or club foot. His murder of his father and desire for his mother caused a curse to fall on the land, which became dry and barren. Hester's own story could be read as a denial of the father and a desire for the mother, represented by her retreat to the stone cottage and the well with its deep secret source of water which is needed to regenerate the land and Hester's life which is also dry and barren.

Hester desires to be both mother and child. Hester mothers Katherine, she nurtures, educates and provides for Katherine, dressing her in childish clothes with Peter Pan collars. Her desire for a child could be said to be transferred to Katherine, the child she can claim without needing a male 'object' to impregnate her. A similar interpretation could be given to Dora's fascination with the Sistine Madonna. Within the Freudian narrative of the family romance, Hester's desire to recreate the mother/daughter relationship with Katherine 'needs' a man, to validate an Oedipal positioning and as the necessary 'Third Party' to sever the mother/child dyad, but the 'man in the well' functions to problematize the Oedipal construct. Katherine's desire for a child initially functions as an extension of Hester's desire for the child Katherine, but also acts disruptively because Katherine fantasizes about a man and marriage.

Hester's behaviour also suggests that Katherine functions as a transference of Hester's desire to return to her own childhood, the time associated with Hilde's care and protection, the time of pre-Oedipal pleasure before the knowledge of castration and problematic sexuality. Katherine's presence causes Hester to remember and start talking about incidents from her childhood, particularly about Hilde, 'about whom she
had never spoken to anyone' (Well 16). Those memories evoke uneasy memories of bodily functions and desires, the 'fascinating and repelling' dark circles of sweat under Hilde's armpits and the fantasized letter from Katherine to Joanna speculating about a possible sexual relationship between Hester and Hilde. Hester's desire, repressed in the deep well of her unconscious, is allowed to bubble out through semiotic elements which Katherine releases. On the first night that she brings Katherine home, Hester sings songs of her childhood and releases images of water and dark, underground sources of nourishment (Well 11). A pattern of images of moisture and dark patches is associated with Hester's desire (the dark patches under Hilde's armpits and the moisture on Katherine's top lip while she is dancing), and are linked to the underground water and thus to the well, perhaps suggesting the grave of Hester's mother? Paul Salzman also links these images with blood, reproduction and sacrifice, suggestive of the Kristevan notion of the sacrificial nature of the Oedipal contract and its repressed basis of desire for the mother.

The abandoned child consoles herself with memories. Hester's childhood memories are associated with music, food and nurture. She desires to take Katherine to Europe, to re-enact her own childhood through Katherine, to return to the place of childhood pleasure associated with Hilde, to memories of 'a little mountain of cream-filled pastries' (Well 63), like full breasts and the swan-like waitress with her high bosom sitting down, all alone to eat them. The images resonate with desire for the mother's/lover's body. However, Hester is afraid of this memory because she remembers her halting attempts to speak French and German. Is it possible to return to her childhood desires? Does the Father's control of language trap her in the semiotic? Such a position exposes Hester's vulnerability, thus this memory is followed by another concerning both the jouissance associated with the music, but also the vulnerability of exposure associated with the memory of musicians:

It was the slight movements which the players made towards each other which touched Hester deeply then and which she remembered now. She remembered too the deep concentration which was evident in the sensitive movement of the muscles of their faces, . . . and the slender white hand, the back of the hand displayed in such a vulnerable way towards the audience. (Well 66)

Hester both desires and wants to break away from these secure yet stifling memories. When Katherine fusses over her and causes her pleasure Hester reacts by imposing discipline and control through a strenuous cleaning programme and hair washing ritual (Well 13), revealing her sense of abjection and her fear of falling under the sway of pre-Oedipal jouissance.
Hester, as both mother and child, realizes the need to separate, but she cannot separate from the powerful hold of the abject. She also realizes that Katherine needs to separate from her, but she cannot allow that to happen. Hence the body in the well becomes an object of abjection in the process of separation, but also something that refuses to die, something which, by its very presence, holds Katherine to Hester in a reworking of the classic guilt complex used by mothers to maintain their hold on their children.

Trapped in the semiotic, Hester's desire is transferred to the eruption of the drives revealed in the sliding of signifiers and the disruptive slang and nonsense of Katherine's speech. It is significant that Katherine's speech, just before hitting the object, is characterized by a disruptive pattern of slang, singing and expletives:

*Dinga Donga Bella Yair Yair*
*Pussa inna wella Yair Yair Yair*
*Dinga Donga Bella Huh Huh Yair*

'Wow! Miss Harper! I sure enjoyed myself.'...

'Weee—wopp—here we go! Nearly home, Miss Harper, dear. Nearly at the last bend. Oops—sorry! caught the bushes, hit a rock. Blast! Shit! Oops sorry Miss Harper, dear, hit the rocks again, always get that rock. I don't hack it.' Katherine laughs in a shrill voice. 'I wish Joanna was here already. Wish you was here already Joanna. Joanna JOANNA.' (Well 4–5)

The sliding of desire erupts with signs of abjection that reveal the fragile boundaries of the abjected mother, who attempts to draw the child to her, but also to expel her. Speech becomes an attempt to control her absence. Kristeva suggests that oral phobia is a result of an unresolved separation from the mother. Words may be used to fill the gap left by the rupture of the mother/child bond: 'Through the mouth that I fill with words instead of my mother whom I miss from now on more than ever.'37 Stories sublate the void, with the irruption of the abject, revealed in childish outbursts and semiotic excess.

An overly correct use of language, as revealed in Hester's correcting of Katherine's speech, can be read as a fetishization of signs, and a desire to repel the abject. Kristeva says that patients subject to abjection will aim at precision in speech. Abjection occurs at the border of language, the point of disconnection between signs and drive energy where language reverberates as musical notes. Hester and Katherine's speech plays in the thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic, filling the void created by the absent mother, creating stories in an attempt to make meaning from the gap. Kristeva also aligns this dislocated language play with bodily paralysis, so it is interesting that Hester experiences the symptoms of a stroke when she hears news of Joanna's visit (Well
44) and that she experiences nausea, vertigo and vomiting when confronted with the object/abject in the well.

Hester associates her headaches with separation, for instance when she is sent to school because of Hilde's absence:

Arrangements were being made for Hester to go away to school, 'as girls did in books', the words began to pound like the pain of the first headache, the first sick headache, 'to go away to school, as girls did in books.' (Well 122)

The 'going away to school' and the 'sick headaches,' perhaps associated with menstruation, separate the child from the mother, but the implied associated recognition of castration prevents entry into the symbolic. Caught in the void, the abjected subject searches for the maternal consolation, attempting to use words and bodily symptoms to cover the hole.

For Hester the object in the well causes a breakdown in her control of language: 'Her voice seeming not in her control' (Well 114), shown by her difficulty in reading her books: 'She stared at the open book without reading' (Well 145) and her fear that she will not remember the German and French which she knew as a child (Well 62). Hester's migraine attack, associated with the threat of Joanna's visit, also causes a disruption in her speech: 'She tried to remember where the apostrophe in fields should go' (Well 49). Unable to 'speak the void', Hester tries to uses her body to communicate.

Kristeva suggests that the way to 'stabilize' such language and behaviour is to effect the separation of mother and child by a focus on 'the other: another object, perhaps another sex, and, why not, another discourse – a text, a life to relive.' Thus Hester could be said to attempt to give voice to her desire through a recreation of childhood memories, through the music, stories and play-acting of her relationship with Katherine and through her story about 'a Great-Big-Monster' (Well 174). Hester's story to the Borden children could be the ultimate fetishization of language, an attempt to reclaim maternal jouissance through the substituted object. Hester's story could also be called her 'talking cure.' Freud's aim was to replace hysterical physical symptoms with a verbal account.

The textual narrative of 'the well' could be said to be enfolded in a story about a well, told by Hester to entertain the Borden children. The opening section may be Hester's story to the Borden children, which, it is hinted, she begins at the end of the narrative, thus the tale as told by Hester enfolds, positions and encloses the larger narrative. One function of the interior narrative is to establish Hester's validity as a story-teller, as the writer figure in the narrative says: 'the tradition is that the story has a narrator who has gone through all the experiences in the novella and is relating them' (Well 157). An interesting consideration is whether Jolley is endorsing or subverting
this convention. Who is telling this story, and where is the narrator situated? The reader is told that a story needs a narrator and an intruder, both serving the function of the Father, locating the story in the symbolic, yet Hester's story becomes interwoven with the fairy stories, movie plots, Katherine's invented fantasy and Hester's memories. In the power struggle between Hester and Katherine, it is Hester's ability to reclaim her memories, to recode them in a fictive form, which suggests the possibility of release for her. Hester has perhaps realized that covering the well was an attempt 'to suppress, to squash her own miserable knowledge' (Well 160), a repetition of the denial involved in ignoring Hilde's pain and not a satisfactory solution. She realizes that it is not possible to close off desire by repression. Differing from the hysteric, the subject of abjection must tell her story.

Hester's story hovers in the thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic. The story she plans to tell the Borden children is in response to a request for a scary story. This device encodes the pre–Oedipal terrors and desires within the conventional genres of fiction, while at the same time creating a rupture by the slippage between constructed fantasy and constructed reality. This situates the repressed irruption of drive activity, activated by the well incident, within patriarchal discourse, authorizing it within the traditional horror story genre while at the same time subverting it.

The outer story folds over the inner story of the intruder in the well. In opening out the story, in becoming an agent, a speaker of her own tale, Hester is opening out the patriarchal structures that may turn on her to close and contain Katherine and herself. If she tells her story the law will take over, Hester will be seen as a 'crazy old woman', Katherine will be taken away. Paradoxically, it enables Hester to prevent her 'other' fear occurring, that of Katherine going away with Joanna.

Hester's telling of the story is also a confronting of the abject, a naming of the fear, an encoding, a gendering of it which enables it to be articulated in the symbolic, which enables Hester to recreate her reality through the story she tells. By inscribing the story in the symbolic, Hester names the void, the fear. Hester faces death and recreates her reality. Kristeva refers to the writer who tries to gain access to the mother through the word as attempting to ward off death by recreating life through signs:

The writer is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he [sic] comes to life again in signs.

According to Kristeva the semiotic needs to be harnessed with the symbolic, otherwise there is the risk of releasing violence and death. The fantasy of incorporation must be inverted, the guilty secret must be vomited out. Failure to name the fear leads to non–
separation from the object, causing melancholia and psychosis. Thus it is necessary for Hester to suppress the mother in order to inscribe the story in the symbolic.

The interesting question is whether Hester does in fact tell her story. The text ends with the children persuading Hester to add to her hesitant beginning:

'It was one dark night,' she tells them, 'along this very road only much farther on... something... happened...'

'Go on Miss Harper!' Dobby Borden says. 'Along this road, now tell us what happened.' (Well 175–6)

Does she tell? Is the movement of the plot circular, do we return to the present tense version of the story with which the text began? If the story at the beginning is not Hester's revelation to the Borden children then it becomes another version of her reality, a 'fragment' to seduce the reader. How many versions of the story are there? What is left out, blocked, covered, refocussed? Hysterics are said to be characterized by their 'inability' (read subversive strategy of refusing to) give complete and coherent accounts. They are said to thwart disclosure and closure by returning to the primal scene and replaying the narrative.45 Perhaps the opening story is Hester's story to the Borden children, perhaps it isn't. Hester's story is like the underground stream, which flows on a secret, silent path, but, if the way has become blocked, the well is left empty and the land above remains dry.

If the horror is from within, if there is no man in the well, Hester's telling the tale may be read as a confronting of the repressed mother. Her story could be seen as a ritualistic purification of her defilement. Her story becomes an offering, a libation, which might explain her rather strange interest in finding a bowl for a foot washing ceremony for the Banker's wife, a ceremony which suggests associations with Christ washing the disciple's feet at the last supper:

Somewhere, she is sure, at home she has a plastic bowl, a square one, which might be large enough for feet. (Well 176)

Kristeva, using Mary Douglas's work on ritual purification, suggests that in confronting the abject a ritualistic washing, a purification is necessary, to enable a reconciliation with the maternal.46 Hester and Katherine engage in a 'merciless cleaning programme in readiness for the coming of Joanna and, in part, as a sort of celebration of the closing of the well' (Well 158). While the discourse on motherhood is controlled and inscribed within patriarchal paradigms, the terms of such a reconciliation are a recognition of the 'hole,' the gap, the absence. The men cover the well. The desire for closure suggests a recognition of castration. Yet Hester's need to tell the story indicates that the well, with its 'powers of horror,' draws her to its edge, to uncover, to lift the cover, like a scab, to pick and play at the borders of abjection, the boundary between subject and object. In
naming the object, Hester is at the threshold of the void, claiming a speaking position, but risking falling back into the stifling power and loss of self within the abyss. In an act that re-inscribes the horror she engages in a ritualistic incantation which seeks to exorcize the abjected mother.

If the well is uncovered and discovered to be empty then Hester risks being positioned as 'that crazy woman' and she will lose Katherine. What can she do, except tell stories?

Part 2

The Powers of Horror—'a stream of spurious egos'47

For Katherine the object in the well can be said to represent her response to an awakening sexuality and sense of identity. The object in the well represents an intrusion which functions for Katherine as an awareness of a boundary or a void that is necessary for her construction of identity. The adolescent repeats the child's activity of closing off bodily boundaries and of attempting to bring together the confusing ambiguous flux of conflicting subject and sexual roles in an attempt to take up a position in the symbolic, social world. In a recent essay, 'The Adolescent Novel,'48 Kristeva moves her attention from the mother to the adolescent, suggesting that the adolescent figure acts as a site of semiotic irruption of the symbolic, because the adolescent is an 'open psychic structure,' in the process of reorganizing the construction of self, with specific references to the establishment of sexuality and gender position. Because of the ambiguity of sexual and social roles in modern society and families, the adolescent questions, transgresses and bends the frontiers of sexuality and identity. Thus the adolescent stands on the threshold of identity and sexuality, being in a state of flux, in the process of constructing a speaking position:

I understand by the term 'adolescent' less an age category than an open psychic structure. Like the 'open systems' of which biology speaks concerning living organisms that live only by maintaining a renewable identity through interaction with another, the adolescent structure opens itself to the repressed at the same time that it initiates a psychic reorganization of the individual.49

Kristeva argues that the adolescent subject provides a porousness in which the boundaries of sexual difference and identity, fantasy and reality, are more easily traversed.50 She claims that duplicity and ambivalence characterize the adolescent's behaviour and that the adolescent's open psychic state allows a flow between the
semiotic and the symbolic, resulting in a reactivating of drives and desires. In The Well the metaphor of the maternal body functioning as thoroughfare for the semiotic unsettling of identity and signification is activated through the adolescent. Katherine is at the threshold of adolescent entry into the symbolic, social world. Her relationship with Hester, her obedience and dependence on Hester, her singing, her fantasies, her stories, her Peter Pan collar, reveal the power of the semiotic in her life; while her debut at the ball, her desire to get her driver's licence and her desire for a baby position her at the threshold of the symbolic.

Katherine functions as a disruptive figure, on the threshold of the semiotic and symbolic. She unsettles the paternal structures that have contained Hester and repressed the maternal. Katherine is an outcast, an orphan who has been raised in a 'Home', a convent, where she has been cared for by nuns, thus she disturbs Oedipal family structures. Katherine displaces her fear of the abject by covering it with fantasy representations, thus her stories about the convent, which Hester suspects are untrue, focus on lack of privacy, beds huddled together, greasy dining room tables and shabby showers where "the water never drained away so you had to stand in a slimy mess left by the other girls" (Well 15). These images concern objects of abjection and the process of establishing boundaries between the self and [m]other.

In establishing a sense of self Katherine is represented as adopting shifting, fluid subject positions, where she explores the permeability of ego boundaries and experiments with a variety of personae, creating 'a stream of spurious egos'\textsuperscript{51} through the roles that Hester and she enact from the films they watch. Katherine is figured as communicating through her body, in dance, music and singing and a variety of speech forms and accents incorporated into an array of assumed characters as she develops a polyvalent, multifaceted subjectivity.

Katherine transfers her developing sexuality and identity onto her re-enactments of romantic movies and ultimately to desire for the man in the well. She represses her sexuality with her child-like behaviour and clothing, in a form of hysterical anorexia. Classically the hysteric uses her body as a spectacle to act out her repression. Jolley's description of Katherine dancing at the Borden's party invites such an interpretation:

Katherine with her head thrust forward and down was moving jerkily, like a wooden doll, towards them, her eyes were empty of expression and her mouth was slightly open. She shook her shoulders and let her arms hang by her sides. She let the shoulder-shake slide to her hips. She moved to the right and to the left advancing steadily towards Hester and Mrs. Borden. When the music stopped abruptly the dancers, as if frozen, stood still. Katherine had one leg forward and one back and both arms were raised and her head was lifted so that her hair was thrown back. Hester saw, with fondness, the beads of moisture on her upper lip. The
music started again and the dancers, as if they had never stopped, went on dancing. (Well 74)

The description suggests the hysteric's arched body and the impression of possession. In *The Newly Born Woman*, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément suggest the dance of the tarantella as an image of the hysteric, where the bitten subject uses music, dance and colour to expel the spider's venom, using her body to challenging symbolic control.52

Katherine's status as a subject-in-process is suggested in an interesting way with her grammatical confusion of subject/object boundaries through her constantly incorrect 'Joanna and me.' When Hester corrects her Katherine's misunderstanding of the correction serves to highlight Katherine's subject flexibility and her desire to separate from Hester:

'Ooh no, Miss Harper, dear, it's me and Joanna I'm talking about. I wasn't suggesting for one minute that you should wear our styles. I mean, country and western wouldn't be yew? It wouldn't be right on yew, really it wouldn't.' (Well 59)

For the subject who is not fully/legitimately inscribed within the patriarchal system the border between subject and object, inside and outside, self and other, semiotic and symbolic is confused. As Katherine constructs an identity as part of the process of separating from the mother, she adopts a variety of subject positions revealing the formation of subjectivity to be a formation of the subject-in-process. Reconstituting herself in language, Katherine experiments with language forms and styles and creates a variety of roles (Well 12–13). Hester and Katherine take on the various identities of their fantasies, changing their voices as they create a heterogeneity of subject position (Well 20). The variety of accents and speech forms that Katherine experiments with can be said to represent her attempt to find another object, in Lacan's terms, an 'objet petit a,'53 to substitute for the lack of the mother, hence her constant experimentation and her dancing and singing. Each characterisation could be said to function as an attempt to deny, cover or fill the void left by the loss of the mother.

The drive home from the Borden's party, the events preceding the irruption of drives and desires into the narrative when the intruder is hit, are characterized by fantasized play-acting about weddings and babies and the nonsense of 'Pussa inna wella' and the break dancing. Katherine's language contains disjointed ejaculations and signs of waste and abjection, indicating how she is both revolted by and yet drawn to the abject. Her language explodes with the irruption of drives and desire:

'Weee-wopp—here we go! Nearly home, Miss Harper, dear. Nearly at the last bend. Oops—sorry! caught the bushes, hit a rock. Blast! Shit! Oops sorry Miss Harper, dear, hit the rocks again, always get that rock. I
don't hack it.' Katherine laughs in a shrill voice. 'I wish Joanna was here already. Wish you was here already Joanna. Joanna JOANNA.' (Well 5)

Outbursts of speech, expletives, slang and nonsense are used to mark a rupture in the text signifying the entry of the intruder and the absence of the mother. They could be said to indicate the horror of, and yet the fascination with, the abject.

Hester has encouraged Katherine in her fantasy and role-playing, but the intruder provokes a crisis of representation. Will Katherine's story be believed? What is Hester to make of Katherine's story? The interplay of reality and fantasy slides with each telling, each teller; the boundaries of fact and fantasy blur:

[I]t had been a little joke between them, but now it played an alarming rôle in the representation of unreality.' (Well 124).

The stories the two women tell become a challenge to the master narrative, with each one competing for their version to be accepted. Katherine, who has never known her mother, attempts to name the void through her stories. The transferring of the signification of the horror away from the mother and redirecting it to the man in the well can be read as her attempt to find a thoroughfare to the symbolic. By locating the abject in the well and intermingling fact and fantasy, the articulation is effected through the maternal thoroughfare as a form of fairy tale.

The Borden's party is a threat not only to Hester's position, but also to Katherine's. Mrs. Borden claims that Katherine must leave the world of childhood, Peter Pan collars and her dependant relationship with Hester, to reposition her awakening desire onto a male suitor, to think of wedding bells. But the wedding bells which Katherine evokes on the trip home are linked with the semiotic songs and nonsense of her dancing and childhood memories: 'Dinga Donga Bella . . . Pussa inna wella.' The threat/Pussa/frog in the well is transformed into Prince Charming in Katherine's version of the family romance!

The tantalizing object in the well draws Katherine to it and away from Hester. In separating from Hester as the Mother, Katherine separates from the objects of abjection and desires entry into the symbolic, represented by the key to the car, kept on a string around Hester's neck. For Katherine, Hester acts as a mother figure, the thoroughfare between the convent and the social world, which functions as the thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic, represented by the fantasy games and the opportunity Hester provides for Katherine to become accepted in the social system. But, according to traditional psychological patterns, for Katherine to effect entry into the symbolic there needs to be a male figure, thus the figure in the well becomes a male suitor, satisfying while subverting the patriarchal paradigm.
Katherine has another reason for the object in the well to be male. If she is to be inscribed within the symbolic order, her desire for the [m]other needs to be transferred onto a 'legitimate' desire within the Oedipal based social structures, hence the object in the well must be represented as a man, thus Katherine 'forces' Hester to name the object in the well as a man: while Hester at first refers to the object as 'it', Katherine names it as 'he' (*Well* 80–1). This is necessary so that Katherine can effect her transfer from the semiotic to the symbolic through the rejection of Hester and the claiming of the man in the well. Thus in their first conflict caused by the man in the well, Hester threatens to return Katherine to the 'home,' to which Katherine responds by pointing out her growing independence: "I'm not a girl any more" . . . She stood up. "You can't send me back," (*Well* 88). Katherine no longer desires to be contained in the pre-Oedipal, she desires access to the symbolic, social world.

The Borden's party gives Katherine the opportunity to experiment with entry into the symbolic, to take her 'proper' position as a young woman, receiving the attention of young men. Her fantasy of the man in the well allows her to experiment with positioning herself in the symbolic as a wife and mother. Hester sees Katherine's behaviour as a separation from her as mother/lover and loss of pre-Oedipal bliss: 'she did not want to lose Kathy especially not into vulgarity and loss of innocence' (*Well* 119). The fear in the well assumes the shape of 'some oaf who was bound to come like a stupid and probably poverty-stricken prince. . . into their lives' (*Well* 119), to take Katherine away.

After the party Katherine is in a state of crisis. The intruder in the well could be said to represent the struggle between the maternal and paternal forces in her life. Katherine knows it is time to leave the semiotic bliss of her time with Hester. She uses the man in the well to separate from Hester, telling her that she is over 21 and does not need Hester's permission to marry or to leave (*Well* 123). She reminds Hester of her twisted back and leg iron and demands the keys of the car and the rope (*Well* 125) and indicates their changing sexual status, that Hester is old and going through the change of life, while Katherine is young and fertile:

'[H]e says some women are in the change for years. His mother he told me was in her change for an age.' She giggled again. 'Do you know Miss Harper, perhaps you'll be doing this too, his mother kept giving away her packets of you know what. That's how he said it, isn't he a sweety pie, he means pads. Anyway his mother kept giving these packets to his sisters, he had two sisters — they're both dead, so sad, anyway, when she'd given them away she'd have to ask for them back! Isn't he . . .' (*Well* 129)

Katherine creates a traditional Oedipal family, with sexual power being transferred, not without problems, from mother to daughter. She highlights the mother's/Hester's loss of
sexual power and the daughter's desire to separate from the mother and to assume sexual independence. The man in the well also demonstrates the slippage of male desire from mother to daughter and he hides his sexual desire in euphemisms of 'packets of you know what,' as Freud does with his teasing statement: *J'appelle un chat un chat.*

Katherine's repressed desire for the mother is revealed through the nature of the conversations she constructs with the man in the well. The abject ties Katherine to the semiotic. Her conversations involve singing songs about death (*Well* 127), discussing menstruation and babies (*Well* 128–9) and throwing food down the well (*Well* 112). Katherine is constantly drawn to the edge of the well, desiring the abject, but unable to effect a thoroughfare. She wants the rope to release the man, but fears having to use it to descend into the well. Hysterically, Katherine refuses to go down the well: "I'm not going down there. I'll die!" (*Well* 107). The image of the rope reverberates with ambivalent association, suggesting phallic access, the umbilical cord and Kristeva's reference to the 'twisted braids of affects and thoughts' of the abjected subject.

Katherine's failure to convince Hester of her 'reality' of the man in the well results in Katherine being tied to the object in the well as a narcissistic self image. The conflict between Hester and Katherine can be said to become a conflict between maternal or paternal inscription. Hester desires two soft-boiled eggs nestled in a glass, wrapped in a white linen handkerchief (*Well* 108) her hair brushed and she wants to hear the songs and music from her childhood. Katherine demands the keys of the car and makes Hester the object of abjection from whom she must separate: "I hate your music," . . . "rack off," . . . "Piss off" (*Well* 138). At the height of their conflict, the maternal power is unleashed, the rain pours down and Hester remembers childhood memories of red foxes and midwives and the loose lid of the well rattles in the wind.

When Hester has the well closed over she appears to have silenced Katherine. Katherine takes on a different way of speaking, her voice becomes flat and lifeless (*Well* 160). Whichever version of the story Hester tells, Katherine will be trapped, the well will enclose her, she will face the 'powers of horror.' Kristeva says, at the end of *Powers of Horror* that confronting 'the powers of horror' results in an 'apocalypse' or a purification. What is in the well?

*The Well* suggests the problem women have in establishing a speaking position in a symbolic which represses maternal elements. The writer is positioned at the rim of the well, fascinated yet repelled by the 'powers of horror,' desiring, yet fearing to 'write the mother.'
NOTES


2. Kristeva 1.


26 Freud, *SE* 7:105n, 120n.

27 Maria Ramas, 'Freud's Dora, Dora's Hysteria,' Bernheimer and Kahane, *In Dora's Case* 151.


29 Stimpson 244.


32 Ramas 171–2.


33 Ramas 156.


35 Kristeva, 'Freud and Love' 251.


38 Kristeva 49.

39 Kristeva 50.


43 Kristeva 38.

44 Kristeva 38–9.


46 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 74.

47 Kristeva 47.


50 John Fletcher, 'Introduction,' *Abjection, Melancholia and Love* 2.

51 Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 47


56 Kristeva 209.
Chapter 9: Motherhood According to Elizabeth Jolley

In 'Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini,' Julia Kristeva suggests that the maternal body can function as a metaphor for writing. She describes poetic language as being formed like the birth-giving process; 'the maternal body is the place of a splitting,'\(^1\) on the threshold of language and the instinctual drives, between the symbolic and the semiotic, analogous to the foetus growing 'as a graft' in the mother's body.\(^2\) Just as the birth process functions to release the instinctual energy of drives and desires into social and linguistic structures, so 'poetic language' may enable a social encoding of the body and an articulation of semiotic elements in the symbolic.

The mother can be said to experience a split symbolization; her body is a powerful site of instinctual drives and desire, yet, as the vehicle of the child's socialization, she promotes social coherence within the patriarchal structures of science, religion and family and functions as the guarantee of social continuity. In these processes the maternal body can be said to operate as a filter, a thoroughfare, or a threshold, where 'nature' confronts 'culture.'\(^3\) Thus it is possible to claim that the mother's body represents the pivotal site for the control of linguistic forces.

Despite Kristeva's formulation of the mother as being in control of this thoroughfare, 'master of a process,'\(^4\) she still claims that motherhood must be represented through patriarchal models because, within a Freudian framework, the need to maintain social control and the fear of the release of powerful maternal forces have resulted in maternal and semiotic desires being sealed off and censored by the symbolic. The disruptive maternal jouissance has been silenced by being encoded within phallogocentric theory, where it is explained away as woman's substitute desire for a penis:

In other words, from the point of view of social coherence, which is where legislators, grammarians, and even psychoanalysts have their seat; which is where every body is made homologous to a male speaking body, motherhood would be nothing more than a phallic attempt to reach the Mother who is presumed to exist at the very place where (social and biological) identity recedes.\(^5\)

In this model the mother is again seen as the object, and the subject position is filled by the son. The material reality of a relationship between mother and child is replaced with the childhood fantasy of the all powerful Phallic Mother. The mother's pivotal position as the threshold and recuperative power as thoroughfare is reduced to being no more than a filter for patriarchal representations.

The artist's (for Kristeva this means a male artist) attempt to 'write the mother' involves writing in the maternal thoroughfare, filtering semiotic elements into the
symbolic in an attempt to locate the secret maternal jouissance. It means being positioned on the threshold of meaning and nonsense, being on the rim of the void made by the absent mother. For the artist the maternal body represents the desire for an intersection of the semiotic and the symbolic elements, the interplay of 'sign and rhythm, of representation and light' in an attempt to enable the representation of the unrepresentable. By an identification with the mother the artist attempts the artistic equivalent of traversing the maternal thoroughfare between nature and culture, through a 'symbiosis of meaning and nonmeaning, of representation and interplay of differences.' This process enables the artist to speak his desire for the mother, but, in so doing, he silences, negates and objectifies the mother: 'the artist speaks from a place where she is not,' because, according to Kristeva, the mother cannot claim a speaking position in the symbolic. Only the son has this right, because of his privileged phallic position in relation to language. Within the Freudian model the mother's body functions as no more than a 'cipher' for representations of the son's desire.

The artistic representation of jouissance, interpreted as maternal jouissance, that is, a desire for a return to the mother's body, can be represented by two quite different artistic approaches. Kristeva's essay involves a comparison of these two different attitudes, evident in Leonardo Da Vinci's and Giovanni Bellini's work. One representation fetishizes the child, the other attempts to catch the 'luminous serenity of the unrepresentable,' the mother's 'luminous, chromatic differences beyond and despite corporeal representation,' in what Kristeva characterizes as a form of artistic incest. Bellini's work attempts the latter, and, in its focus on the body of the mother rather than the child, Kristeva claims it offers the possibility of women recognizing their own experience.

Kristeva does not suggest the possibility of a woman artist representing maternal jouissance, of speaking from the place where she is! In her critical writing Kristeva is more interested in male attempts to reclaim the body of the mother through poetic language, because, according to traditional psychoanalytic theory, the male artist is legitimately positioned in the symbolic. Thus he creates a dramatic rupture with his attempt to reclaim the mother through a 'kind of incest.' By contrast, the woman artist, traditionally positioned only in relation to her lack, is considered to be in danger of slipping back into the maternal chora. However, I suggest that the use of the maternal metaphor suggests the possibility of a speaking position for women that acknowledges a semiotic and symbolic articulation and empowerment in both spheres of nature and culture by working through the maternal thoroughfare.

For, according to Kristeva, there remains an untheorized maternal jouissance, 'a nonsymbolic, nonpaternal' desire which is better characterized by images of flux and movement than by theories of being and linguistics; which is better represented by
maternal metaphors than phallic signifiers. Kristeva asks:

How can we verbalize this prelinguistic, unrepresentable memory? Heraclitus' flux, Epicurus' atoms, the whirling dust of cabalistic, Arab, and Indian mystics, and the stippled drawings of psychedelics – all seem better metaphors than the theories of Being, the logos, and its laws.16

This aspect of maternity Kristeva describes as the 'homosexual–maternal facet' which may involves 'the reunion of a woman–mother with the body of her mother'17 and which draws on the jouissance of semiotic elements:

*The homosexual–maternal facet* is a whirl of words, a complete absence of meaning and seeing; it is feeling, displacement, rhythm, sound, flashes, and fantasied clinging to the maternal body as a screen against the plunge.18

It is this aspect of maternity which can be used as a powerful model for poetic language in a process that seeks to incorporate nonlinguistic elements into the symbolic and to reformulate symbolic structures.

The split subjectivity, which the mother as threshold inhabits, allows for the incorporation of nonlinguistic elements into the structures of language and society and posits a multiplicity of perspectives and positions for woman as mother. Kristeva's claim that the maternal metaphor acts as a filter or threshold for the semiotic and the symbolic, means that the 'symbolic stratum' is unsettled19 and representations of motherhood can become an important articulation of working in, through and against the structures of language and society.

Elizabeth Jolley's *The Sugar Mother* offers such a challenge. The pun of 'sugar mother,' which is a linguistic distortion of surrogacy, implies that traditional representations of motherhood are being challenged and that the mother may be used as a metaphor for subversive linguistic activity. *The Sugar Mother* suggests that representations of motherhood may be used to construct alternative speaking positions and models of existence. Although the text is concerned with mothering, it is in a context in which all positions, including 'language–symbolism–paternity'20 can be said to be challenged and reformulated.

Edwin, a professor of Renaissance Literature, talks about maternity through references to idealized literary and artistic representations of the Madonna. For Edwin 'literary references made the idea, the idea of having children, very desirable' (SM 35, italics mine), but he doesn't have any children. Edwin's wife, Cecilia, is a gynaecologist who is absent, at a conference on infertility. Leila, a pregnant adolescent and her mother, who is only ever refereed to as 'Leila's mother,' move into Prof. Page's house.
while Cecilia is away. Leila's mother, who could be said to function as the phallic mother, starts reorganizing Edwin's life. This demonstrates what Kristeva calls 'the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling.'\textsuperscript{21} She decides that Edwin and Cecilia need a child and offers her daughter, Leila, as a surrogate mother.

Surrogacy itself is an interesting challenge to traditional maternity. It demonstrates social control of biological activities. It can be seen as an attempt to supplant the 'natural' rights of the mother by the legitimating power of the law through a contract, a process whereby the pregnant woman becomes a commodity. It could be seen as a patriarchal attempt to control reproduction, or as a matriarchal attempt to acquire economic control of the means of reproduction.

But what happens when the legitimating structures are ruptured not by surrogacy but by the carnivalesque dialogistic deferral of a sugar mother, which is a linguistic distortion of surrogacy:

'[T]here's always whatsaname, whatyoucall it, the surrated mother, sugared whatsit, thingumajig, sugar mother.' (SM 67)

Leila's mother's definition ruptures representations of motherhood. Repressed jouissance ('sugar') and abjection ('surrated') irrupt the linguistic codes and the power of naming is subverted. Her linguistic distortion suggests that to rename maternity is to challenge the power of naming, to speak beyond the phallus. The carnivalesque 'sugar mother' disrupts traditional concepts of knowing and being and an unnameable pregnancy challenges the legitimating structures of language and society. In The Sugar Mother the authoritative 'master narrative' is unsettled by a cacophony of women's voices which claim the power to tell their own stories. In this context who speaks for whom, and with what authority?

Kristeva suggests that the socially legitimate discourses on maternity are those of science and religion. She refers to The Virgin as 'the most refined symbolic construct... on Maternality.'\textsuperscript{22} Professor Page, whose knowledge of motherhood is academic, speaks with apparent authority. His field of knowledge is the Renaissance, that period known for its glorification of Man and his achievements (scientific and artistic) and for the dominant maternal discourse of the Virgin Mother.

Edwin's first meeting with Leila's mother would appear to have each character taking conventional subject positions. Edwin, the Renaissance man, 'patriarch' and head of the house is the chivalrous gentleman:

His quiet voice and his words encapsulating a whole life--time of that endless chivalry which makes men available for climbing up, and for penetrating and forcing ways through impossible cracks and apertures in
order to enable forgetful or lost women to be rescued. (SM 25, italics mine)

The chivalrous gentleman knows how to position himself within the dominant discourse!

Leila's mother positions herself as the traditional, biological mother figure, upholder of family values, inheritor of the curse of Eve: 'Her sigh was laden with all the long drawn-out hours of labour, first and second stage, from Eve onwards' (SM 29). Yet her very first conversation opens up the space for the sugar mother; her nonsense, malapropisms and cliches act as a carnivalesque threat to traditional family configurations and articulations.

Leila's mother acts as the phallic, controlling mother for both Leila and Edwin. She speaks for Leila, who initially is absent from the room, but who, on returning, is silenced by her mother, whose comment also decentres Edwin's authoritative world of scholarly knowledge with mother/child babble. When Edwin asks if they are familiar with the Madonnas painted by Hans Memling or Albrecht Dürer, Leila's mother replies:

I don't think we have met them – have we Leila? But we both love ickle babies, don't we Leila, honey. Come and sit down by mother. (SM 29)

She firmly ensconces herself in Dr Page's lounge chair, in a parody of Whistler's mother.

Cecilia is absent, as she will be throughout the novel but Edwin attempts to speak for her, using the patriarchal images of the Madonna:

'[Y]ou see Cecilia really feels the individuality, the special light, she calls it, which surrounds every new-born baby. Every birth is an event, a miracle.'... 'Every time', he said, 'she comes home radiant.'... 'I often see this radiance give way to a wonderful calm expression, an "exquisite tenderness and purity", I'm afraid I'm quoting now, it's a bad habit of mine.' (SM 29)

His representation includes the image of the Virgin and Cecilia's own purity and 'luminous serenity,' which, despite Edwin's attempt to speak with authority, threatens to elude his inscription. In order to speak for Cecilia, Edwin has to sternly silence Cecilia's laughter 'which was so shrill in his head he felt that the visitors might be hearing it too' (SM 31). Cecilia's refusal to be silenced prevents the patriarchal marginalizing of her presence and her disruptive laughter mocks and unsettles Edwin's authority.

Where is Edwin positioned in the maternal discourse? Edwin's experience comes not from the materiality of lived experience but from reasoned analysis which filters and insulates his world:
The books lining the walls, together with his solid desk by the window, made the room rather like a fortress with double walls. . . . the masses of words expressing so much of human life, were an insulation. (SM 24)

He attempts to protect and legitimate his life through deciphering and encoding linguistic representations.

As a model of Renaissance Man, a figure of authority and control, Edwin studies and classifies the body and his experiences, in the manner of the 'self-absorbed, self-preserving scholar' Cardano (SM 16). Edwin has three books of the body, in which he keeps meticulous notes about his bodily sensations.23 His narcissism can be explained in Freudian terms as a desire to return to the pre-Oedipal identification with the mother's body. Cecilia mockingly points out that his tea-making ritual can be interpreted as a desire to satisfy the child's craving for the breast (SM 39–40). Edwin's insecurity about his bodily functions suggests the abjected subject's inability to close off bodily boundaries between child and mother and his need to control his bodily sensations with linguistic structures suggests the threat of castration.

Edwin's marriage to Cecilia reveals a desire to control his body and to appropriate the discourse of motherhood:

She had an intimate knowledge of human life, of birth and death and of illness and cure. . . . From the beginning he wanted her to tell him about the human body. (SM 18)

That this appropriation attempts to silence women is suggested by the discussion concerning Daphne and Cecilia's fathers, both gynaecologists, both 'masters' of female discourse, who display patronizing control, technological manipulation and good manners while withholding knowledge about 'down there' (SM 72). The desire to silence women in maternal discourse is highlighted by a quotation from Euripides which prefaces one of Edwin's lectures, in his 'Study of Man' series, which is his master discourse on the novel:

If only children could be got some other way without the female sex! If women didn't exist, Human life would be rid of all its miseries. . . (SM 19–20)

This quotation reveals a deep-seated male misogyny and fantasy about male control of reproduction.

Prince, Daphne's dog, which has puppies, suggests another phallic fantasy, that of male conception, which is another attempt at phallogocentric control of maternal discourse. Or is this another trick, is Prince a Princess? Is the master narrative barren?
Is phallic potency only possible if it is grounded in the reproductive power of the mother? Daphne suggests that creative power is located at the site of male desire, the hole or lack in Western discourse:

'They say that man, meaning women and men, that man creates best from that which is the rejected part of him.' \(SM\ 63\)

The repressed maternal works through the patriarchal structures to rename and reformulate the maternal discourse. The artist's attempt to write the absent mother is incomplete if he can not reclaim the rejected semiotic elements of language.

Edwin's bodily functions disrupt his theoretical control:

Putting the pages of the \textit{Study of Man} lectures within reach he drew the notebook of the intangible towards himself and waited for the expected stomach cramps. \(SM\ 210\)

Edwin's self-absorption is subverted with this third notebook which deals with the intangible. It is to this notebook that he returns at the end of the novel, suggesting that it could be read as the novel itself, that which we are in fact reading, so that the subversion is multiple, as the fictionality of reality interweaves with the embodying of the intangible, so that the 'Study of Man' is challenged and the narrative frame is refocussed.

The sugar mother disrupts narrative certainty and bodily control. Edwin sees Leila as the Madonna, ensconcing her within the traditional patriarchal discourse, but by so doing the narrative is subverted, for the Madonna is a Virgin – who is Leila's child's father? Edwin thus becomes positioned as an outsider:

Suddenly he was an outsider, not the child's father at all and not at all sure that Leila's mother was entirely truthful. \(SM\ 192\)

The ultimate weakness in the father's narrative of motherhood is that, while the patriarch may speak in the Name of the Father, he can never know if he \textit{is} the father, despite Western society's attempt to legitimate the child through the father's line. Hence Edwin's interest in Cardano's statement 'Vowing to perpetuate my name, I made a plan for this purpose as soon as I was able to orient myself,' \(SM\ 128\) and the patriarchal refocussing of the maternal discourse to emphasise the boy child (as with the Christ-child and Oedipal complex). Illegitimacy challenges the Father's control and surrogacy questions it. But what happens when a 'sugar mother' unsettles the master and his narrative? Masculine appropriation of woman's experience attempts to position man as the expert, woman as the riddle, target, object, puzzle and problem of this masculine discourse,\textsuperscript{24} but this claim is unsettled by the material certainty of the mother's
Edwin is careless about legitimizing procedures, such as receipts and birth certificates, and he loses authority and control. The narrative opens up to tricks and distortions. The reader begins to realize that Leila had already been pregnant, that what she wanted was a father, or a sugar daddy. The trick played by Leila and her mother on Edwin inverts, twists and confuses the idea of surrogacy in a similar manner to Leila's mother's linguistic distortion of surrogacy to 'sugar mother,' with its 'sugar daddy' echo, which functions to involutes the role of provider and recipient, pleasure and labour and confuses utterly the question of who speaks for whom, and with what authority.

Although Edwin speaks the 'master narrative' on motherhood, he does not possess it or own it, as is signalled at the beginning of the text when he stands and watches the children playing. Leila's mother observes:

'[H]e only stands and doesn't seem to own any one of the children.' (SM 10)

Despite his attempts to master the narrative the maternal body eludes his grasp.

Edwin's attempt to control the sugar mother narrative could be explained in similar terms to his description of the Mozart piano concerto, which he hears as being replayed and resemantized in an attempt to produce a consistent single effect:

'It's as if the pianist goes back as if to replay, to redo the run of notes and the chords.' (SM 86)

Daphne has a different interpretation. From a woman's point of view it is not a putting right, a correcting, a legitimizing, rather it is a recognition of a flaw, a disruption, a harmonizing of cacophony which was there from the beginning, which was meant to be part of the concerto:

'It's not a putting right, not a fresh start – only something going on in the way it has been going. It is the actual music, in the actual music, I should say, it was the way it was written – it's even more inevitable that way.' (SM 176)

Daphne's description of the music allows for difference, variations, flaws, oppositions which complement, support and emphasizes each voice, while acknowledging the oppositional nature of the dialogue which breaches the unitary foreclosed Name-of-the-Father.

The Sugar Mother could be said to be engaged in exploring difference, variation and flaws in a variety of representations of maternity to see how women might 'write the
mother.' Woman's disruptive behaviour acts to rupture the barriers between body and word and to unsettle Edwin's authority and control by releasing desire for the body. While the women in the text can be said to function in the maternal thoroughfare, involved in an interplay of body and word, Edwin is uncomfortable with the power of the flesh, as his quotation from Euripides suggests: 'If only children could be got some other way without the female sex!' (SM 19), but he also desires Leila's body and the home cooking provided by her mother. Uncomfortable with his desires, he creates idealized abstract images in an attempt to silence the disruption of her naked flesh. Edwin's desire for 'a naked, plump, contented child' and 'the blessed Mother' which he transfers to artistic contemplation is juxtaposed with the shrill laughter and chatter of mother and daughter in the bathroom, and his desire to peek into the bathroom is 'screened' with his reflections on diaphanous Roman lingerie (SM 32). He attempts to hide his erotic desire in the language of art, which, in Kristevan terms, functions as an attempt to represent 'motherhood's entry into symbolic existence' through 'translibidinal jouissance, eroticism taken over by the language of art.'25 Edwin, like another Renaissance man, Leonardo da Vinci, tries to 'master' his subject; to reproduce 'bodies and spaces as graspable, masterable objects,' by using his position in the symbolic to attempt to cover the maternal imprint by encoding maternity in the language of medicine, art and theology.

Edwin's vision while waiting for Leila and her mother outside the market privileges language as the basis of the real: 'an idea, a vision, if written about, could be brought into existence' (SM 131). He silences Cecilia's voice on the telephone and suggests that they write instead, so that they can 'express their real feelings' (SM 131). In writing the cheque he positions Leila's pregnancy as a commodity that will be used by him (SM 134–5), but the apparent power of Edwin's position is destabilized in that scene by his desire for Leila's body, his image of her 'slippery body' in the bath, the maternal image of Leila's mother ironing and folding clothes, and the disruptive laughter of Cecilia, the giver of the gift of the silver pen used to sign the transaction. Edwin the 'gentleman', 'head of [his] own house,' is authorized to 'do as [he] thinks best' (SM 135), yet the maternal body mocks, manipulates, entices and eludes him.

Kristeva suggests there are two methods of representation of the mother: that of the body as fetish, the patriarchal focus on the representable child and containable mother; or a representation of 'differences beyond and despite corporeal representation.'27 Edwin can be read as a model of the Kristevan male artist who desires to 'know' the mother. The maternal body represents for Edwin the opportunity to move beyond/behind the discourse of the Father, to attempt the second form of representation by positioning himself in the space where the mother could be reached, as, according to Kristeva, Bellini does:
Bellini penetrates through the being and language of the father to position himself in the place where the mother could have been reached. A kind of incest is then committed, a kind of possession of the mother, which provides motherhood, that mute border, with a language; although in doing so, he deprives it of any right to a real existence (there is nothing "feminist" in Bellini's action), he does accord it a symbolic status.

Edwin can attempt to do this by an 'unseating virgin motherhood in favor of carnal love,' which, according to Kristeva's argument, was what Bellini attempted to do. The movement in *The Sugar Mother* can be said to follow Kristeva's interpretation of Bellini's own path:

[L]eading from the "iconographic" mother to the fascinating mother-seductress, and then, passing through a threatening and fleeing mother to the luminous space where she surrogates herself.

Edwin moves from an iconographic representation of motherhood, where he is absorbed by artistic and literary references, to the temptations of the 'mother-seductress,' represented by both Leila and her mother, who then become the mother figure from which he must flee, because they threaten absorption in the maternal *chora* and loss of identity. Finally Edwin beholds but cannot enter the self-contained 'luminous space' of the surrogated mother, Leila and her child (*SM* 191-2). Leila represents the unrepresentable, inexpressible mother who eludes representation within the symbolic order, whose embodiment splits representation, whose jouissance disrupts language.

In his search for the mother Edwin is tempted and threatened by the fascinating mother-seductress in two forms: Leila's mother as the phallic mother and Leila as the child seductress. Leila's mother represents for Edwin the desire to return to the symbiosis of the mother-son relationship, to satisfy his unfulfilled desire through an enjoyment of her baking, knitting, home-making: 'Seeing her by the stove it seemed to Edwin that she had always been there' (*SM* 41). Jolley delights in the food/desire pun in the description of the Sugar Mother/surrogacy:

'Better than adopting', Leila's mother said, 'like a cake you've made yourself, a home-made cake. You know what's in it. I always say home cooked is best. You can't go wrong.' (*SM* 68)

Images of baking and washing are associated with the good nurturing mother, but the cooking and cleaning that Leila's mother indulges in also conveys the child's sense of abjection from 'the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling,' which draw the child to the mother, but also repel the child:
When she was cooking she seemed kind and wholesome and there was nothing sinister about her at all. (SM 66)

Although Edwin desires the comfort Leila's mother provides, he also knows that a fearful, possibly 'sinister' power is concealed.

The abject unsettles meaning. It is a threat from 'an exorbitant outside [Leila and her mother] or inside [pregnancy], ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable.'32 In Freud and Kristeva's representation of the abject, the child is both drawn to, and tries to break away from, the maternal body. So, Edwin both desires and flees from Leila's mother: 'He turned abruptly and fled from Leila's mother's washing' (SM 36). However, Irigaray suggests that the mother fills up and leaves the child.33 Leila's mother could be said to represent a parody of such maternal plenitude as she stuffs Edwin with her cooking at the same time as she is manipulating him into providing for Leila and herself.

Kristeva's analysis, in *Powers of Horror*, of the borderline patient, suffering from the symptoms of abjection, makes an interesting comparison with Edwin. His speech is precise and abstract, he engages in intense self-examination, most significant is his split between signification and drives and the check he puts on Cecilia's 'free association' telephone calls.34

In resemanticizing motherhood, family groupings are rearranged, shifting configurations of the traditional Oedipal family group are suggested and a 'little sugar-mother family' is created (SM 181), which displaces the Holy family. Due to the disproportion in ages, we are aware that the 'proper' arrangement would be Edwin as father with Leila's mother, and Leila as their child. In this context Edwin's desire for, and seduction of, Leila can be viewed as incest, a desire for the body of the mother claimed through the seduction of the child.

Edwin also positions himself as the child of Leila's mother in another incest configuration:

He understood again that Leila's mother, though he suspected that he was older than she was, made him feel young and safe. He thought now about her constant approval of him and how she was able to make him feel that what he thought and did was all for the best. (SM 178)

Edwin as child decentres Edwin as father figure. Thus Edwin's position in the symbolic is undercut, confused and challenged by his desire to return to the pre-Oedipal semiotic, to penetrate the symbiotic mother/child space, to return to the repressed primal scene of the child's desire for the mother. Desire disrupts the settling of meaning and control.

Leila is silenced by accepting her place in the configuration, that of the daughter
who makes love to the father and produces the substitute phallus, the male child. But in silencing Leila much is repressed. There is, for instance, the reference to the mother/daughter relationship, ignored in Freud's Oedipal family configuration, which Edwin finds disturbing:

It was annoying, in one sense, that Leila and her mother had a very close bond. . . . They had something that seemed to physically hold them together. In the presence of this he felt excluded, jealous even. . . . They seemed to live their lives close as if they were in a nest. (SM 112)

The nest/chora of the 'homosexual-maternal facet' of maternity challenges masculine inscriptions with a 'whirl of words', an 'absence of meaning' which refuses phallic penetration.35

Within this decentred Oedipal family Leila's mother, as phallic mother, is in control. She controls the semiotic/symbolic thoroughfare, giving Edwin permission to go to Leila, organizing his life, while appearing to acknowledge his authority. Jolley parodies Leila's mother's nurturing, homemaking skills: "All of us ladies are mothers in our real true hearts. . ." (SM 54). She is in fact manipulating, controlling, self-serving. She disrupts the Oedipal patterning by invading Edwin's territory, retaining the key to her own place and by finally leaving, having accomplished her purpose. Leila's mother manipulates and controls events to suit/dress her purpose, but in entering his house she acknowledges his power and authority. Leila needs a father for her baby and the game must be played according to the rules of the patriarchy: 'She had not lost sight, she said, of whose house it was' (SM 31). Leila's and her mother's power is represented as being covert and manipulative, working within the male boundaries.

In The Sugar Mother Leila, as the child/mother/lover figure, represents, for Edwin, the opportunity to move beyond the discourse of the Father, to position himself in the place of jouissance where the mother can be reached, where the symbolic can be disrupted with the semiotic. Edwin's theoretical idealized ideas from his books are disrupted by the 'sweet invitation' of Leila's breasts:

She gave a shy half-smile and slid by him sideways, her full youthful breasts, pinkly innocent, moved slightly in the opening of her garment. (SM 36)

The male artist's desire is to penetrate beyond the language of the Father, with its abstract references to 'ideas' of conception, and to position himself 'where the mother could have been reached'.36 In 'Motherhood according to Bellini' Kristeva claims that, in order to penetrate through the place and language of the Father to provide the mute mother with a language, the artist must position himself in the space where mother and
father meet. This provides a discourse of the mother, but it is a 'speaking for' and the mother becomes the object of the discourse. Thus in the representation of Edwin's desire Leila is silenced. But this very silencing is threatening, this maternal space is 'fascinating, attracting, and puzzling,' hence Edwin feels insecure in his relationship with Leila, constantly aware of the unrepresented 'marginal experience' of the mother herself.

If Edwin is to attempt to claim maternal jouissance, he must be positioned in the maternal thoroughfare. One attempt Edwin makes to filter the semiotic and symbolic, in an attempt to speak the maternal discourse, is his visit to the ante-natal clinic with Leila. There he is enveloped in the language and experience of women: 'It was impossible not to overhear the intimate narrative' (SM 125). Edwin senses the mystery, but the only way he can understand the experience is by exercising patriarchal control. Pregnant women become objectified by the medicalization of childbirth and Edwin's impressions are contextualized through a knowledge gained from reading Cecilia's textbooks and the notices in the waiting room:

On reflection it seemed to Edwin that the whole of life could be lifted up and pinned to a notice board. All feeling and thought and emotion could be reduced to little squares and oblongs of paper containing the passionless sensible care of the human body from conception onwards. (SM 127).

Edwin's secret desires and attempts at linguistic control of the discourse of maternity do not provide an effective speaking position.

Edwin is not able to effect a thoroughfare for the filtering of the semiotic into the symbolic. He has no claim to original creative power: 'To write something he would have to create from the original and he was aware of the difficulties' (SM 194). He retreats once again into the rigidity of the empty symbolic: 'taking a false way, a falsely intellectual way out' (SM 194). Unable to be creative and original, he remains trapped in the words and images of reflection and (re)creation.

Edwin's desire is associated with the enclosed bedroom/study, the warm, wet sensuality of the bathroom and the dark pines, a green and fragrant spot from which one can emerge and return home on safe suburban roads. Jolley positions the reader as a voyeur, observing Leila's seduction, as Edwin reflects on the events of the previous night. His jouissance stays secret and enclosed, suggesting a choric fantasy, a desire to return to the womb and incestuous desire for the mother. His secret desire and images do not provide a thoroughfare for the semiotic and the symbolic, the word and flesh, desire and knowledge. Edwin is silenced and excluded from the maternal discourse, there is no father mentioned on either his own, or the baby's birth certificate. The master
discourse has been mistressed by old wives' tales and the cry of a baby.

From what position does Leila attempt to speak the maternal story? The linguistic rupture which maternity effects breaches the totalizing, controlling masculine discourse. Leila, as the pregnant young woman, is on the threshold of the semiotic and symbolic, disrupting and unfolding the narrative. In the first encounter with Edwin, Leila is absent, then silent. The first trace of her presence is the unsettling 'sweetly inviting' glimpse of her breasts. Throughout the narrative she is frequently positioned outside the house, for instance, on the night of the dinner party. It is interesting that Jolley uses a scene from this incident as a prologue. The choice, at first, seems puzzling, a tangential incident, as it deals with 'Home,' 'the old Country,' aspects of place which are common areas of critical focus for Jolley's work, but not so immediately relevant in *The Sugar Mother*. The scene also contains another typical Jolley feature, the outsider, the intruder who disrupts the settled calm of life. However these apparently disparate elements of place and intruder come together when we focus on the figure which I see as central to Jolley's fiction, the pregnant woman as intruder, and site of an intrusion. A 'sense of place' can then be seen in a new way as a desire to return to, or find again, in a new setting, a sense of place which is a return to home, or a feeling at home with, which is ultimately a desire to return to the Mother. Thus in the incident in which Leila is outside the house she is a 'stranger in the yard yet familiar' (*SM* 7). As the pregnant young woman, she represents the mother, who is both known and unknown, inside and outside, who stands in the threshold of the semiotic and the symbolic, disrupting and unfolding the narrative, while remaining folded in on herself and her baby: 'her arms folded round him as if to keep everything and every person away' (*SM* 189).

Leila is described as having a 'Madonna-like quality, the tenderness in the tilt of the head and the possibilities of silence, patience and endurance' (*SM* 193), perhaps similar to Bellini's Madonnas who Kristeva claims represent a mute, silenced, unrepresentable aspect of maternity. Leila has no words with which to speak of motherhood, but she does have the lived reality. She is unable to leave her baby with Edwin. Her return positions her in control, she claims the child as hers, and ignores the pretentious claims founded on legal and economic technicalities. She disrupts the border between biological and social constructions of ownership and naming with the materiality of her claim:

Leila, without a word or even a look, dropped her ugly handbag and took the crying child from Edwin. She sat down on the sofa and unbuttoning her blouse held the child close, her arms folded round him as if to keep everything and every person away. She bent her head so that her lips rested in the softness of the down-like hair. She was, Edwin could see, completely absorbed in her son, in comforting him and in protecting him and in feeding him. In spite of all the arrangements and
the money he was, without question, her son. She rocked to and fro on
the cushions. There was no sound in the room except the little gulping
murmurs of swallowing which the child made. Leila, rocking, began to
sing, a low crooning song. (SM 189–90)

The mother has a reality that cannot be denied, but she has been silenced within male
discourse. She remains folded in on herself and her baby, her representation is enclosed
and self-contained, her language is a low crooning. Leila can be said to represent the
mother still encoded within the patriarchal order, constructed on the model of the
Madonna, but also suggesting the unrepresentable rhythm and sounds of a jouissance
beyond phallic representation, which operates within the maternal thoroughfare as
evasive and enticing.

The patriarch's control is deconstructed by Leila's muteness, Leila's mother's
babble, Dorothy's music (and the disruption of texts, as suggested by the reference to her
dramatized version of King Lear) and Cecilia's carnivalesque telephone calls. It is
Cecilia's presence 'outside' the narrative which stretches the challenge to traditional
representations, although her absence could be said to suggest that she is
impotent/infertile, unable to change or control the discourse or events. However, in The
Sugar Mother change is effected by linguistic practices which stretch and dilate
traditional encodings of maternity to birth new bodies of being and knowing.

Cecilia's marginal position in the narrative provides an alternative perspective
from which to read The Sugar Mother. It suggests an unconventional, speculative
representation of motherhood. Kristeva talks about such a representation effecting a
shattering of conventional models with semiotic outbursts of light and space:

This is the sublimation of a totalizing power, pushed to the limits of
representability: form and color. . . .

It can only result in a shattering of figuration and form in a space of
graphic lines and colors, differentiated until they disappear in pure light. . .
. motherhood is nothing more than such a luminous spatialization, the
ultimate language of a jouissance at the far limits of repression, whence
bodies, identities, and signs are begotten.41

With such a representation new models of bodies, identities and signs might be possible,
formulated by the 'ultimate language of a jouissance.' The maternal metaphor would
then effect an interplay of semiotic and symbolic elements, to enable the speaking of
maternal jouissance within symbolic structures.

Cecilia is absent throughout the novel, and she apparently cannot bear children,
nevertheless she has a highly disruptive effect on the narrative. Her intrusion into the
text by means of the telephone and through Edwin's memory, challenges the
metaphysics of presence and offers a diversity and flexibility of subject positions for women.

As an obstetrician and gynaecologist she has mastered the male discourse on motherhood. The barrenness of this discourse is revealed by the conference she is attending, a conference on Infertility. She delivers babies at the Mary and Joseph Maternity Wing, a name which suggests that she subverts the patriarchal Madonna images of Edwin's references with a shifting paternal figure.

As a woman she is self-contained and aloof, suggested by her association with the Iceberg rose:

He pressed the rosebuds gently between his thumb and forefinger feeling the cool softness of the tightly closed and layered petals. They did remind him of Cecilia. It was their small, neat prettiness tightly closed. . .

He stared at the silent flowers. (SM 19)

Cecilia is closed, untouched, unpenetrated. She is also active, capable independent, achievement-oriented. Her characteristics suggest that she is the Virgin goddess archetype, 'one-in-herself who 'belongs to no man.'

It is possible to contain Cecilia within the patriarchal model by using the Freudian interpretation of her successful medical career as a child/penis substitute, but her intrusive presence 'outside' the narrative makes us question the sufficiency of this explanation. Kristeva's analysis reminds us that the desire to have a child can also be theorised as 'non-paternal' desire, seen by Kristeva as a desire for a reunion with the body of the mother, 'the homosexual-maternal facet' of desire, which is part of the elided voice of the mother/daughter discourse, ignored in Freudian analysis. This aspect of maternal jouissance draws on a maternal dream language:

_The homosexual-maternal facet_ is a whirl of words, a complete absence of meaning and seeing; it is feeling, displacement, rhythm, sound, flashes, and fantasied clinging to the maternal body as a screen against the plunge.

Kristeva's description of 'a whirl of words' makes an interesting context in which to read Cecilia's telephone calls, disruptive laughter and desire for food, as a way of representing desire for the maternal body and also as a means of separating from the mother.

Cecilia's focus on oral delights suggests a desire to fill the mouth up with words and food in an attempt to fill the void left by the mother. 'Cecilia loved food. . . . she positively stuffed herself with it' (SM 35). Her desire for food can be read as desire for the mother's body. The desire to be stuffed full of food is the metaphor that Irigaray uses to invert the Freudian/Lacanian (and Kristevan) image of lack which the daughter is
supposed to experience in Freud's Oedipal explanation. Cecilia's relationship with Vorwickl also valourizes the female/female, mother/daughter pattern and disrupts patriarchal heterosexual patterns.

The relationship between the written and the spoken word as used in The Sugar Mother also suggests an interesting illustration of the difference in maternal and paternal representations. While writing may function to produce what Kristeva refers to as a 'bounded text,' speech works to open up meaning. In The Sugar Mother, Edwin can be said to 'bind' the narrative with his literary allusions, his notebooks on the body and his lectures on The Study of Man. Cecilia's telephone calls, like Leila's mother's malapropisms, deconstruct the power of the written words; they open up the text with dialogical possibilities of speech, suggesting a plenitude of meanings. In Bakhtin's terminology, which Kristeva uses, the telephone conversations function as Menippean discourse, defined as carnivalesque, atemporal, disembodied and disorientating, freed from social and linguistic values and constraints. Rationality and the authorized texts have kept these Menippean tendencies in check, but certain narrative structures speak across, through and outside of the dominant discourse, enabling the release of disruptive, instinctual semiotic elements.

The telephone functions to give Cecilia a presence in the novel. Her conversations can be said to operate in the maternal thoroughfare, as an interplay of word and spectacle, as a communication across and through spaces. The fragmentary conversations become a space of intertextuality where texts meet, contradict and revitalize each other through repetitions, incomplete utterances and illogical connections:

Reaching out in the darkness Edwin answered the telephone. Cecilia's voice was remarkably close and clear . . . . She had escaped with Vorwickl from a lecture, a demonstration lecture on bonding. Blow up dolls. He heard her laughing. They had to blow up the mother and child, she told him, inflate them and then bond. He heard her laughing across continents. Exploding. He tried to wake up . . . . He told her he had a surprise for her. It's black he said with four legs and a tail. A parrot she said I'm only guessing. Right first time he said. She must be head first he said in an empty canister holding her legs nimbly together at the knees kicking frantic but only from the knees . . . . He heard her laughing. Red shoes he said . . . . Boots she managed in the middle of her laugh. Vacuum packed he said. Tinned she agreed. A parrot she said . . . . he could hear them squeezed together in a telephone box . . . . Guten Tag . . . Listen she said sharp teeth crunching fruit long distance. (SM 92–3)

Cecilia's language is outrageous, eccentric, contradictory and fragmentary; her conversation hints at orgies, dreams, death and perversions.
The ring of the telephone, Cecilia's voice and the world she reveals all threaten Edwin's world. One interpretation of the telephone calls is to view them through Edwin's eyes, as his unconscious, thus they become his attempt to filter his semiotic desires through to the symbolic:

*A world of disorderly notions* . . . He staggered trying to ignore his own imagination. He must ignore the tirade which was all of his own making. (SM 198)

If the telephone conversations represent Edwin's unconscious, then he cannot accept the carnivalesque elements of his unleashed semiotic desires. He pulls out the telephone cord and suggests writing. He wishes to prevent the return of Cecilia, which suggests that he is not comfortable with the disruptive female voice and seeks to repress it.

Cecilia's laughter also functions as an unsettling element in the text:

She often laughed at quite surprising things, things which he did not find amusing. (SM 181)

Thus Edwin is unsettled by Cecilia's laughter during their lovemaking, when she questions his everyday ritual of tea making, he hears the insistent echo of her laughter at his first meeting with Leila and her mother and when he realizes he is probably not the father of Leila's baby. Cecilia's laughter, like the telephone, questions the authority of Edwin's text and makes the reader aware of other stories that could be told.

Laughter plays in the thoroughfare of the semiotic and the symbolic, as part of the maternal discourse. Kristeva claims that the child's earliest experience of the semiotic is marked by laughter. This is the point of the first awareness of the mother, the experience of jouissance in the mother/child symbiosis, before language. As 'the riant wellsprings of the imaginary' it could be the space where bodies, identities and signs are begotten:

The imprint of an archaic moment, the threshold of space, the "chora" as primitive stability absorbing anaclitic facilitation, produces laughter.49

Cecilia's laughter can be said to represent her desire for jouissance through a reclaiming of the mother's body. Her disruptive laughter unsettles Edwin's masculine models of being and knowing and suggests the secret jouissance of the maternal body.

In the text laughter, the body and absurd speech rupture conventional representations of maternity. Leila's mother has subverted the rules of patriarchy to play her own game and rename maternity. Although the sugar mother is mute, Leila's silence disrupts the symbolic with jouissance, and she claims the child. Cecilia's disruptive
voice challenges the master narrative, but she is absent and has no child. Can she contribute to the maternal discourse?

The climax of the narrative is orchestrated with a cacophony of sound that confuses and disrupts meaning and purpose and opens out a variety of narrative strands, each with its own story:

Prince howled at the kitchen door and Blackie whimpered in reply and the *Concentus Musicus Wien*, with conscientious precision, began to play Johann Sebastian Bach. Somewhere in between, Fiorella, inspired, went on with her own interpretation of the music. She was up to a later passage. And above all this Leila's baby, whose voice was powerful, cried. (SM 185)

Dogs bark, music plays, the phone rings and the baby cries. The women's voices erupt in a discordant harmony. Cecilia's laughter functions as part of this cacophony, as a refusal to allow the master narrative an authoritative, univocal voice.

The phone call from Cecilia ruptures the narrative closure of her expected return home with the tantalizing news of Cecilia's and Vorwickl's plane being detoured to Cairo. Daphne, after speaking to Cecilia on the telephone, suggests that this deviation may open up the text to the possibility of yet another representation of maternity:

"My head like yours', she added, 'is full of the noise of a crying baby'... I actually began to have a foolish little fantasy about a baby, a little princess, starting her life on the edge of the Nile. You know, the Nile, *great father of waters, thou that rollest thy floods through eighty nations*. . ." She sighed and continued, 'I know there is no child there but I thought, I imagined what it would be like to cherish and nurture a child who has played on the grass and the sands along the banks of that great river.' (SM 207)

This story is evoked out of a telephone line that is bad, crackling and humming, and it may necessitate reinterpreting the original sugar mother intrusion as unpruned trees scraping against the window, yet it offers seductive possibilities. Is another sugar mother story to be enacted on the shores of the Nile. If there is a child crying, who is the father? Is there a father? Is this the matriarchal Virgin story, set, appropriately, on the banks of the Nile, with its all female cast. What happens to the mother's inscription in the symbolic when the child is a daughter instead of a son? Imagine what it would be like to cherish and nurture such a child. The imaginary possibility is fascinating, unsettling, empowering.

*The Sugar Mother* suggests that in confronting the mother linguistic and social structures need to be challenged and stretched. To use the maternal body as a metaphor
for writing allows the release of drives and desire into social and linguistic structures, enabling a social encoding of the body and an embodying of semiotic elements in the symbolic. Maternity can be said to effect a linguistic rupture which breaches the master narrative and positions woman in the maternal thoroughfare, where multiple narratives fold and unfold.
NOTES

1. Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 238
2. Kristeva 237
4. Kristeva 238
7. Kristeva 242
12. Kristeva 249.
15. Kristeva 239.
17. Kristeva 239.

25 Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 243.

26 Kristeva 246.

27 Kristeva 243.

28 Kristeva 249.

29 Kristeva 253.

30 Kristeva 262–3.


32 Kristeva 1.

33 Irigaray, 'One Doesn't Stir' 65.

34 Kristeva, _Powers of Horror_ 49.

35 Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 239–40.

36 Kristeva 249.

37 Kristeva 249.

38 Kristeva 247

39 Kristeva 243.

40 Kristeva 243.

41 Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 269.


43 Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 239–40.

44 Irigaray, 'One Doesn't Stir' 61.


Kristeva 84–5.

Julia Kristeva, 'Place Names' 283.

Kristeva 283.
Chapter 10: From One Identity to an Other – From Dispossession to Inheritance?

The heroic stories of Western civilization are about becoming a man and the explanatory myths, such as those constructed by Lévi-Strauss and Sigmund Freud, are stories told by sons, about the desire to inherit the name, the authority, the power of the Father. These stories are predicated on the silenced Mother, who the sons must repress because she represents the threat of castration, the loss of manhood. In such stories the daughter is doubly dispossessed. As woman her entry into the Father's world is difficult because of 'the problem she has with the phallus', and, as daughter, her relationship with the mother is denied.

The Oedipal conflict is the framework that Kristeva uses for her analysis of the challenge to the paternal function of language. The naming, authorizing, identifying function of language is the child's means of entry into society through the Name-of-the-Father. Language creates the subject position T, it constructs knowledge, power and identity. But language is also constructed on the silenced, repressed 'other' language of the unconscious. A challenge to meaning unsettles the unity of the speaking subject and reveals a subject-in-process which allows for the repressed unconscious to shape the construction of self and signification.

In 'From One Identity to an Other' Kristeva, using an argument based on Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, challenges the notion of unity of meaning in both subject and signification. She posits instead a heterogeneity of meaning and signification evident in poetic language which works through a crisis or an 'unsettling process' to disrupt meaning and subjectivity:

I shall therefore . . . argue in favor of an analytical theory of signifying systems and practices that would search within the signifying phenomenon for the crisis or the unsettling process of meaning and subject rather than for the coherence or identity of either one or a multiplicity of structures. [italics Kristeva's]

This unsettling process, which Kristeva argues arises from the semiotic, draws on the instinctual, pre-Oedipal stage of the child's bodily contact with the mother which, according to Freud, needs to be repudiated if the child is to enter the symbolic world of language. Kristeva argues that, while language is constructed by the repression of the instincts and drives of the unconscious and the repression of desire for the mother, poetic language continues to reveal the presence of the semiotic by such devices as music, nonsense and carnivalesque disruption, which challenge the symbolic function of language that attempts to be univocal, rational and authoritative. Poetic language reclaims the hidden elements by effecting a passage or thoroughfare which allows for the reactivation of maternal elements within paternal structures.
establish the maternal semiotic activity within the symbolic which constitutes the heterogeneity of poetic language and subject:

Language as symbolic function constitutes itself at the cost of repressing instinctual drive and continuous relation to the mother. On the contrary, the unsettled and questionable subject of poetic language (for whom the word is never uniquely sign) maintains itself at the cost of reactivating this repressed instinctual, maternal element.4

The semiotic is constrained by the symbolic, that is, it must work in and through the symbolic in order to be recognized and recovered by language and self, and to maintain symbolic and social cohesion. But poetic language provides a space for a disruption of the patriarchal constructs of signification and self and a challenge to the paternal function of naming and authorizing.

Jolley's companion novels *My Father's Moon* and *Cabin Fever* can be read as an interesting illustration of Kristeva's theory in 'From One Identity to an Other.' The unsettling, maternal element of language, contained and repressed by the symbolic function of language, yet operating within language as a 'crisis' or an 'unsettling process,' disrupting unity of meaning and subject, is evident in these texts. The narrator Vera, as a subject-in-process, unsettles meaning and coherence as she works and reworks the semiotic and symbolic tension in the signifying process of her narration. Using the device of memory she explores her relationship with her father and mother and attempts to accept her own role as mother. Her position as a young pregnant woman whose pregnancy contravenes the legitimating codes of post-war British society is dismptive. As a young woman pregnant too soon, both psychologically and socially, she challenges conventional social and linguistic constructions of maternity and struggles to find a site which will allow her to claim authenticity and meaning. She finds that to maintain herself it is necessary to reactivate the 'repressed instinctual, maternal element.'5

While both books deal with Vera's pregnancy, *My Father's Moon* focuses on the role of the father (Vera's and Helena's) and *Cabin Fever* is more concerned with the women in Vera's life at that crucial time. Jolley has said that:

*Cabin Fever* is not so much a sequel to my last book [*My Father's Moon*] as a companion volume.

*My Father's Moon* is really a homage to the father of the central character, Vera Wright. *Cabin Fever* moves on, and is a homage to Vera and the mother.6

It is interesting that *My Father's Moon* was written first. This suggests that the relationship with the father has to be worked out first, while the maternal is repressed or
silenced. The Freudian Oedipal story privileges the Father as the means of entry into the constructs of Law, language and social institutions and represents the daughter as dispossessed. Thus, in her search for identity and a socially sanctioned role, as a young woman with an unsanctioned pregnancy, it is perhaps necessary that Vera first attempts to claim her position in the symbolic social order through reclaiming her relationship with her father. But the maternal, repressed, yet present in My Father's Moon, must also be reclaimed.

Poetic language, as represented by the metaphor of the pregnant body, provides a site for the disruption of symbolic structures. The pregnant body threatens to rupture patriarchal authority and control with undecidability and desire. Linguistic and social structures can be said to be unsettled by the trope of pregnancy and the maternal metaphor can function as a filter, threshold or thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic, working to reactivate the repressed maternal.

Kristeva suggests at the end of 'From One Identity to an Other' that women provide the opportunity for developing a new theory of signification which is grounded in a multiplicity and intertextuality of meaning, which weaves together drives, bodily impulses, the maternal, the paternal, social and historical factors and which arises from a speaking subject who is a subject-in-process, thus providing a thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic:

It is probably necessary to be a woman (ultimate guarantee of sociality beyond the wreckage of the paternal symbolic function, as well as the inexhaustible generator of its renewal, of its expansion) not to renounce theoretical reason but to compel it to increase its power by giving it an object beyond its limits. Such a position, it seems to me, provides a possible basis for a theory of signification, which, confronted with poetic language, could not in any way account for it, but would rather use it as an indication of what is heterogeneous to meaning (to sign and predication): instinctual economies, always and at the same time open to bio-physiological sociohistorical constraints.

This kind of heterogeneous economy and its questionable subject-in-process thus calls for a linguistics other than the one descended from the phenomenological heavens; a linguistics capable, within its language object, of accounting for a nonetheless articulated instinctual drive, across and through the constitutive and insurmountable frontier of meaning. This instinctual drive, however, located in the matrix of the sign, refers back to an instinctual body (to which psychoanalysis has turned its attention), which ciphers the language with rhythmic, intonational, and other arrangements, nonreducible to the position of the transcendental ego even though always within site of its thesis.7

Although language functions by repressing the semiotic elements, meaning is constructed as the result of the dynamic interplay between the maternally connotated
semiotic and the paternally connotated symbolic.

The formal device of the two separate texts of *My Father's Moon* and *Cabin Fever* could be said to acknowledge the paternal control of entry into the symbolic order, while the texts' narrative structuring device of dislocated memory affirms the semiotic challenge to meaning and selfhood. As the 'novel of the father' *My Father's Moon* is the more structured, coherent narrative, containing more details, 'facts,' about Vera's entry into the social structures of school, hospital and work; and its structuring image is that of journeys to represent Vera's quest for identity and a place in the symbolic order. *Cabin Fever* is a more 'interior,' free-formed narrative and its structural motif is the hotel room, which can be read as the semiotic *chora* or womb. Vera stays in her hotel room throughout the narrative, remembering and reworking the semiotic/symbolic, maternal/paternally connoted elements of many of her memories from *My Father's Moon*.

In *My Father's Moon* Vera identifies with her father who represents her means of entry into the symbolic order. Vera's position in the social world is insecure. She desires acceptance, but, lacking confidence, social position and power, she is on the margins of life at school, the hospital and at Fairfields. Her father sees her off on her journeys to these places, indicating that he wants to journey with her, to sanction the entry of his daughter, who is already disadvantaged by being a girl, and who then breaks the Law of the Father with her pregnancy. These leave-takings suggest that Vera's position in the public, social world of the Father is somewhat shaky. Kristeva argues that woman, especially a mother, has difficulty being accepted in the symbolic:

> The difficulty a mother has in acknowledging (or being acknowledged by) the symbolic realm — in other words, the problem she has with the phallus that her father or her husband stands for — is not such as to help the future subject leave the natural mansion. The child can serve its mother as token of her own authentication; there is, however, hardly any reason for her to serve as go-between for it to become autonomous and authentic in its turn.

Jolley's sense of the ridiculous provides a carnivalesque illustration of Kristeva's statement, 'the problem she has with the phallus,' through the device of fetishized last minute tokens of language and culture, the magazines, being thrust into her carriage as a substitute for her father, who is unable to travel with her. Jolley's essay 'Mr Berrington,' in *Central Mischief*, adds an interesting intertextual resonance. The father's decision to travel on the train with his wife and daughter to see them off in London results in his unexpected meeting with the wife's lover, who is planning to holiday with the mother and daughter. This suggests that semiotic elements of maternal desire threaten the father's position in the symbolic (*CM* 38). Freud's experience of travelling on a train as a young child and seeing his mother naked ('nudam') an incident which he
acknowledged caused his travel anxiety, also suggests the repressed maternal desire which unsettles traditional interpretations of journeys as having masculinist connotations.

Although the power of the Father appears strong in this novel through the function of the Law (Vera's marginal position is because of her lack of social standing and her unsanctioned pregnancy) the actual power of the fathers is weak. The opening lines of the text suggest this:

'Why can't the father, the father of your – what I mean is why can't he do something?'
'I've told you, he's dead.' (MFM 1)

The father of Vera's child was married and is now dead. Helena's father had a reputation for having fathered many children, but he has not shown any interest in caring for them. Vera's own father sees her off on many journeys, but he is always left at home. Mr Morris, the husband of one of the teachers at Fairfields, creates the impression of 'the perfect husband and father' (MFM 15), but his wife is left to bear the burden of his irresponsibility. The institutions of school, the hospital and Fairfields are dominated by women. Vera, despite her desire to be accepted within the social order, indicated by her game of comparisons at school and her aspiration to win the Gold Medal, often acts as a disruptive element, which is indicated by her secret baths at school (MFM 38-9), the stolen food at the hospital (MFM 68), the way she causes trouble for Nurses Sharpe and Queen (MFM 68-9) and her effigy of Night Sister Bean (MFM 73). These incidents suggest a disruptive, semiotic power, which challenges and unsettles the authoritative structures which attempt to contain a young woman. In a novel that purports to recognize the power of the Father, these elements act as objects of abjection, elements which both attract and repel the subject-in-process. For Vera these incidents are abjections associated with the maternal which she would like to disclaim because they threaten her entry into the symbolic.

Vera desires to enter the world of the Father, she wants to release, or deny, the maternal hold (both as daughter and mother). Vera's 'violent, clumsy breaking away' from the mother, her attempt to authenticate herself, is revealed in the opening incident of the text. Vera's move out of her mother's house to Fairfields with her daughter Helena, who is dressed in a white dress with her hair tightly plaited, 'like a miner's child dressed up for an outing!' (MFM 1), suggests Vera's attempt to inscribe mother and daughter within the accepted conventions of the symbolic realm. Vera's anger with her mother, her fear of falling under 'the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling' is expressed in her argument with her mother by her shattering of the milk bottle which represents Vera's desire to break free of the maternal influence, to assert self over the
mother, to repudiate the milk, to shatter the relationship, to go on her own journey.

Other scenes associated with objects of abjection, such as the secret baths at school, the visits to the subterranean kitchens at the hospital, the stolen rations, the soldier with a terrible stomach wound and Vera's suppression of her pregnancy, reveal the threat to Vera's entry into the symbolic and challenge her autonomy, but they also reverberate with repressed desire, for instance Diamond and Snorter's bath serves a pleasurable rather than a purificatory function (*MFM* 58).

The maternal influence continues to work through the narrative creating heterogeneity of meaning and subject–position, revealed through Vera's confused and conflicting desires; she wants to be seen off on her journey by her father (*MFM* 25), and yet want to return to the mother to be held and comforted by her (*MFM* 33, 93), despite the realities of the conflict between mother and daughter.

The desire to be cherished and held by the mother, to maintain the semiotic, instinctual, maternal element within the signifier, is the unwritten, repressed script in patriarchal discourse. The words of cherishing, the language of desire, are the words learnt at the mother's breast. As a child, on her way to school Vera remembers and desires the words, the cherishing of her mother:

But I want the words of cherishing spoken in German. I want those first words the child remembers on waking to the knowing of language. I wish now in the train to be spoken to as *du... (MFM* 21)

Within the present patriarchal paradigms of language the language of desire, the maternal language, disrupts and unsettles meaning but can only be acknowledged as the deferral of meaning, the shadow of meaning, revealed in images, dreams and hints, released from the unconscious, or, as in this example, in the forbidden foreign language of the enemy.

The language of the mother, the relationship with the mother is an ambivalent one. Vera's school memories of her mother involve a desire for the warmth and comfort of her mother's body: 'I pretend that the nightdress is my mother holding me' (*MFM* 33), but it also shows the conflict, the daughter's rejection of the words of her mother: 'Shut up,' I said, not liking her to speak to me in German in front of the woman from next door. 'Shut up,' I said again, knowing from the way she spoke it was a part of a poem. 'Shut up,' I crushed the nightdress back into the overnight bag, 'it's only a nightgown!' (*MFM* 33)

In this Easter story the mother is denied three times. Vera,¹² the sacrificial victim, is divested of her seamless robe.¹³ The Father/Son Easter story reverberates with the suppressed mother/daughter parallels.
Repressed desire for the rejected maternal within the patriarchal structures, the trace of the semiotic in the symbolic, creates the crisis, or unsettling of meaning and identity for Vera. While the structure of *My Father's Moon* suggests Vera's attempt to enter the symbolic order, a gap of desire and longing is opened up by the ambivalence associated with Vera's relationship with her mother, by the figure of Ramsden, the silent traveller on Vera's journey, and also by the strange disjunction of the paternal/maternal, symbolic/semiotic, in the symbol of 'My Father's Moon.'

The moon is a feminine image, traditionally associated with Artemis or Diana, virgin Goddess of the moon, the hunt, chastity and childbirth and linked to the 'feminine' qualities of instincts, emotions and the unconscious. Like the Goddess Artemis Vera is 'the lady with the lamp' (Artemis is often depicted as carrying a torch), is associated with the hunt (one of the chapters in *My Father's Moon* is called 'The Hunt' and reference is made to Mozart's 'The Hunt') and she is associated with groups of women and woodlands (Gertrude's Place) and water imagery (the river shack). One way of reading the reference to maintain the patriarchal structure is to position Vera as her father's moon, that is the daughter of Zeus, desiring paternal approval. The Goddess Artemis is a competitive, high achieving virgin (woman unto herself), which Vera aspires to be until her affair with Dr Metcalf. As Artemis, Vera wants the love and approval of her father, and his 'gifts' to enable her to enter the symbolic order, but the patriarchal power of legitimating and naming thwarts the entry of an unmarried mother with a young child (although the older Vera who narrates the story, appears to have achieved her ambition and her child isn't mentioned). But the Goddess of the hunt is also the Goddess of the moon, the Goddess of chastity is also the Goddess of childbirth. The Moon Goddess as maternal influence disrupts Vera's journey, 'the call of the mother' haunts her.

Another way of reading the moon image is as a trace of the repressed maternal which Vera relocates onto her father, a reactivating of the 'repressed instinctual, maternal element,' a linking of the child and father through the silenced mother. Vera has repressed and silenced her mother, and displaced her feelings onto a maternal image which becomes the means of relating the father and the child:

The huge Easter moon, as if within arm's length, as if it can be reached simply by stretching out both hands to take it and hold it, is low down in the sky, serene and full, lighting the night so that it looks as if everything is snow covered, and deep shadows lie across pale, moon-whitened lawns. This moon is the same moon that my father will have seen. (*MFM* 26)

The moon can be figured as the thoroughfare between the maternal and the paternal, the semiotic and the symbolic, allowing the child to move into the socio–symbolic structures of the Father, by means of the moon which shines on both father and child.
The child and father are thus united by their desire for the moon/mother. Although Vera is ostensibly father-identified, and has silenced the mother, the father/daughter relationship draws its strength from this secret link, this maternal filter, the desire to be cherished by the mother. Kristeva claims that the signifier, in thus case, the moon, is heterogeneous and that desire provides a sliding signification that links the symbolic and the semiotic and the father and child in desire for the mother, in 'the equivalent of incest.' It is the shadow of the maternal, unsettling the text that gives My Father's Moon a strange power.

It is possible to position the four main female characters as representations of aspects of motherhood, each one offering a different filter between the semiotic and the symbolic and each one subverting the Oedipal family configuration. Vera's mother is situated as the actual mother, thus the repository of ambivalent desire for nurture and abjection. Gertrude and Magda can be seen to represent the 'good' and the 'bad' mother respectively. Gertrude provides nourishment, nurture and shelter, but also a pull back to the protective dependency of childhood. Vera wants to break free and is attracted to the 'bad' mother figure, who is sensual, irresponsible and selfish, identified with the fox. The mother is traditionally represented as asexual, and not associated with desire and jouissance, thus Magda the sexual woman has no children and Vera must transfer her desire to Magda's husband (Vera sees Helena as the child of Magda and Jonty). Ramsden, in this configuration, becomes a kind of archetypal primal mother, combining Magda's jouissance with Gertrude's nurturing.

The silent Ramsden figure, the Madonna, mother-substitute figure of desire and deferral, suggests the repressed jouissance of poetic language. Vera is acutely aware of Ramsden's absence/presence on her journeys. Ramsden folds and unfolds through the narrative like snatches of a remembered melody, the place of desire and cherishing, the secret harbour:

Perhaps one day it will be the right time to try to explain and, at the same time, to give up the secret of the harbour. The sky harbour, the exact place in the Brahms where the soprano sings with sustained serenity, her voice rising above a particular group of trees on a certain road known only in this pattern of events to me. (MFM 123–4, cf 23)

The sky harbour is another maternal/paternal image, associated with the semiotic rhythm of music. Gertrude's place, as a haven of peace and goodness, acts as a melodic variation of the Ramsden theme, 'the sky always seems nearer at Gertrude's Place' (MFM 108). Music, the sky harbour image and my father's moon function as a maternal filter, providing a thoroughfare between the semiotic and the symbolic.

Ramsden is represented as a maternal, protective figure (MFM 22, 23, 27), yet
she is silent and suffering. She is present on Vera's journey, if Vera catches the earlier train, where semiotic, maternal memories are released, providing a different, yet familiar perspective. The haunting deferral of meaning: 'Before this journey is over I intend to speak to the woman' (*MFM* 19), signifies the way that desire is created through the endless movement from one signifier to another, the sign presupposing the absence of the 'Thing' itself, the desire for the mother/child wholeness. The need to be maintained by the hidden maternal element reveals the heterogeneity of language and subject positions necessary for a woman to maintain herself within the symbolic structures.

The site of desire is in the maternal thoroughfare where the mother is both absent and present. To resolve the semiotic-symbolic split desire needs to be both anticipation and realization:

'It's the anticipation,' she replied, 'it's what is hoped for and then realized.' (*MFM* 21)

But for Vera the desire to return to the mother, transferred to her desire to speak to Ramsden, is endlessly deferred. The closing scene suggests that Vera cannot reach out to Ramsden until the ghost of her father's moon is laid to rest. The Easter moon shines over the empty buildings on Good Friday. Her father is dead, Vera has entered the world of the Father, the semiotic has been sacrificed and the Son's tale has been told. But next week, sometime soon, Vera resolves that she will approach and speak to the woman, begin the silenced mother-daughter dialogue. The daughter still has a tale to tell, but not yet, not in this novel which ends with endless deferral:

Tomorrow is Good Friday.
Next week I shall take the earlier train again and, before the journey is over, I shall speak to the woman... .

*Ramsden, I shall say, is it you? Much water has gone under the bridge – this is not my way – but I shall say it carelessly like this – Much water has gone under the bridge and I never answered your letters but is it you, Ramsden, after all these years is it?* (*MFM* 171)

The disruption of time and sequence, the broken sentence structures and the shifting subject position in this passage suggest the unsettling instinctual entry of the drives and desire into language.

Language, specifically Vera's writing out of her memories, has been the process of deferral, the move from one situation to another, from one signifier to another, from one symbol to another, creating desire because the object, the Other, the 'Thing' itself is never possessed, the mother/child unity is never reclaimed. Vera's journeys are characterized by dispossession, disinheriteance, discontinuity and dead-ends as she
searches for the lost moment, the moment of denial of desire.

At the beginning of the novel Vera recounts the moment of denied desire, juxtaposing the paternal and maternal modes of entry into the symbolic. Vera's father's farewells remind Vera of the night when Ramsden came to her by train. Rather than sending Vera off into the world of language and symbol, Ramsden had come to Vera, 'her eyes were pools of pleasure and tenderness' (MFM 4). Vera is caught between the two worlds, between desire and law, between body and language:

'I'd hoped...' I turned away from the clumsy embrace of her breathed–out whispered words knowing her breath to be the breath of hunger. (MFM 5)

Desire for another woman's body threatens the social and linguistic systems that are construed as being constructed on desire for the phallus. To enter the world of the Father, Vera must repress her desire, which means repressing her own sexuality as her joyless lovemaking with Dr. Metcalf indicates. Vera draws away from Ramsden, longing for, but unable to claim, her repressed desire. The Law of the Father does not allow her to enjoy Ramsden's body, the language of society has silenced the language of the body:

I turn away trying to avoid the place on the platform where Ramsden tried to draw me towards an intensity of feeling I could not be a part of that night. (MFM 5)

Vera longs for, but is unable to claim, repressed desire.

The 'intensity of feeling' which Ramsden offers Vera suggests another repressed desire, the secure but stifling power of the mother. Joan Kirkby, using Kristeva's work on abjection, suggests that it is the 'call of the mother' that leads to a denial of female sexuality and to 'maternal blackness' in Elizabeth Jolley's work. In 'About Chinese Women' Kristeva claims that the patriarchal denial of the orgasmic maternal body means that in order for a woman to enter the symbolic order she must deny her own body, which results in masochistic relationships. Vera has such masochistic relationships with her school friends and nursing colleagues. Her relationships are aloof and competitive, measuring herself against others. She is passive in her relationship with Dr Metcalf and Ramsden, unable to respond to intimacy or jouissance. It is partly because of her own unresolved relationship with the maternal that Vera cannot accept her own self and has conflicting relationships with others. Vera, as a structural device, has a disruptive function in the text, but as a character she is closed in on herself, unable to open up and respond in a relationship. She has not found an enabling voice within the patriarchal discourse.
There is, however, an ambivalence in Jolley's writing, so that desire for the mother, although it is repressed and deferred, ruptures the text, unsettling paternal control. In the process it creates powerful writing which is characterized by carnivalesque humour, a subversion of social codes and a lyrical language of desire and cherishing which, I argue, can be read as a reclaiming of maternal elements filtered through the symbolic. My Father's Moon, apparently a homage to the father, is driven by the 'secret motor' of repressed drives and desires. In 'How Does One Speak to Literature?' Kristeva examines the conflict the subject experiences between desire and the Law, the testing of the subject's dependence on the laws of the signifier, and the displacement of desire. In order to maintain herself Vera finds it is necessary to confront the signifying system with the repressed drives and desires which are revealed in the maternal thoroughfare. Language must be broken open, refashioned and reinscribed within a semiotic context, thus images of desire are evoked by the moon on water, the sound of water at the River shack and the peaceful haven of Gertrude's Place. Desire is not associated with Dr Metcalf's cold hard narrow bed in the hospital, that is the site of sexual knowledge rather than jouissance. Likewise there is no sugar or joy the night Vera sleeps on the cold hard floor of the housekeeper's room at Dr Metcalf's, when the apparent dissonance between maternal and sexual desire evokes despair. Vera's sexual jouissance in relation to Dr Metcalf is returned to her at the end of the novel, a 'thick, secret letter,' unopened.

Vera cannot approach Ramsden until she has returned to, accepted and embraced the maternal in her own body – her relationship with her mother and her own unplanned pregnancy. This is something she does not confront in My Father's Moon, but moves towards in Cabin Fever. The inappropriate choice of an embroidery book from Ramsden's bookshelf represents Vera's inability to reactivate the maternal. Her choice has been a recurring source of disappointment for Vera because it does not represent Ramsden. The book she has chosen does not allow her to take hold of the semiotic elements which might release her memories of Ramsden. The embroidery patterns become an empty encoding of the female world and experiences of pleasure and desire. Likewise, Vera's long wait at the bus stop for Ramsden indicates the silenced, misdirected maternal discourse.

Because the dominant patriarchal discourse has repressed the maternal, Kristeva claims that women may attempt to participate in the symbolic order by a transference of the maternal traits to the father, as seen in this text in the metaphor of 'my father's moon,' or by a melancholy submission to pain and suffering, suggested by the Easter imagery, Ramsden's association with suffering and the incidents of abjection. Kristeva suggests that a more positive speaking position for women is difficult. She claims that repressed drives and desires create a gap which, while they open up the heterogeneity of language,
they do so by opening up an abyss in which the unstable subject may lose her identity:

Psychosis and fetishism represent the two abysses that threaten the unstable subject of poetic language.²²

Vera's pregnancy opens up such a gap, it positions her as an unstable subject. Linguistic and social structures are unsettled by pregnancy, especially an unsanctioned pregnancy, which cannot claim the Name-of-the-Father. The incidents of pregnancy and birth which Jolley deals with in My Father's Moon are ones which are unsettling because they cannot be adequately inscribed within the patriarchal structures of language and society.

The first incident is Vera's dream at Dr Metcalf's, which is the memory of the cries of a pregnant young woman banished from her father's house because of her pregnancy (MFM 93–4). The memory arouses a sense of the contrast between the patriarchal rejection and the maternal comfort through the image of the sharp fresh fragrance of the 'snapped-off and bruised elderberry' which is overpowered by the smell of bone and glue, the blast furnace and the mine shaft; through a contrast between the women as agents of reproduction and the impersonal agents of production and industry; and the contrast of the musical soft, flute-like voice of 'my mother' which comforts and soothes, but is drowned out by the dominant discourse:

With a heaving roar the blast furnace on the other side of the town opens and the sky is filled with the familiar red glow. (MFM 94)

Pregnancy, which threatens to rupture the symbolic order with undecidability, with images of desire and death, is displaced and silenced.

The other birth dealt with in My Father's Moon is in a section entitled 'Single Malt,' (MFM 137–43) which starts with a reference to Vera's mother, and Vera's desire to restore her memories and relationship with her mother. The three incidents in this section all show Vera on the margins of events, drawn into something she is unable to understand, to which she can't give meaning or coherence. They are incidents where the semiotic disrupts and disturbs the signifying process, but which are finally repressed and contained within the symbolic order. Vera finds it difficult to deal with these incidents because the emotions she experiences exceed the language forms that encode them.

The incident concerning the birth/death of the baby is one which Vera slowly moves towards, obviously disturbed and confused by this memory, finding it hard to confront. The tears and the small rustling sigh of the baby's breath are measured against patriarchal language:

'I baptize thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.' (MFM 141)
Is the function of naming sufficient? Is the child inscribed within the patriarchal order by virtue of this baptism? Patriarchal words and ceremony do not seem adequate to give voice to the disruptive, instinctual processes of birth and death. The splitting of the signifier reveals multiple, contradictory ambivalence, and, ultimately, the loss of meaning and belief.

Vera confronts death again through the soldier with a terrible stomach wound (MFM 112–13). He is trapped in his totally abjected body with both legs amputated and his stomach torn away and crawling with maggots. He pleads for mercy, for Vera to place the cross in his wound. Vera cannot do this, it is not clean nor proper, such an action would draw her into his death and decay. She draws back, trying to separate herself. The nurse who comforts him does so by placing the cross, as sign and symbol in his wound, suggesting the incorporation of desire and death into the wound. Vera tries to tell Gertrude about the incident (MFM 114), but she is not able to transfer the semiotic, maternal elements of nurture and comfort associated with Gertrude's Place to the hospital, which, for Vera, functions as a site of abjection and rejection of the maternal.

Vera's own pregnancy is the ultimate disruption of the linguistic and social forces that constrain her. It positions her as an unstable, split subject. To name, to acknowledge her pregnancy, or to approach Ramsden, opens up a gap, brings into play the negative, heterogeneous nature of language. Unable to tell her father she is pregnant Vera contemplates suicide in a dream sequence that uses the death wish to disrupt and unsettle the unity of meaning. She dreams that there is a full moon which shines down the corridor where Dr. Metcalf's room used to be. Now the corridor leads to an unknown, unexplored room; a semiotic womb/tomb–like room of drives and desire, birth and death:

During the night there is a full moon, it makes a trellis of shadow and light on the opposite wall. It seems as if, instead of a corridor up here, there is another room. A room I have never seen before. L–shaped with a long passage leading to a place which shines as a river shines when moonlight lies across undisturbed water . . . The corridor ends abruptly in space. (MFM 162)

The passage leads to an abyss, a gaping hole.

Water in the water tower from an artesian well under the hospital has multiple associations, including the repression of unconscious drives, phallic sexual power, and childbirth:
I feel afraid of the power and the force of the water in the tower. I can imagine, all too easily, the depths of the precipice in front of me. It is as though a neglected wound, which I already know about, has been uncovered. (*MFM* 162)

The wound, with polysemic resonance, suggests the ruptured, even shattered mother/daughter relationship, the torn hymen, the soldier with a terrible stomach wound who begs for pity and Vera's own hidden pregnancy. Ultimately the wound which can never heal is the severed umbilical cord, the separation of mother and child which all future desire for objects will endeavour to heal, all future attempts at language will try to hide. In this text, the wound functions as a rupture, a gap between desire and death. Functioning as the piercing of the virgin's hymen and the soldier's manhood, the wound suggests sexual uncertainty, the co-existence of love and violence and reveals the sliding of desire to death. Vera desires to step across the threshold, to stand 'between desire and fulfillment,' without rupturing the gap between the hospital and the moon. She knows that the maternal thoroughfare would enable her to tell her secret and her father to understand it: 'If I was over there he would know without my telling him' (*MFM* 163). This knowledge, this secret desire would be possible in death. In death she could reach her father's moon, heal the wound, breach the semiotic/symbolic divide, but only by emptying the signifier of meaning (a function of fetishism) and suppressing the subject. Is it possible to articulate this knowledge in the symbolic, can Vera tell her father that she has disrupted the Law of the Father, repudiated her position in the symbolic, unsettled the naming function of language?

Two answers are offered. The first is the patriarchal one. In her dream she hears her father's voice urging duty:

>'Quite a lot of life,' he says, 'is doing what we don't like very much.' (*MFM* 163)

The other is a female one, speaking nonsense. The nurse who comes to disrupt Vera's dream and death wish draws her back to life with a carnivalesque disruption of meaning:

>'A–wun–a–tew–a tree a wun a woman band! Listen,' she says. 'Counter irritant,' she says, 'if things are bad make some other thing worse. Ching chang Chinaman givee good advice, don't pee until you have to. Busting!' (*MFM* 164)

Nonsense acts as a carnivalesque challenge to the symbolic function of language and as narrative uncertainty between the sign and signifier. Homi K. Bhabha, in an essay entitled 'Articulating the Archaic: Notes on Colonial Nonsense,' suggests that nonsense functions as a contradictory place between being and meaning, between subject and
It could be said to function like the maternal, semiotic elements in language, which filter into the symbolic, thus providing new sites for signification and self. Kristeva also argues that negativity and nonsense function to unsettle meaning and identity:

\[
\text{[T]he heteronomical negativity of writing operates, on the one hand, between \textit{naming} (utterance/enunciation) carried out by the subject of understanding (meaning) and \textit{polynomia}, that is, the pluralization of meaning by different means (polyglottism, polysemia, etc.) traversing nonsense and indicating a suppression of the subject.}^{27}
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Thus nonsense contests and ruptures meaning and positions the subject as a divided subject, a subject—in—process who occupies permutable, multiple and mobile places.

The unsettling of the maternal element, which has been contained and repressed by the symbolic function of language, operates within language as a 'crisis' or 'unsettling' process for Vera. Thus while she adopts the paternal stance, 'does her duty,' it is also necessary that she maintain herself by reactivating the repressed maternal element. To suppress the maternal element in discourse results in a rigid, unitary encoding while the disruption of the semiotic within the symbolic creates a multiplicity of subject positions as these incidents concerning pregnancy demonstrate. The rupture opens up a gap of longing, desire for the absent, irreplaceable mother. The lost idealized object can not be replaced. The gap between need and satisfaction constitutes desire. For Vera this is acknowledged in her attempts to replace the absent figure with other figures:

However much a person resembles another person, and it is not that person, it is not of any use. (\textit{MFM} 137)

The book ends without Vera approaching the woman in the train.

Carnival, music and nonsense work in the text to contest and rupture meaning and to position the subject as a subject—in—process who occupies multiple and permeable sites, who articulates desire on the threshold of the semiotic and symbolic, in the maternal thoroughfare. But the maternal remains repressed in \textit{My Father's Moon}, thus Jolley needs to return to it in \textit{Cabin Fever}. 
NOTES


2 Julia Kristeva, 'From One Identity to an Other,' Roudiez, *Desire in Language* 124–47.

3 Kristeva 125.

4 Kristeva 136.

5 Kristeva 136.

6 Rod Moran, Interview with Elizabeth Jolley, 'Big Weekend,' supplement to *West Australian* 11 May 1991 : 5.

7 Kristeva, 'Identity' 146.


11 Kristeva 13.

12 Vera's name, which means Truth reminds us of Pilot's question to Christ 'What is Truth?' Veronica (of which Vera is a corruption!) was traditionally one of the women who followed Christ as he carried his cross, and wiped the sweat from his face with a linen cloth which became imprinted with the image of Christ, something which is parodied at the hospital as the nurses wipe the surgeon's brows.

13 According to tradition Christ's garment, which was taken from him on the cross, was a seamless one.


15 Kristeva, 'Identity' 136.

16 Kristeva 136.


18 Kirkby 47–9.

19 Kristeva, 'Chinese Women' 147.

20 Julia Kristeva, 'How Does One Speak to Literature?' Roudiez, *Desire in*
Kristeva 116.

Kristeva, 'Identity' 147.

Derrida, *Dissemination* 213.


Kristeva 'Identity' 135.

Bhabha, 'Articulating the Archaic' 204–8.

Kristeva, 'Speak to Literature?' 111.
Kristeva asks: *What can be our [women's] place in the symbolic contract?* In 'Women's Time' she examines the need to theorize sexual difference and the necessity to acknowledge women's specific and multiple experiences of corporeal and reproductive desires if women are to claim an effective speaking position within the socio–symbolic system. According to Kristeva, the symbolic contract operates on the principles of linear historic time, but, for women, there is a dissonance between linear time, with its emphasis on the temporal and logical and which sites events in the historical time of production and language, and the *monumental* time of motherhood and reproduction, which is based on the reproduction of people and creative processes and the social reproduction of the 'symbolic denominator' of community. She claims that while the subject's position in the symbolic appears to be constituted by socio–historic specificities, the process of collective memory works to link individuals to a linguistic construct of community, for instance that of 'women.'

Kristeva argues that female subjectivity, while it may be determined by the linear socio–political realities and is subject to specific biological rhythms, also seems to partake of an intrasubjective rhythm of 'monumental time' associated with a sense of place rather than time and drawing on the mythic maternal representation of the womb as the *chora*, the source of life and anterior to time. She suggests a variety of situations in which space functions as an important element in the construction of identity:

'Father's time, mother's species', as Joyce put it; and indeed, when evoking the name and destiny of women, one thinks more of the *space* generating and forming the human species than of *time*, becoming or history. The modern sciences of subjectivity, of its genealogy and accidents, confirm in their own way this intuition, which is perhaps itself the result of a socio–historical conjuncture. Freud, listening to the dreams and fantasies of his patients, thought that 'hysteria was linked to place'. Subsequent studies on the acquisition of the symbolic function by children show that the permanence and quality of maternal love condition the appearance of the first spatial references which induce the child's laugh and then induce the entire range of symbolic manifestations which lead eventually to sign and syntax. . . . psychoanalysis as applied to the treatment of psychoses, before attributing the capacity for transference and communication to the patient, proceed to the arrangement of new places, gratifying substitutes that repair old deficiencies in the maternal space.

The maternal *chora* can be said to function as the site of the development of subjectivity and language, through the incorporation of the 'symbolic denominator,' that is semiotic traces or memory into the present socio–symbolic order.
If women are to claim a place in the symbolic order it is necessary to challenge the exclusion of women's representations of subjectivity. It is woman's sexual difference, represented within a Freudian phallocentric system as lack, which is used to position woman as more vulnerable within the socio-symbolic structures. Kristeva defends Freud's formulation of castration;6 however, she also acknowledges the need for women to call into question the grounds of such theories.7 She advocates an interiorization of the problematic of sexual difference and the 'founding separation of the socio-symbolic contract,'8 that is separation from the mother, which is represented, in Freudian theory, as the threat of castration, but which Kristeva, in this essay, suggests be extended to represent 'all that is privation of fulfilment and of totality,'9 and which I read as referring to the void effected by separation from the mother. Language and subjectivity are constructed by negotiating that space constituted by the 'founding separation.'

Kristeva advocates an attempt to open out language forms and paradigms, to break the paternal control, so that semiotic, maternal elements may be incorporated into the symbolic structure. She claims what is necessary is:

[T]o break the code, to shatter language, to find a specific discourse closer to the body and emotions, to the unnameable repressed by the social contract.10

In the shattering of language it may be possible to give birth to new language forms and thus make a space for women's maternal desires. Speaking from 'the very personal'11 it may be possible to speak of the specificity and multiplicity of each woman's experience, to split open that 'signifying space' designated 'Woman' to reveal diversity and heterogeneity, 'a fluid and free subjectivity.'12 According to Kristeva, to reject socio-symbolic structures entirely is to risk generating psychoses, while to develop a 'woman's language,' an 'écriture feminine,' is limiting because its lexical specificity is the product of, and also results in, social marginality.13 Women may, however, attempt to transform the system: 'to take hold of this contract, to possess it in order to enjoy it as such or to subvert it.'14 Thus 'aesthetic practices' are important because they function to situate the speaker both within a personal specificity and within a community.15 Monumental time functions to reinvest a cultural memory into the present, through a 'symbolic denominator,' or common memory, associated with place rather than time. One way this may be done is by the use of spatial metaphors, which incorporate representations of women's experiences of their biological rhythms into linear discourse. In this process memory reconstitutes events that were situated in linear time to a reformulation in monumental time, thus enabling a reclaiming of space and a reconstitution of time.

_Cabin Fever_ demonstrates how Vera uses memory to claim a speaking position
in the symbolic. It is necessary for her to return to repressed experiences of 'maternal space,' to acknowledge her 'founding separation,' in order to incorporate the maternal into symbolic structures. In Jolley's *My Father's Moon* the specific socio–historical constraints of post–war British cultural expectations of sexuality and maternity make it difficult for Vera to locate her experience as an event in 'monumental time,' which could function to link her to her body and the mother. Vera needs to return to her experience to give voice to the 'intrasubjective and corporeal experiences left mute by culture.' In returning to the experiences of a young mother in *Cabin Fever* Jolley displays the 'inspired thrift' which Helen Gamer comments on, the return to that what is not fully explored or exorcised:

Jolley operates with an inspired thrift. She returns unabashed to what she finds evocative and rich and not yet properly understood or exorcised.

Gamer, in a review of *My Father's Moon,* suggests that it was Jolley's wartime experiences as a nurse which sent 'waves of subdued power through everything she wrote,' but we have seen that it was also another aspect of her wartime experience which was worrying, disturbing, unsettling Jolley's memories and writing, that is, her own experience of a pregnancy as a young, single woman, the sudden intrusion of another, as Kristeva puts it, 'Within the body, growing as a graft.' The maternal body which has been censored and repressed, present yet silent in Jolley's work, is now recognized and embodied in language. It is this event, this pregnancy, which ruptures the symbolic linear structures of language and patriarchal structures of family, and opens the text up to a cyclical movement of fluidity, play and permutation in an attempt to find a discourse that is, in Kristeva's terms, 'closer to the body and emotions.'

In *Cabin Fever* Jolley returns to Vera's experiences as a mother, a mother on her own, raising a child. In this account she approaches these experiences through the recreation of the memory of the women in her life. *Cabin Fever* can be seen as an attempt by a woman to return to her mother, as a way of mediating the semiotic/symbolic interchange, of claiming the 'symbolic denominator,' in order to understand and deal with her own experiences of mothering. It involves confronting and accepting her destiny; the direction a life takes, determined by a series of choices made, and not made.

As Vera 'remembers,' free–floating dreams, memories, unconscious desires and drives form chains of associations, overlapping memories and a kaleidoscope of patterns which produce a text with endless play of signification. One possible configuration is of psychoanalysis. Inverting the role of the analyst that the text suggests she has become, Vera turns the focus on herself:
For my work a ruthless self-examination is needed for, without understanding something of myself, how can I understand anyone else? (CF 7)

Vera's memories and Jolley's text create a rebus (an image of dream analysis used by Freud22), a word puzzle, an intriguing interplay of incidents and counter-incidents which parallel, but also deflect from similar incidents in *My Father's Moon*, so that the text comes to resemble the analyst's 'talking cure.' The 'analysis' she engages in frees the unconscious, so that dreams, desires, and memories tease and reinterpret Vera's past and create a dialogic text, as the unconscious, which, according to Lacan, is structured like language, resonates with deferred and diffuse meanings. The release of repressed memories unsettles order, temporality and identity, restructuring incidents, reforming associations, activating unconscious drives and desire:

Memories are not always in sequence, not in chronological sequence. Sometimes an incident is revived in the memory. Sometimes incidents and places and people occupying hours, days, weeks and years are experienced in less than a quarter of a second in this miraculous possession, the memory. The revival is not in any particular order and one recalled picture, attaching itself to another, is not recognizably connected to that other in spite of it being brought to the surface in the wake of the first recollection. (CF 7)

Vera's memories dislocate the linear social organization of time, relocating her social, empirical, time-controlled life to within her memory, which functions as a fluid, heterogeneous space of knowledge. She divests herself of her social role (therapist/doctor?) and function (to give a conference paper), and locks herself in her hotel room.

The central metaphor of *Cabin Fever* is of Vera, alone in the enclosed, overheated hotel room. An accompanying metaphor is of the reflection in the mirror. Vera could be said to gather up her memories in the *chora* of the hotel room, rediscovering a secret life in her unconscious which feeds on the repressed maternal. Through the process of bringing the outside inside and breaking down the barriers of abjection, the retreat to the semiotic disassociates her from the empirically given, a conference in New York. It is a process she names 'Cabin Fever,' a need to search for the trace of desire, the mark of the beaver's tail, to discover what is beneath the surface:

Perhaps if I had known more about thin ice, about the metaphor of the strength of the beavers' tails, more about what is hidden immediately beneath the skin, hidden behind the voice of excited enthusiasm or the melting gaze which seems to be, at the time, love – I could have known and understood earlier about things which can not be known purely from
the surface, from the outside appearance. (CF 53)

Vera needs to activate the maternal thoroughfare in order to find the hidden drives and desires which are at work beneath the 'thin ice' of social structures.

Vera's enclosure in the *chora*-like space of the hotel room allows her to relocate her experience within the 'monumental' time of the maternal voice and gaze. Her retreat to the hotel room functions like the hysteric's retreat to reminiscences and bodily expressions. Kristeva's formulation of the function of space can be used to suggest that Vera, enclosed in the hotel room searches for 'arrangement of new places,' to 'repair old deficiencies in the maternal space.' I have already shown, in my analysis of *The Sugar Mother*, how an analysis of the importance of place for Jolley can be rewritten as an attempt to recover the lost original maternal space. *Cabin Fever* can be read as a series of 'arrangement[s] of new places' as Vera tries to rebirth the original repressed, unhappy birth of her daughter. Vera needs to relive her birthing experience as she has been unprepared for the power and intensity of the birthing experience, unprepared for the disjunction of maternal space into 'Father's time.'

Vera searches through her memories in an attempt to create a safe 'lying-in' place:

The room is a cave where a dog might turn round and round ensuring his safety before lying down to sleep. (CF 236)

The hotel room, as an image of the birthing process, can be seen as a cave, womb, or *chora* which is hot, (like Vera's mother's kitchen, and Sister Peter's kitchen) surrounded by the sound of running water, and sealed off, at the end of a long passage. In the hotel room she reconstitutes time, space and memory. Her memories unsettle and restructure the paternal order, allowing repressed desires and images to surface:

I have been reliving at a too short distance the final stages of my own wild pains and hysteria. (CF 123)

In the hotel room Vera can attempt to claim the 'corporeal experiences left mute by culture in the past.' She can move beyond her previous, frustrating attempts to understand her experience within paternal structures.

Vera's memories of Helena's birth are raw and lonely. She has no visitors, no husband. She feels Helena's birth is not 'registered' within the symbolic structures, that her motherhood is not sanctioned, inscribed in socio–symbolic structures through the legitimating Name–of–the–Father. After giving birth, Vera feels oppressed by the legitimating structures of time and paternity, this awareness coming significantly from a book by Virginia Woolf:
I have been reading where Virginia Woolf writes of 'the clock which marks the approach of a particular person' knowing that I have no such clock. (CF 94)

Vera does not have the means to legitimate her maternity. Dr Metcalf's watch, representative of masculine, linear time, is the only item Vera has had to attempt to claim legitimation, to attempt to encode her daughter in the symbolic order.

However, in Vera's recreation of the past, linear time is subverted by the interplay of memories which distend, ignore, conflate, or superimpose alternate time sequences on the narrative, culminating in the total loss of time in the hotel room: 'I am frightened. I have lost count of the days' (CF 236). To continue in this state would trap Vera in a psychotic state. To reconstitute her identity Vera needs to reclaim and rewrite her experiences.

Within the dream fantasy she constructs for the reliving–rewriting of her experiences, Vera's disregard for temporal time can also be said to act as a form of unconscious displacement of her inability to stop the inevitable passage of time that will reveal her secret, her pregnancy:

The coming of a baby, the birth of a baby is inevitable. In this house we are all pointing, because of my new baby who cannot be put off, inevitably in a certain direction. (CF 234)

Vera's pregnancy is inserted in time in a way which Vera would prefer it was not, for the 'untimely' birth threatens Vera's position in the social order. Vera's changing physical shape functions in the same way, being secret, hidden in monumental time, deep inside, and an increasingly noticeable intrusion into historical time, impeding her ability to do things like wear stockings or climb in bathroom windows:

'We'll go right away,' I say as if there is no change in me at all from being the kind of person who used to do all kinds of things, like climbing on the roof, to being the person who keeps on her winter coat in an over-heated kitchen in an attempt to hide herself, to keep hidden within herself her secret. (CF 71)

Vera's pregnancy, seen as an intrusion into social time and space, has to be kept hidden. She has to transpose the experience into many different forms before she can own it.

In the hotel room itself she recreates the lying–in of a new mother, repairing the deficiencies she felt in the actual situation as a mother. The day of Helena's birth is cold, with the wind howling outside (CF 93). Helena cries and is wrinkled with grief; images of birth and death are juxtaposed, the red tulips are reminiscent of Sylvia Plath's poem, 'Tulips,' about a suicide attempt, and the snow arouses fear rather than childish delight in Vera, for snow makes the unprotected mother's journey more difficult (CF 94–5).
When her mother holds her baby, Vera recognizes but is not able to respond to the shared experience of motherhood between mother and daughter:

She holds Helena trying to quieten her. I see something about my mother then, something which must have belonged in her life and which I have never seen before. (CF 94)

Vera desires, yet cannot be comfortable with, her mother's visit, because the visit is associated with guilt and accusations. Her mother conveys her distress in her comment 'I should never have given you the book about Elisabeth Ney' (CF 93). But the mother's desire to comfort is shown in the long journey it has been necessary for her to make. The journey could be said to function as a pilgrimage, an attempt to atone for the sins of the daughter.

Another memory of her mother's visit to her in hospital could be read as an attempt to reconstruct the birth situation. Vera, as a child, waits, expecting to recognize her mother's white hat, thus she is unprepared for the warmth and softness of her mother's new hat, a peachy golden fox fur, flesh of the mother - a hint of the silenced, denied mother/daughter dialogue:

I breathed in her scent and pressed my face to the soft smoothness and melted into it. I stayed against the softness of her cheek as if I could stay there for ever. As if I need never move away. (CF 75)

The child's desire is to remain with the mother, in the protective, omnipotent sensuous presence of the archaic mother, but the soft fur and skin contact are replaced with the visual image of an ugly scarf, suggesting that not only must the child separate from the mother, but the mother must also repress or cover up her sensuality and hide her desire:

For some reason my mother keeps the ugly scarf on her head in the house. It is a war-time habit this head scarf. Even though the actual war is over, in many ways it is still as if there is a war. As if the war will never really come to an end. (CF 75)

The ambiguous, silenced mother/daughter discourse in Cabin Fever is represented by the mother's transition from hats to head scarfs. The hats are elegant and sensual and Vera's childhood association is of her mother visiting her and comforting her, delighting the child with her hat. The scarfs are ugly and utilitarian, often covering curlers, and signalling a lack of cherishing, a time of war and rationing and recriminations (CF 30).

The juxtapositioning of the incidents entitled 'My Mother's Hats' and 'My Mother's Bathroom,' suggests that desire for the secret jouissance represented by the hats is followed by the dissonance of thwarted desire. While there is a fire, warmth, food and comfort in the kitchen, neither Vera nor her mother are able to enjoy the maternal
discourse. Vera retreats to her cold bedroom to wash her hair. Her mother opens the kitchen windows to let in cold air, and is angry at the gifts of toilet rolls and soap sent by a guest. All these actions involve objects of abjection, representing Vera's desire to separate from the mother, to establish her own 'clean and proper body,' an identity separate from her mother. Vera is also angry with her mother's grammatical mistakes: 'it is not usual, in English, to leave out the definitive article. . .' (CF 77). Syntactical correctness signifies tight symbolic control, a clear sense of borders, positions and rules. The mother blurs the boundaries, she does not establish a clear sense of self and other, thus she suggests the threat of drawing Vera back into the secure, but stifling power of the mother. Since the mother is also disturbed by the gift of toiletries it suggests that she too has not effected a clear sense of self as separate from her own mother. Abjection, while it functions as revulsion, because of the child's desire for autonomy, is also compelling because it represents the child's desire to return to the chorric security. Abjection can be said to be a recognition of the 'want,' or lack on which 'being, meaning, language or desire is founded,' so Vera, in separating herself from her mother, also fears that her mother by leaving her scarf on, by cloaking her desire, is going to go out and leave Vera alone, hungry as she is for maternal nurture.

The mother/daughter jouissance has likewise been covered over, misread in society and in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, with Freud suggesting that desire for a child is desire for a penis, or desire for phallic and symbolic power. But there is a maternal experience which exceeds the symbolic attempt to encode it, the woman—mother's desire for a reunion with the maternal body, described by Kristeva as the 'homosexual—maternal facet' of maternity. Irigaray has also attempted to reclaim the archaic desire between mother and daughter. In 'And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other,' she rewrites a mother/daughter discourse, which, because it has been silenced, each woman has to attempt to reclaim:

This breach of silence where we constantly reenvelope ourselves in order to be reborn. Where we come to relearn ourselves and each other, in order to become women, and mothers, again and again.

But we have never, never spoken to each other. And such an abyss now separates us that I never leave you whole, for I am always held back in your womb. Shrouded in shadow. Captives of our confinement.

And the one doesn't stir without the other. But we do not move together. When the one of us comes into the world, the other goes underground. When the one carries life, the other dies. And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive.

It is the silenced mother/daughter dialogue which Vera seeks to reclaim, which will
require a return to the womb, an attempt to recuperate the lost maternal, to find a speech where the three voices of mother/daughter/granddaughter can be heard, where one doesn't die giving birth to the other. She knows that the place of rupture, where 'one doesn't stir without the other' is in childbirth. Thus it is recreations of this that she enacts in *Cabin Fever*.

In an idealized recreation of the lying-in, Vera, in the hotel room dials for room service, and her food, like a child in this imagined birthing scene, is brought forth and laid tenderly, with 'a sense of offering and of cherishing' for the mother to enjoy, delight in. Vera positions herself as both mother and child, the symbiosis of the mother/child relationship both giving and receiving nurture:

I'll dial for room service and have a pot of coffee and some croissants sent up, balanced shoulder high on the palm of the waiter's hand, the heavy tray, silver at the edges, drenched in white linen, bringing with it an unbelievable atmosphere, a sense of offering and of cherishing carried, from the place where it has been carefully prepared, all the way up to my bedside. And here it will be placed, set carefully on the space cleared temporarily as my notes and papers are moved with reverence across the smooth covers of the bed.

I shall lie back on the pillows and breathe in the fragrance of the coffee and of the croissants, their crisp golden warmth, hidden folded in the white table napkin. I shall handle the cutlery, heavy with good quality, and feel with my lips the china rim of the cup. Seen from the consolation of this masterpiece my notes are noble. (CF 50)

As she 'lies-in' the 'gift' is brought to her. Like a new-born baby the fragrant offering is carefully prepared, wrapped in linen, carried with reverence and given with delight to the waiting woman. A space is made for this offering, notes and papers are moved aside, the symbolic must not only accommodate the maternal discourse, but recognize its power.

The jouissance of the maternal semiotic of this scene is, however, disrupted by the external social world as the text moves from this incident to a noise outside the room, where someone is drilling and hammering, shattering the maternal space. Something is broken. The noise and broken glass, as elements of abjection, disturb the maternal symbiosis, penetrate the secret enclosed space, in images that suggest birth, but a painful, disorderly, disturbing one (CF 50–1).

The other incident of room service that Vera relates is of a woman cleaning the room, 'crooning as black mothers croon to their little children' (CF 91). Vera longs to be sung to and cherished in this fashion. The singing opens up a dialogic gap in language; Vera imagines herself in an Ibsen play, transposed by Brecht or Pinter, set to music by Mahler, but again her desire is thwarted by the demands of language and society, for she must work on her conference paper. The symbolic encoding of the conference threatens to turn Vera's personal experiences into abstract studies:
Symptoms of Panic Disorder. Cupboard Infections. A recent study of Closet Relationships. (CF 91)

Their empty symbolic encoding is evident in the meaningless titles. Language is broken open with a parodic time/space dissonance. Locked in the hotel room, hearing symbolic structures crash around her, Vera retreats to a warm enclosing space, a haven of safety.

Vera reproduces other metaphors of space, safe havens where a pregnant woman can enjoy her enlarging body, rest in the chora. The first such haven is the pregnant woman's own body and her secret discourse with the other within:

Beatrice, Baba, Baba I must talk to you. You and I, Beatrice – Baba, must have a little talk. Twice today, Beatrice, you have kicked me. Beautiful Beatrice, the giver of blessings. You, Baba, seemed never to be growing and now, all at once, you have grown and you move. (CF 29)

In pregnancy the mother-subject experiences a splitting of the self, the self within the self, the intrasubjectivity of self/other/self. The signifying site of maternity stretches the skin, the boundaries in order to claim a space, a signifying process in linear time.

Vera's storehouse of memories hoards other images of warm, protective refuges, such as her memory of Gertrude's place:

I can think about Gertrude until I am held in the magic palm of memory and I can feel sure that her place, Gertrude's Place, is only round the corner from where I am. That I have only to step outside and walk the smallest distance, turn a corner, and I shall be at the foot of the path, trodden through the long grass, leading to her door and on to the poultry speckled field with Gertrude, herself, sitting at her open door, as she so often sat, a partly plucked fowl across her apron and her face turned towards me, smiling. It is only then, in this point of remembering, that I can disregard the great distance in time and place and event and, in this forgetting, take the few steps which are needed and, putting out my hand to reach her hand, my whole self to receive the blessing of the welcome she never failed to give. (CF 180)

Vera's desire for sanctuary can be interpreted as Kristeva might interpret it, as the paranoid's retreat from the symbolic into the chora of the semiotic, but the image of Gertrude's Place reverberates with a blessing which has the potential to be refreshing and empowering. Vera's memory steps aside from the coldness she continually experiences, in the case of this memory, caused by the loneliness of Fairfields. Gertrude is dead, Vera's father cannot change things at Fairfields, nor can Vera go home with him; a gulf exists between the semiotic and the symbolic. Time and space are reunited in Vera's memory, outside of the social constructs. The incident is structured around her desire to feel welcomed and loved, by using recurring images of being held and desired. Her
memory of Gertrude's place is associated with protective, welcoming hands: 'I am held in the magic palm of memory' and 'putting out my hand to reach her hand.' Other memories also evoke the desire to be held: Vera says of her mother, 'Her arms held me close' (CF 74), of Dr. Metcalf 'the last colour of the setting sun made his body golden as he waited for me and, smiling, stretched out his arms to draw me to him' (CF 125), she remembers 'lying naked, held by Mr George's arm, as he sleeps beside me' (CF 216) and she wants to hold someone in her arms, 'I have a great longing to be at home holding Tulip, changing her clothes and rocking her in my arms (CF 183). The desire to be accepted, held in someone's arms can be seen as a longing for the lost mother/child nursing, suggesting a desire to create an arrangement of spaces that reconstitute the maternal space.

The semiotic link of *chora*, blood and water resonates with the maternal associations of childbirth in Vera's memories of safe havens. The kindly welcome Vera receives at the George's is represented by the pleasant cherry-wood furniture of the attic bedroom, and the unattainable tranquillity of the deep watery green of the maid's room (CF 220), which are entwined with her memories of Mr George's bedroom, as sexual desire meshes with maternal jouissance, (as it does in the scene in *My Father's Moon* where Vera contemplates suicide (MFM 162–4)), through a linking of images associating phallic potency and maternal fecundity:

Somehow it is, just then, as if the remembered reddish colour of his pullover is blending with the glowing floor boards and the cherry-wood furniture of the attic bedroom, and I wonder why I should, during the sweet wild moments, consider this woollen garment and the attic chair, the woodwork of the wash stand and the floor boards. (CF 216)

The powerful images which attract Vera are metaphors of safe, enclosed places and homely objects. The juxtaposition of paternal and maternal images highlights Vera's attempt to inscribe herself in the social order, while her pregnancy disrupts this attempt, in a similar way to which the sliding from maid's to master's room creates conflict in the temporal, social context:

If I do belong to Mr George, as he says I do, how will it be about the attic bedroom, the cherry-wood furniture and the floor boards? And how will I be able to go on sitting in the deep watery green of the maid's sitting room? That wished—for shaded green of the conservatory mixed with the ancient yellow—ochre of the table cloth, will that have to belong to someone else? Where will I be, if I do belong to Mr George as he says I do, where will I be in this house? At present I am all over the house, everywhere, both openly and in secret. (CF 233)

As the disruptive pregnant woman figure Vera is 'all over the house,' fitting in with the
patriarchal social constructs as a domestic, but also disrupting those constructs by the jouissance of secret desires. But, if she 'belongs to Mr George,' has her child under the protection of Mr George, will she forfeit the maternally inscribed place of joy and resistance, will she be subsumed under the patrimony?

One way of viewing the incidents 'At the Georges' and 'Closely Watched Hedges' are as imaginary constructions created by Vera to find and test a site for herself within a family configuration. The father of Vera's child is dead, so she cannot be positioned in the social structures through his name, so she searches for another means of entry into the symbolic order. In the incident concerning the Wellingtons she is marginalized, excluded from the family which is composed of the tight-knit, tightly controlled family structure of Mummy and Daddy Doctor. This 'ideal family' has a dream-like surreal quality, and an unattractive rigidity. Their suburb is characterized by the image of the closely watched hedges which contain the 'happy family packages' which exclude Vera.

The 'closely watched hedges' function dialogically. The neat suburban garden, clipped, controlled and maintained, works on one level to exclude the marginalized single mother from the 'closely watched,' paternally instituted family structure, but they also represent a stifling conformity she does not want, 'I am closed in by them' (CF 57). They suggest the approved family pattern which Vera needs in order to participate in the symbolic order:

I like this garden and wish that it was my place with the children's toys all over it and a husband coming home in the evening. (CF 67)

Vera needs a father's name on her baby's birth certificate, but she gains a certain pleasure from the fact that this knowledge is private and hidden (CF 68). Similarly, the hedged gardens hint at the secret enclosed garden of sexual pleasure; the 'garden with the wild toys' and the glossy thick leaves of the hedges, which are associated with her secret meetings with Dr Metcalf (CF 68), also contain secret signs which suggest the site of hidden jouissance, the baby moving and growing within the mother's body:

In the hedge near the collapsing gate post there is a little piece of pink wool, thin like darning wool, caught in the green leaves. I have seen it before. I look out for it every time I come home. Because it is there and, because it is always there, I feel certain it means something which I have thought all along, that my baby is a girl. Beate, Beatrice, Baba, Baby. (CF 75)

But delight in the baby's body, and the mother–daughter bond is hidden and difficult to claim.

To reclaim maternal nurture Vera moves towards the secret site of jouissance, the site of pleasure and pain, to be desired and feared. This site is the secret centre of Cabin
Fever, it is the return to the childbirth experience and the mother/daughter/mother relationship.

Elizabeth Grosz says that the central chapter of Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* is the point of self speculation, where Irigaray holds the mirror up to herself, the curved speculum displaying the 'mysteric' who delights in her own self-contained pleasure, in contrast to the surrounding chapters which are a critique of the phallocentric theories of Freud and Plato. In a similar way the structure of *Cabin Fever* follows a pattern where the recurring images of childbirth move into a central opening up to Vera's experience of childbirth, at the maternal core of the text, 'The Hilda Street Wentworth.' This is the incident Vera has not been able to approach until now. In *Cabin Fever* she has had to recreate many childbirth images, 'memories which haunt' (*CF* 92), before she could claim it for herself, for how can this rupture be spoken within the symbolic?

Vera's time at the Hilda Street Wentworth is happy; she is befriended, nurtured and cared for by Sister Peters and Herb, her work keeps her busy and she has time to spend with Helena. The images and memories associated with her time at Hilda Street are ones of fertility and comfort: cosy meals in front of the fire (*CF* 102), warm earth, the sound of doves (*CF* 109) the sugar store, and jam making (*CF* 140), a pregnant rabbit (*CF* 103, 117), babies being held, fed and comforted, with the babies' sounds mingling with the sounds in the garden:

Everything is sweet and nice at the Hilda Street Wentworth. The lines of nappies and towels blow in the damp wind. . . .

It is sunny in the garden and for half an hour, a little gift of time, I thin out and transplant some tiny cabbage plants. My knees make hollows on the warm earth and the doves in Mr Peters' dovecote, . . . talk to and fro softly; a contented murmuring reminding of the tiny gulping noises when the new babies are feeding all at the same time. This gentle and sustained music is a reminder of the incredible contentedness which accompanies the temporary moments of pleasure while hunger is satisfied and survival for the next few hours is promised. (*CF* 108–9)

Vera's contentment is centred in the image of the garden, which can be read as an image of the mother's body. The secret jouissance enclosed within the closely watched hedges is the source of her peace:

I have come to need the safety and the privateness of being enclosed within the mellow brick walls; and I look forward, with a sense of comfort, to the coming of the blossom on the big old pear tree and to the yearly transformation of the vegetable garden from the dark rich forked over earth to the neat little rows of summer lettuces and radishes, spring onions and beans. (*CF* 141)

Sheltered in the enclosing arms of her safe haven, Vera can now approach and attempt to
name her secret jouissance. Just as the Hilda Street incident is nestled in the centre of *Cabin Fever*, so at the heart of that section is Vera's birthing experience, which centres on her desire to return to her own mother:

[In that wonderful silence which follows childbirth, I am making a curious attempt after what seems a long time to, somehow, be near my mother. To bring her close in some way. (CF 123-4)]

It is common for the childbirth experience to cause a woman to revise her relationship with her own mother and to desire an affirmation of the mother-bond. Patriarchal social constraints robbed Vera of the joy and celebration which should have been attendant on the woman-centred activity of childbirth. The visits by her mother and Magda were marked with tension and tears and Vera's memory of their visits is mixed with recollections of Herb's flawed buckets and a compulsive search through her mother's books. Vera's memory, of going through the books at her mother's house, suggests a furtive search for those which hold inscriptions of secret desire. But the mother's books do not contain the unwritten mother/daughter relationship, nor do the books in Vera's small storehouse of memories, in her trunk:

I change my position and move Helena to my other arm and continue this search for some trace of my mother in my own small store. Perhaps her messages and quotations chosen especially to be suitable for her gifts to me, these things, in her handwriting, I want to find now. . . . I can't help wondering what this alarming compulsion, this searching through the books, opening them with an unrealistic eagerness only to put them aside, can mean. (CF 123-4)

Vera cannot find a trace of the mother in the symbolic records. However, her own experience of childbirth has the potential to locate that trace of the mother, to reinscribe the maternal semiotic within the symbolic order. Vera desires the cherishing of the mother/child for both herself and her baby:

Perhaps there is a deeply felt wish which I must acknowledge. Perhaps I must recognize the wish to have my mother bend over my baby with all the pleasure and tenderness expressed in the words and gestures of cherishing which I seem to recall clearly as coming to me from her when I was a child. (CF 124)

Interestingly, the image of the mother bending over the baby with blessings is superimposed on the image of the daughter bending over the books. While the socio-symbolic structures operate by the Law of the Father, which works on the assumption of the need of the child to break the maternal bond, to move away from the maternal body, into the world of Law and language; the semiotic operates on the desire of the child to
remain with the mother, to locate the maternal inscription, to superimpose the body on
the text. The challenge of the semiotic to the symbolic is most powerful at the point of
the ripening, opening, birthing of the child/text. The birth experience is a 'coming' of
desire, of orgasmic pleasure. The improbable dyadic bonding of mother and child
suggests new metaphors for signification, involving an embodying of language and a
speaking in the maternal thoroughfare, incorporating nature and culture, the semiotic and
the symbolic.

In *Of Woman Born* Adrienne Rich claims that the mother/daughter relationship is
at the core of her book on motherhood. The book functions as Rich's own recreation of
her birthing experience, as an attempt to return to her mother and a testimony to the
many times and many ways in which she had tried to return to her mother, to repossess
her and to be repossessed by her:

This is the core of my book, and I enter it as a woman who, born between
her mother's legs, has time after time and in different ways tried to return
to her mother, to repossess her and be repossessed by her, to find the
mutual confirmation from and with another woman that daughters and
mothers alike hunger for, pull away from, make possible or impossible
for each other.

The first knowledge any woman has of warmth, nourishment,
tenderness, security, sensuality, mutuality, comes from her mother. That
earliest enwrapment of one female body with another can sooner or later
be denied or rejected, felt as choking possessiveness, as rejection, trap or
taboo; but it is, at the beginning, the whole world.31

The birth of a child to a daughter both recreates and ruptures the original
mother/daughter bond.

This conflict is represented by the ambivalent position Vera ascribes to her
mother. During the journey home Vera is working and reworking conversations with her
mother which concern Vera taking a position in the social order, and are stamped with
her mother's shame and disappointment because her daughter's desire has ruptured her
assigned position in the symbolic order (*CF* 137). In Freudian terms a woman bearing a
child becomes a way of offering the mother a 'penis,' to substitute for her lack. Vera's
return home can be seen to fit into this pattern, but conflict is present because Vera and
her child cannot be legitimately positioned in the patriarchal social codes. Vera is
haunted by the legitimating power of the Father, who attempts to deny the maternal
right, which can be seen as represented by her fear that Daddy Doctor is on the bus as
she is on her way to her mother, and her fear that her daughter will be taken from her
(*CF* 131). The mothers are unable to claim the joy of the mother–child reunion because
they feel that social sanctions have been breached.

However, it is necessary to rupture the paternal sanction so that maternal
jouissance can be articulated. The silenced discourse desires to be spoken. The 'founding separation' yearns to be bridged through the maternal thoroughfare. The desire of a woman-mother for a reunion with the body of her mother needs to be claimed. This language is spoken, this thoroughfare is established, in the mother/granddaughter bond when Vera brings Helena home to her mother. Vera has repressed desire, but now, through her child, wants to return to the mother as the source of desire. Desire slides from child to mother to grandmother:

My mother buries her face in Helena's shawl. I look once again at delphiniums, light blue and dark, reaching up into the arms of the little apple trees, into the abundance of small green unripe apples... (CF 135)

Vera's own position is outside the gaze of desire, looking at the mother-grandchild gaze.

... When my mother looks up at me it is as if my baby has inherited these jewels, my mother's blue eyes. My baby looks like my mother... In their smiling at one another it seems, for a moment, as if they are exchanging the blue brilliance of their eyes. (CF 135–6)

Here the maternal gaze becomes the basis for knowledge and identity.

In 'Giotto's Joy,' Kristeva discusses the importance of the colour blue as a semiotic experience that has a decentering effect on the gaze fixed on the object. Colour perception, especially blue, because of its short wavelength, develops in a baby before centred vision. Centred vision, which is necessary for the identification of objects, including one's own self, develops in the mirror stage, leading to the development of the fixed specular I and an awareness of objects. However, an awareness of colour, particularly blue, is part of the infant's first instinctual, biological, material recognition and dependence:

Thus all colors, but blue in particular, would have a noncentered or decentering effect, lessening both object identification and phenomenal fixation. They thereby return the subject to the archaic moment of its dialectic, that is, before the fixed, specular "I," but while in the process of becoming this "I" by breaking away from instinctual, biological (and also maternal) dependence. On the other hand, the chromatic experience can then be interpreted as a repetition of the specular subject's emergence in the already constructed space of the understanding (speaking) subject; as a reminder of the subject's conflictual constitution, not yet alienated into the set images facing him, not yet able to distinguish the contours of others or his own other in the mirror.32

Kristeva uses colour to translate psychological elements and instinctual drives into language structures. Jolley's description of the mother's delight in Vera's baby, represented by the exchange of the blue of their eyes through the blueness of the
delphiniums, offers Vera the means to return to the jouissance of the forbidden mother within the symbolic sphere of language. The secret, pleasurable garden, full of summer flowers, functions as a hidden fertile centre and source within the patriarchally constructed closely watched hedges. The mother/child gaze is self-reflective, between mother and child's eyes. There is no need for Lacan's mirror here. Identity and knowledge are constructed and exchanged through matrilineal links:

'She looks like you,' I tell her.
'Your father will say she looks like his mother,' my mother says. (CF 135)

The child–mother–grandmother gaze and identity draw on a community of women who are same and different. Woman's shared knowledge has been repressed and silenced by the paternal discourses. 'Once again I am seeing something I have not known about before, in my mother' (CF 135), but appears now in the dreams and memories of the bereaved Vera.

Jolley's multiple recreations of maternal space constitute a challenge to the control and unity of the Name-of-the-Father, and represent a semiotic, maternal joy which unsettles and transforms meaning, as Kristeva claims Giotto's paintings do, by the use of colour:

Giotto's joy is the sublimated jouissance of a subject liberating himself from the transcendental dominion of One Meaning (white) through the advent of its instinctual drives, again articulated within a complex and regulated distribution. . . . This chromatic joy is the indication of a deep ideological and subjective transformation.33

A reclaiming of the maternal body effects a linguistic transformation.

The desire for a semiotic/symbolic thoroughfare between body and text is revealed in Vera's interaction with her dream baby, Baba, Beatrice, who remains locked in the womb, representing the idealized child, the maternal desire for a child which arises from instinctual drives and memory, from the chora, a paradise lost:

Before my baby is born I call her Beatrice, the bestower of Blessings. I feel her little round head in my side and I keep reading about Dante's love for Beatrice and how, in his poem, he sees Beatrice as being a guide through Paradise. (CF 95)

Beatrice, who could be said to represent not a lack, but a link to the archaic source of desire, cannot be born: 'No one calls anyone Beatrice nowadays' (CF 95). Because the social encoding of motherhood is contained within paternal paradigms the maternal language may be silenced, the maternal space closed over.
It may be that the only way Vera can partake of this joy is by positioning herself as the child, hearing her 'father's voice' in her 'mother's house,' as a child herself, as she hears/remembers her father singing Helena/Vera to sleep, invoking a dream fantasy of interwoven maternal/paternal images of desire:

Go to sleep. Go to sleep. Go to sleep. My father comes creaking on bent legs along the hall. He crawls flickering across the ceiling crouching double on the wardrobe. Go to sleep he says. Flickering in fire light and candle flame. Flickering and prancing he moves up and down the walls, big and little, little and big, colliding in the corners with himself. . . .

My father's voice is soft and softer. His voice, my father's voice is singing down through the years to me. (CF 137)

The shadow evokes grief, loss and confusion for Vera: 'I wake weeping and do not know the reason'(CF 138).

Because the mother remains a repressed object of desire, Vera's adult relationships are unsatisfactory; the lover is used as a substitute for the lost maternal object. Vera's unresolved desire for the mother is shown by images of desire which move between the male lover and female forms and maternal images. Vera transfers her love for Magda to Dr Metcalf: 'I love Magda too. . . . "I can't live without you, Magda"' (CF 2) and she associated Magda with the fox: 'Her hair shines. Red gold, the colour of a fox' (CF 97), which evokes memories of Gertrude's place (CF 189) and desire for her mother (CF 74-5). Memories of Gertrude intertwine with memories of Magda (CF 3) and Dr Metcalf (CF 5), and with those of her mother with her baby, linked through red-gold imagery and the association of summer:

I would like to take Helena home to my mother where she can, in her own kitchen, unwrap and exclaim, and where she can nurse the small perfect body in front of the kitchen fire and sing in that sweet, suddenly remembered voice which knows the music but is not able to reproduce it.

Why do I remember now, Dr Metcalf, naked and shameless, leaning back in a basket chair beside the small westward window in the cottage, high up, so high up that, though dusk was filling the valley, the last colour of the setting sun made his body golden as he waited for me and, smiling, stretched out his arms to draw me to him?

Why does the next summer have the same fragrance of the summer before? (CF 124, see also 7-8)

This linking continues at the George's where Vera associates Miss George with Sister Peters and her own mother (CF 227), and the red imagery reappears. Vera cannot understand why she should remember the red of Mr George's clothes and furniture 'during the sweet wild moments' (CF 216), in the same way that she seeks to hide the blood stained sheets with their multiple associations of birth, death and miscarriage. As
Vera finds desire ripening she slides the signifier of desire from maternal to paternal, nurture to passion, lover to mother. (These terms are not used dichotomously, but represent a continuum thus producing an intertextuality of meaning and desire.)

A Freudian reading would suggest that Vera's love affairs and her offering her child to her mother function as a means of giving the mother what she lacks, a 'penis.' Thus Vera sees Helena as the child of Magda and Dr Metcalf (CF 33), and imagines Miss George with the baby (CF 232). Helena, viewed in this way, becomes a fetish object, a reminder of, and attempted substitute for, Vera's situation of lack in the symbolic order. As such Vera both affirms and denies, acknowledges and refuses to accept Helena as the consequence of Vera's own castration. The fetishized object becomes a means of enacting and denying the 'lack.' This construction could be used to explain Vera's strange relationship with her daughter whom she both affirms and denies, and it would explain the daughter's absence within the time-frame of the text where Vera is inscribed with the symbolic order because of her work rather than her child. But such a reading is based on an acceptance of the Freudian narrative of Oedipus, with Vera positioned within the constructs of a patriarchal society which functions on the Oedipal paradigm.

Vera's love affairs re-enact her containment within the Oedipal configuration yet also allow a shifting subject position, as representations of mother/father/child slide from character to character. Vera in her love relations finds it hard to position herself as an adult love object. She slides in and out of different familial positions in an attempt to find love, to recreate the parent–child relationship. In her relationship with both Dr Metcalf and Mr George she positions herself as the child, representing her lovers as either much more experienced, or much older than herself. However, it is interesting that it is Vera's mother's voice, the repressed maternal, which locates Mr George as the father figure: "This man, Vera, is older than Daddy" (CF 200). The mother's expression of the situation suggests that the mother's voice represents the repressed, abjected maternal, the function Vera ascribes to her mother's voice in the 'conversations' she has with her mother while she is at the Georges, using the telephone to separate the mother from the self, and representing the mother as the figure who mourns and fights against the daughter's rejection of the maternal and her entry into the world of the Father. Vera, in this enactment, is positioned as an inexperienced person's mentor, (CF 218) that is Mr George slides from father figure to child and Vera assumes a shifting position as daughter/lover/mother:

At present I am all over the house, everywhere, both openly and in secret. (CF 233)

As mother/lover/child Vera is both legitimately and illegitimately positioned in the
house.

Kristeva sees the possibility of shifting between different identities as one response to the Oedipal situation:

This is a very particular solution to the Oedipal situation; the subject does not become normalized through triangulation of the neurosis; he does not appear in the dual fear of narcissistic relationship in the absence of a third party; he covers the three positions at the same time - trinity, three dots, from one identity the other, no identity, rhythm, rotation, rigadoon.35

A disjunctive pattern of 'Either. . . or. . . or36 challenges the rigid Oedipal family structure.

Magda also subverts the Oedipal positioning, locating Vera as Dr Metcalf's lover, as her child and possibly desiring her herself (CF 2–3). Magda's own relationship with Jonty and her own family's structure are also distortions of the Oedipal pattern so that the object of desire is again positioned as the child.

In the shifting Oedipal constellations Helena's relationship with her mother is silenced. Helena is a sad, lonely, silent child. She cries all the first day of her life: 'a heartbroken crying as if she knows straight away some secret awful thing about the world into which she has come' (CF 94). Helena's crying reveals the vulnerability and loneliness of both mother and child, the unconsolled mother is unable to console her child:

When she looks up at me I see my own sorrow looking back at me. (CF 188)

Patriarchal constraints have exiled Vera and her child. Vera's repressed maternal bond with her own mother appears to have silenced her mother/daughter relationship with Helena. Vera is alone in New York, neither sending nor receiving letters. Where is Helena? A similar pattern is suggested in Jolley's latest book, The Georges' Wife, where Vera leaves her children in England when she comes to Australia with Mr George. The focus of the text is the 'Migrant' and the 'Widow,' suggesting a motif of dispossession and loss. (In The Georges' Wife relationships again distort the Oedipal family arrangement, as the title suggests.)

A sense of separation is necessary if Vera is to provide for her child within the socio-historic constructs of society. Her gamin haircut represents the need to break away from maternal authority in order to locate her own image, her own construct of self:

I keep putting my hand up to feel my hair, the freedom of my hair, to feel with my fingers the strangeness of short hair all round my head.
Every time I pass the landing mirror, at the top of the stairs, I take a quick look at this different person who is me. . . . And my hair lying all round the chair. You know, on the floor, seemed not to be mine, seemed as if it had belonged to someone else. (CF 165)

Vera's haircut can also be viewed as an act of ritual cleansing. Purification appears to be necessary if a reconciliation with the maternal body is to be achieved, hence the blood-stained sheets must be washed, and replaced with an image of the clean sheets on the line during childbirth (CF 237). Vera's happy memories are associated with cleanliness:

Bed time and clean clothes and clean sheets are all part of what I have come to look upon as the little celebrations especially when Helena is all dressed in clean clothes too. (CF 147)

Celebrations of cleanliness include the hotel room being cleaned (CF 91) and the baby changed and dressed by the mother (CF 136). This is interesting, in the light of Kristeva's comment that: 'Maternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self's clean and proper body.'37

'Linear' time has involved Vera in the processes of the production of material goods and identity. But working diagonal to that time, underneath it (like the beaver's tail), are the repressed processes of 'monumental' time which she has denied while raising her daughter. Now the denied maternal need cracks the ice.

The silenced maternal ruptures the symbolic at times of birth and death. Vera has come early to New York to come to terms with her bereavement, we do not know for whom, but she seems to be totally bereft 'I do not have letters to look forward to now' (CF 238). In acknowledging her isolation and loneliness she confronts her repressed desire and acknowledges that one person cannot substitute for another:

Furthermore, understanding the loneliness and despair of knowing it is not possible to bring back a wished for person, and knowing that one person can never replace another, is understanding that this is what bereavement is. (CF 8)

Bereavement may involve a process of renegotiating one's boundaries with the absent other. The ritual of purification is both a bereavement and a consolation. Purification encodes corporeality within language, acknowledging boundaries, that this person is not that person. Rites of purification can also become the means of renewal, as in the Eucharist.

Vera, in the hotel room, can be viewed as undergoing a rebirth, with the mirror image being the basis for her establishing her identity, using the Lacanian interpretation of the development of the 'T, and through the process of writing out of one's memories, which function as a reclaiming of the maternal space, mediated through language, so that
a thoroughfare is effected between abjection and sacred, desire and knowledge, death (alienation) and society. The final rebirthing scene then becomes Vera's own, as she gives birth to herself. The hotel room becomes a tunnel, the birth passage into the outside world. However, it can represent birth, or death.

Kristeva suggests in 'About Chinese Women' that the call of the mother is a call away from temporality and spatial location, a retreat from identity and signification, into hallucinations, voices, madness. Because the mother/daughter bond is devalued in our society, a daughter needs to authenticate herself by denying the maternal and entering the world of the Father. If women wish to participate in the symbolic order they must repress the maternal and identify with the paternal order. In 'About Chinese Women,' Kristeva deals with the problem that poses for women. The repressed maternal is the site of the unconscious, with the possibility of desiring or deathly signification. This desiring jouissance threatens the symbolic order, but it can trap women, leading to death:

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. Once the moorings of the word, the ego, the superego, begin to slip, life itself can't hang on: death quietly moves in. Suicide without a cause, or sacrifice without fuss for an apparent cause which, in our age, is usually political: a woman can carry off such things without tragedy, even without drama, without the feeling that she is fleeing a well-fortified front, but rather as though it were simply a matter of making an inevitable, irresistible and self-evident transition.

The examples Kristeva gives, of Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath, have figured in Vera's memories, as has the cause, the disintegration of meaning and identity. Cabin Fever can be read as moving towards the enclosure of death.

From her room Vera can see the reflection of an unknown man who is in a hotel room on the other side of the street. The reflection in the mirror may represent loss of identity and disorientation: 'I have no idea who he is' (CF 236). Vera is alone with nothing to look forward to. Her view of the outside world, which she sees through the hotel window, is cold and impersonal. To suggest a happy ending for this text could be said to provide a clichéd resolution, one Jolley herself forewarns against: 'like the hoped for ending to a particular kind of novel (CF 237). Perhaps the only remedy is death:

Bereavement has become a clichéd word but to feel bereaved and to know it when there is no one to turn to is to experience the kind of
despair for which the only remedy is to lie on the warm earth dissolving the long hours in tears. (CF 8)

It is possible to suggest that Vera, trapped in her room, contemplating death, is being represented as what Kristeva would describe as psychotic. She has become: 'An empty castle, haunted by unappealing ghosts – "powerless" outside, "impossible" inside.' For such a 'patient' there exists a split between signifier and signified. In Vera's case the conference paper becomes meaningless, the known becomes strange, the image in the mirror becomes split, suggesting a hall of mirrors, or a Chinese box of reflections, all working to trap Vera in the room.

However, since I suggested earlier that the text may be read as a 'talking cure,' we could perhaps apply the diagnosis and therapy suggested by the psychoanalysts. Kristeva, in Powers of Horror, describes the 'borderline patient' (a male one) as desiring the mother, yet separated from her, and consequently experiencing an encompassing that is stifling. In Vera's case that could be the hot hotel room, which traps her, compressing her ego. The analyst's role is to tap these remainders of 'signifying vectorization' by giving them a desiring and/or deathly signification:

In short, one unfailingly orients them toward the other: another object, perhaps another sex, and, why not, another discourse – a text, a life to relive.

If the restructuring of memories has been effective, then Vera's experience of 'cabin fever' could provide her with 'another discourse,' another way of reading/writing about her life, a way to relive the past through reclaimed, reconstructed memories.

The ending could then open out in true Jolley fashion, to provide a disturbing ambiguous heterogeneity of meanings and readings, one of which, in contrast to the despair of psychosis, could be a reading of a desiring of the Other, a rebirth. In this formulation Vera gives birth to herself, as a means of establishing a separation from the mother, and thus she effects the creation of a new speaking position. The final section of Cabin Fever suggests that birth and death may mean resurrection and replenishing, and that meaning may be hidden in mystery and memory. Kristeva, despite her pessimism about woman's speaking position being only one of madness or silence in the symbolic order, does suggest that there is a signifying space which needs to be claimed in order to articulate shifting, fluid voices which recognize specificity and multiplicity and which would echo jouissance, mad words and pregnancies. These voices refuse total masculine identification on one hand, and hysterical symptoms on the other:

But how can we do this? By listening; by recognizing the unspoken in all 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.

A constant alternation between time and its 'truth', identity and its loss, history and that which produces it: that which remains extraphenomenal, outside the sign, beyond time. An impossible dialectic of two terms, a permanent alternation: never the one without the other. Is it not certain that anyone here and now is capable of this. An analyst conscious of history and politics? A politician tuned into the unconscious? Or, perhaps, a woman...  

The maternal metaphor can function to provide such a signifying space for woman. It functions as the thoroughfare between time and space, paternal and maternal discourses. *Cabin Fever*’s image of the womb/tomb, the maternal space sited within the traditionally phallic encoding of a skyscraper, can be said to function as an 'impossible dialectic of two terms,' Vera's memories are located both in time and outside time, she draws the outside inside, making the hotel room the locus of drive energies, an opening out of the unconscious, a searching for a site for signification and meaning for that most ambiguous of signs, the pregnant woman. The mirror image can function as a recognition of identity and a realization that one is separate from that image. Vera sees both self and other in the mirror, and the Other is no longer the [M]other.

Does this mean that her desire to return to the mother has been resolved (is it ever resolved?) and that Vera can therefore now locate desire outside herself and the hotel room, onto the male image across the street, in a recognition of a subject separate and different from herself, and a recognition of a holding together of fragmented experiences? Does a reconstitution of identity free her to move outside the room? The text suggests that, rather than denying the maternal in order to constitute the self as separate, the inside and outside need to meet in an interweaving of time and space. To leave the hotel room and cross the thin ice of the conference floor it is necessary to collect and hold together one's ambiguous, fragmented memories 'as if they were treasures in a small storehouse' (*CF* 237), to stave off alienation. Jolley quotes Saint Augustine on the power of memory:

*All this goes on inside me, in the vast cloisters of my memory. In it are the sky, the earth, and the sea, ready at my summons, together with everything I have ever perceived in them by my senses... In it I meet myself as well I remember myself...* (CF 235)

Alienation is prevented by the self meeting the other/self in memory.

The untimely pregnancy, that had challenged the symbolic constraints of language and society, had silenced Vera. The inability to tell this disruptive unsettling tale, this pregnancy, the need to hide the fact from nursing friends and neighbours, had been like a constant deferral of meaning, represented by the constant deferral of the
question 'is it you?', suggesting the eliding of the desire for encountering the other:

This cabin fever is like the intention to speak, it is the long drawn-out pause of intention. (*CF* 237)

The deferral of meaning has caused scar tissue to form over the memories.

In an article entitled 'Cloisters of Memory' Jolley discusses the function of memory as being a 'herb of self heal,' a closing of gaps, a search for one's origins. She suggests that it is in writing that the gap of desire and death are healed:

Perhaps the writer in writing can close the spaces, can console and heal others and in this heal himself.43

Vera's mourning has discharged her memories; she now seeks a substitute for the lost object. Writing becomes a way of filling the gap, the lack. Writing positions Vera in the symbolic contract, but the return to the evocation of images of summer at the ending of the book are images of desire which provide consolation, a remedy in an alienating, lonely world. The writing of the text is itself a birth and a death, a *pharmakon,* both the remedy and the poison, as Derrida argues in his deconstructive reading of Plato's *Phaedrus.*44 Vera's writing out of her memories can be said to function as a death, an end to her search and sense of alienation revealed in her memories; but also as a birth, as the writing process reconstitutes the lack of which the text speaks. Vera, in *Cabin Fever,* is blocked from writing. In the hotel room she is unable to write or image herself giving her lecture. She retreats from the world, returns to her memories, but that very action can be seen to be recuperative, as the textualization of her memories, desires and death wish reinscribes her in the world outside the hotel room and the text *Cabin Fever* becomes itself the writing out, the giving voice to the experience, the location of monumental time within linear history.
NOTES

2. Kristeva 190.
24 Kristeva 194.
26 Kristeva 13.
27 Kristeva 5.
28 Kristeva, 'Motherhood' 239.
29 Irigaray, 'One Doesn't Stir' 67.
33 Kristeva 224.
36 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti–Oedipus* 76.
39 Kristeva 156–7.
41 Kristeva 50.
42 Kristeva, 'Chinese Women' 156.
43 Jolley, 'Cloisters of Memory' 539.
44 Derrida, *Dissemination* 94.
Conclusion: The Maternal Metaphor: Claiming the Jouissance of the Mother.

Julia Kristeva's work on maternity offers the possibility of constructing a maternal metaphor which positions the mother at a pivotal site as a thoroughfare between 'nature' and 'culture,' between semiotic desires and symbolic encodings, in a process that unsettles patriarchal constructions of subjectivity, representation and meaning. The maternal metaphor acknowledges the necessity of recognizing the semiotic in language and the maternal in society. Functioning as a thoroughfare which mediates the body and the text, the pregnant body represents the dialectical process of incorporating the semiotic into the symbolic.

Kristeva describes language as a birthing process, creating a split symbolization on the threshold of symbolic structures and bodily drives. The maternal body functions as a representation of the postmodern construction of the splitting process of signification and the split and fragmentary subject. The split subjectivity that the mother represents challenges traditional structures of language and society and offers a multiplicity of perspectives and positions for women's writing. The fragmentation of contemporary social, family, political and linguistic structures enables the construction of a diversity of forms and techniques and allows for a heterogeneity of speaking positions in social and linguistic structures. As language is broken open many sites of meaning are called into play and new forms of signification and subjectivity become possible. Within the diverse social and linguistic structures of contemporary society woman as mother offers a revolutionary basis for woman's participation in the symbolic. The mother's experience is of a division of the flesh, represented textually as a division of language. Hence the figure of woman as mother in a text functions to breach and rupture narrative structures and to position the mother as stretching and dilating linguistic forms. The trope of woman as mother suggests the birthing of new forms of signification which incorporate the body into the text in a variety of specific and disruptive ways.

Although Kristeva argues for a reclaiming of the mother's body in discourse, she claims this is achieved by the male artist, as son, because of his access to the symbolic. In this thesis I have argued 'beyond Kristeva,' to claim a speaking position for woman as mother and daughter. My model of the maternal metaphor is one in which the process of subject formation and literary production are enacted in relation to the mother's body, through the maternal gaze and the interactive process of self/other/self, thus enabling diverse and fluid constructions of language and subjectivity. The maternal gaze functions as a site of multiple displacements as the mother and child claim their separate but contingent subjectivity, as subjects—in—process. The mother's role in language and subject formation functions to provide a thoroughfare for the development of social and
artistic practices, which enables a reclaiming of maternal language. The process of separation from the mother involves a recognition of the interplay of being same and different, of desiring and repudiating the mother, which is represented textually by the folding and unfolding of multiple narratives and by elements of desire and abjection.

Maternal language, that is, the embodiment of semiotic elements within the symbolic, effected through the maternal thoroughfare, can be said to offer a speaking position for women. Language is broken open into polyvalent forms which draw on semiotic elements and challenge the fictive unity of self with multiple speaking positions. In seeking a reflected image from the maternal gaze the fragmented, fractured self, ruptured by desire, death and absence, is reinscribed through a number of speaking positions, which questions the construction of closed systems of identity, gender and sexuality. The rupture or 'castration' of separation from the mother initiates a linguistic attempt to rewrite the mother, to claim maternal jouissance. The maternal metaphor allows for the reclaiming of the mother's body through language. Heterogeneity of language and subject position function as an attempt to fill the void created by separation from the mother.

In *Palomino* I argue that the mother is the primary agent of language and identity and thus has the capacity to function as the link or thoroughfare to the symbolic and that the child's entry into language functions, not as a desire for the phallus, but as a desire to reclaim the mother through language. If separation from the mother is represented, not as a void, or a hole which 'needs' to be filled by the phallus, but is represented by the opening of a woman's body in lovemaking and birth, then new models of identity and language are possible which are based on the interactive model of self/other/self. *Palomino*, by positioning a female lover in the gap created by the separation from the mother, explores alternative models of identity and relationships.

Kristeva's Freudian model of the Father as the means of entry into the symbolic is challenged in Jolley's writing. Miles in *Foxybaby* and Edwin in *The Sugar Mother* mock the phallic power, and the male figure becomes a fantasy in *The Well*. In *My Father's Moon* Vera identifies with her father, as her means of entry into the symbolic order, however, it is the repressed desire for the rejected maternal within the patriarchal structures which creates the unsettling of meaning and identity in the text. Jolley returns to Vera's repressed memories of the mother in the companion novel, *Cabin Fever*. The structure of *Cabin Fever* suggests the need to rewrite memories to reclaim the silenced maternal associations. A recovery of the lost mother–daughter relationship and an attempt to reactivate the repressed instinctual, maternal elements in language and culture provides a way of writing out of dispossession into inheritance.

Because patriarchal structures control and contain the role of the maternal in language and society, the maternal thoroughfare is often blocked or covered over. The
loss of the maternal thoroughfare means that some things remain repressed, unspoken, and memory becomes imbued with abjection. In Milk and Honey the denied mother is silenced and hidden, yet compulsively sought after by substitute objects of desire, which are objects of delight and horror, desire and death represented by a 'black sun' of longing. Denial of the maternal voice means loss of the maternal thoroughfare, resulting in unrepresentable desire, unlocatable semiotic memories and rigid, empty symbolic structures, as is suggested by Mr Scobie's Riddle where the old men are unable to speak the semiotic in the symbolic, but Miss Hailey's Idyll releases jouissance. The Well also reveals the effects of the repression of the maternal.

The sense of loss due to separation from the mother's body and the sense of lack on entry into language function to position the desiring subject as searching for maternal jouissance in the body/text. Desire for maternal jouissance, associated with maintaining links with the mother, is ruptured by the need to separate in order to be situated in the symbolic. Separation from the mother opens up a void, a gap of longing which the writer fills with words in an attempt to sublate the void. The writer can be said to engage in constructing multiple sites to signify desire in an attempt to bridge the semiotic/symbolic rupture.

In the gap of desire, 'the word not spoken,' the rupture created by the absence of the mother and longing for the mother, the writer seeks for maternal jouissance through the signification of language. It could be said to represent a search for what Kristeva refers to as WORD FLESH, an embodying of the unspoken word in a desire for consolation. The textual representation of the pause of intention is an important motif in Jolley's work; it characterizes Laura's desire, Vera's search for Ramsden, the wait for Joanna, Mr Scobie's dream of entering his house.

Elizabeth Jolley's texts reveal the often hidden pathways of the maternal thoroughfare, which, through the use of carnivalesque narrative techniques, articulate the semiotic in the symbolic, in a process which reclaims the mother through language. Carnivalesque writing destabilizes the totalizing symbolic forms, inverts social patterns and delights in the polyvalent excess of language and identity. It offers a 'feast of becoming.' Such writing gives voices to the elements of the unconscious, drives and desires by releasing semiotic elements of music, laughter, nonsense and fragrance into the symbolic structures of language and society. Jolley's texts use semiotic word play, parody and linguistic fantasy to challenge symbolic structures, such as the interweaving of multiple narratives in Foxybaby or in The Sugar Mother where carnivalesque techniques of nonsense, music and laughter rupture and rename motherhood. To 'write the mother' means being positioned on the threshold of meaning and nonsense; the rim of the well becomes a site for storytelling. The semiotic elements of Jolley's writing, such as the multiple narrative structures, the discontinuous, interrupted sequences, the
interweaving of characters, the play of language, the rhythm and music of the text offer a jouissance which attempts to reclaim the lost territory of the mother.\(^3\)

The maternal thoroughfare provides a polylogue of language, identity and jouissance with which women may take possession of the symbolic. Jolley's text highlights the physicality of the body/text and the heterogeneity and intertextuality of the narrative. The range of disconnected narratives exceeds the controlling function of the paternal, shatters the unity of the subject and of writing, and locates the subject in the maternal thoroughfare. *Miss Peabody's Inheritance* challenges the unitary structures of genre, language, form and identity. This is achieved by the writer figure functioning as an enabling mother who provides a birthing of the semiotic within the symbolic through the maternal thoroughfare so that the daughter's linguistic inheritance of maternal language and jouissance is reclaimed. Miss Peabody's 'second birth' is a textual one, she rediscovers the maternal in the letters of Diana Hopewell, which become her maternal inheritance. The textual delights of night-time fantasy are pleasures experienced by an escape from the mother's calls for attention and control, a jouissance located in the gap created by the absence of the mother. My analysis of *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* suggests the necessity of a woman breaking free from the constraints of meeting the needs of others. Weekly's pear tree dance subverts the 'reproduction of mothering' in a 'burst of song, color and laughter,'\(^4\) by claiming a place of her own, a piece of land which functions as a place of maternal jouissance.

The mother/child relationship, with the interplay between dependence and autonomy in the construction of a speaking position, is revealed through the issue of the mother's duty of housework, cleaning and caring for others. In *Central Mischief* the article 'Only Connect!' deals with the writer claiming a position in the symbolic as writer, but the incidents related concern Jolley's desire for structure and order, learnt from her mother's obsessive attention to detail in relation to housework, and now seen by Jolley as necessary for her writing (CM 19). The obsessive attention to organization and detail, attributed to the mother, is evident in Jolley's discipline in writing, leading to a large output and initial persistence in the face of recurring rejection. It is also evident in the meticulous structure of her texts, the tendency to have a circular form or a return to the beginning of the narrative in the structure, and the careful development of motifs, like music, leaves, seasons and fragrances, which form an intricate network of patterns in the texts. However Jolley is also able to subvert this 'ritualistic' pattern, with devices like the 'guide to the perplexed' at the beginning of *Mr Scobie's Riddle*, the letters at the beginning of *Foxybaby* and the ambiguous retelling of the well incident.

A reclaiming of the mother/child relationship requires a maternal thoroughfare or bridge, to provide an interactive process between the semiotic and the symbolic. This enables a 'writing out of the mother' while acknowledging the porous boundaries
between child and mother, which floods the prose with longing. In seeking consolation the child needs to claim the maternal inheritance by locating a multiplicity of subject positions to give birth to her story. Jolley's fiction constructs multiple fragmented subjects and stories in the process of establishing a speaking position, which entails claiming social and sexual identity. Jolley's writing challenges conventional constructions of subjectivity and sexuality. Boundaries between social constraints and pleasure, duty and desire, self and other, are ruptured through the use of the maternal metaphor which connects up heterogeneous sites of meaning thus allowing semiotic irruptions within the symbolic and a challenge to conventional social structures.

Jolley's fiction ruptures the traditional Oedipal family with unconventional, distorted and fragmented family patterns. Jolley experiments with fracturing and realigning the Oedipal family configuration in many of her texts. In Mr Scobie's Riddle Mr Rawlings is married to both Matron Price and Mrs Rawlings, Vera is involved in a love triangle where the two men and one woman pattern is inverted to two women and one man, this pattern is repeated with Mr George and his sister. The interweaving of desire is revealed by Jacob with his love for two women and his impossible desire to hold together the disparate parts of his life in one house. A shifting motif of desire results, often resulting in strange or discordant patterns: the desire of the sister for the brother in Palomino and Milk and Honey, the headmistress for her students, Laura for Dr Gollanberg, Steadman for his daughter, Hester for Katherine and her governess, and the shifting Oedipal patterning of mother/lover/daughter in Sugar Mother, My Father's Moon and Cabin Fever. The conflict of multiple desire and its possible deathly implications are also revealed by Louise's love for Jacob and Waldemar, and Andrea's love for Christopher and Laura. Perhaps it is also represented in Weekly's need to be free of both Vincent and Nastasya, and Magda's desire for Vera enacted through Vera's relationship with Jonty.

In breaking open the Oedipal pattern the mother's desire is revealed. How does one represent the irruption of maternal desire within the traditional coding of the asexual mother figure? The mother/lover figure involves a confrontation with the mother's desire and desirability beyond the child and such an articulation of desire is difficult, representing perhaps what Kristeva terms a 'kind of incest.' In Jolley's texts hats and the soft fox fur become a vehicle for representing a maternal jouissance which Kristeva claims threatens to elude artistic representation. The fox is threatening as well as desirable in Foxybaby. Alternative figures of desire become superimposed on the mother figure, as in Palomino and The Sugar Mother. Vera associates the mother's hats with the sensual warmth and comfort and delight in the mother, while the scarves, which the mother begins to wear during wartime, are ugly and utilitarian, often covering curlers. The hats create 'little pauses and spaces of mystery,' which hide and silence the
semiotic irruptions of desire, but that very action creates a pause, a threshold, a writing space (CF 80). Letters are frequently used to encode desire, for example Madge's letters from her mother, Miss Peabody's letters from Diana Hopewell, and the many letters to and from homesick migrants in Jolley's short stories. The maternal threshold is returned to again and again in an attempt to reclaim the thoroughfare, a passage for mother and daughter, to enable the mother/daughter to mine language in desire to speak maternal jouissance. In my reading of Cabin Fever I suggest that it is in a returning to and reclaiming of the mother–daughter bond in birth that the writer is able to claim a speaking position. The focus in Jolley's texts is on the stories that women tell, the multiplicity of stories and language forms which are used to construct various representations of reality in an attempt to claim a speaking position, to reclaim the mother's body in the body/text as a form of 'spoken incest.'

In my examination of Jolley's writing I have shown how the maternal body functions as a metaphor for the reclaiming of semiotic elements in language. The maternal thoroughfare allows for multiple stories, shifting subjectivities and diverse readings. The incorporation of the semiotic into symbolic structures effects a transformation, a recovery of memory and the mother's body in the body/text. By releasing the iridescent jouissance of the mother into the text language comes to sing in the maternal thoroughfare, as my reading of Jolley's fiction demonstrates.
NOTES


4. Kristeva, "Banishment" 158.

5. Kristeva, "Motherhood" 249

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