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Motherhood:Portrayals in American Literature

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MOTHERHOOD: PORTRAYALS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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MOTHERHOOD: PORTRAYALS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

By

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THESIS

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Finally, I am thankful this thesis is complete.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate five categories of motherhood in American literature. The five categories chosen are: the self-absorbed mother, the self-martyred mother, the child-sacrificing mother, the self-sacrificing mother, and the substitute mother. I chose these five categories because they appear frequently in texts written by people of multiple ethnicities who represent several larger American cultures.

1. The self-absorbed mother lives for her personal pleasures. Her children are a burden. She prefers her happiness over the day to day care of the children.
2. The self-martyred mother believes that she is responsible for all the difficulties of the world. She may believe every action her children take is her fault. She may deny herself the love of her children believing it is neither deserved, nor desired.
3. The child-sacrificing mother makes decisions which most mothers hope to never face. She is the mother who gives up her children so that they may be saved, either physically or spiritually. She is also the mother who chooses to kill her children to keep them from suffering what she perceives as a greater harm.
4. The self-sacrificing mother gives up everything to take care of her children. She will risk her life to be sure that her children are cared for properly. She sacrifices her life, personally or professionally, for her children.
5. The substitute mother accepts the responsibility for another woman's child. She agrees to raise that child as her own.

I chose a variety of American authors whose works span approximately a century. The novels and the short story, in this thesis, reflect both works of significant importance in the canons of American literature and works which reflect varied portrayals of motherhood discussed. With the exceptions of Cristina Crawford and Terry Ryan, the authors chosen are read in specific college literature classes. I chose novels by Dorothy Allison (*Bastard out of Carolina*), Kate Chopin (*The Awakening*), Cristina Crawford (*Mommie Dearest*), Linda Hogan (*Solar Storms*), Sue Monk Kidd (*The Secret Life of Bees*), Toni Morrison (*Beloved*), Fae Myenne Ng (*Bone*), Terry Ryan (*The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio*), John Steinbeck (*The Pastures of Heaven*), Amy Tan (*The Joy Luck Club*), William Faulkner (*As I Lay Dying*), and a short story by Annette Sanford ("Trip in a Summer Dress").

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

American literature is teeming with portrayals, detailing both detrimental and beneficial behaviors, of motherhood. These portrayals are representative of the varying roles of motherhood. Literature is patterned after these roles. For instance, Ma Joad from John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* highlights the strength and grace of a woman who must provide the model for the rest of the family under great distress. She never gives up even though everything around her is crumbling. As a woman facing the desperation of the Depression and the hopelessness caused by the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma, she stands strong and preserves the family unit as best she can.

Also setting an example of motherhood is Eliza Harris from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a mother so desperate to save her child from slave traders that she crosses an ice floe with her child in her arms, fearing the horror of slavery more than the unknown consequences of death. She is a poignant example of what a woman born into slavery might have felt.

Katie Nolan in Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* recognizes that she is the one who must remain detached and stalwart if the family is to survive. She is a woman ahead of her time when she takes a leading role to support her family. Also, notable in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, Momma, the matriarchal grandmother, is not only the anchor, but also the rudder for both of her grandchildren. Momma provides an example of fortitude after which her grandchildren can model themselves.

Additionally, Linda Loman, the long suffering wife and mother from "*Death of Salesman*" by Arthur Miller, is the consummate nurturer until there is nothing left of the illusion of the happy family. Insurmountable odds and heart-breaking truths do not discourage her. A similar portrayal is Mrs. Thomas, mother of Bigger in Richard Wright's *Native Son*, who tries indefatigably to make her son a respectful member of the community in which they live. Knowing that he has committed unspeakable crimes does not shake her desire to save him.

Finally, Celie in *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker becomes a substitute mother to a ragtag grouping of ill-mannered, ill-behaved children when she is forced to marry a man she doesn't love. Even in these unhappy circumstances, Celie still forges on to care for these difficult children who have been neglected since the death of their mother.

These are but a few of the mother characters portrayed in American literature. They too represent multiple portrayals of the varied roles of motherhood. Through these portrayals and many others, the myths and truths of motherhood are sustained in a myriad of experiences. Literature portrays these experiences through a multitude of characters in novels, short stories, and plays. These portrayals of motherhood are interspersed through many genres of literature.

As might be expected, motherhood cannot be defined absolutely even through varying genres of literature. Motherhood is an abstract term as difficult to describe as happiness or jealousy. Motherhood is a term applied as liberally as salt to bland food to nearly anyone who provides even the most minute degree of service to a child. In the most traditional sense, one must have given birth either physically or via paper through adoption to be considered a mother, but there are those persons who have taken on the role through marriage, death, or some other absence of the first mother in a child's life. However, one need not be caring, concerned, or devoted to take part in this role. Conversely, the opposite is also true. Some mothers are

omnipresent and omniscient. Their influence on children can literally and physically shape the future of their children along with the future of the world. Both the portrayal of the unconcerned mother and the devoted mother are represented in countless genres of literature.

Undoubtedly, literature provides portrayals of mothers who have managed to balance this act of give and take and of mothers who cannot arrive at this point in mothering. Clearly, there are innumerable portrayals of mothers in literature espousing every viewpoint imaginable.

However, this paper examines only five of the innumerable portrayals in American literature of mothers and the depiction of their roles in the following categories: self-absorbed mothers, self-martyred mothers, child sacrificing mothers, self-sacrificing mothers, and substitute mothers.

CHAPTER 2:

EXPLANATION OF CATEGORIES

I. The Self-Absorbed Mother Portrayal

To be self-absorbed is to be invested in one's own thoughts, needs, or preoccupations. Such is the case of the self-absorbed mother who lives for herself. Her pleasures come first and the family suffers, sometimes in silence, but at times protesting all the way to her grave. She is a woman who does not believe her life should be defined by the responsibilities of motherhood. Instead, she sees motherhood as a burden, something peripheral to be contended with and certainly not a position she desires. Her focus is on herself. In her heart and mind, motherhood has been forced upon her, and while she will perform the duties necessary, she will also do all she can to resist the trappings of this unwelcome position. Her all-encompassing search for personal fulfillment comes at any cost, including the loss of herself or her family.

II. The Self-Martyred Mother Portrayal

A self-martyred mother finds worth in her sacrifices. The reader often identifies this character because she complains about herself and those desired characteristics which she sees as lacking in her offspring. From the reader's viewpoint, her life appears to be filled with disappointment and unfulfilled desires. Yet, she willingly consents to her place in the scheme of the world. She feels she is helpless to change the situation, and she accepts that as the way life should be. She appears to be a mother who is modest and gracious, sometimes even self-effacing.

For her, attention is garnered through this self-imposed martyrdom. Some readers might see her as a woman who has given her all for her children. This portrayal of motherhood in

literature is seen by some readers as a mother willing to accept responsibility for her children's faults because she sets her personal needs aside in favor of the needs of the children.

Another type of self-martyred mother is one who refuses all attention and all love offered her. She purposely lives her life devoid of all the comforts she might receive from her children. She chooses not to accept the love of her children, believing she does not need, nor does she deserve their love. This woman may have some deep philosophical issue which she sees as more important than the love of her children

III. The Child Sacrificing Mother Portrayal

The portrayal of the mother who suffers from unspeakable anguish is the character who sacrifices her children so that they do not suffer greater harm. In her own mind, this mother is the perfect example of purity, dedication, and servitude. To her, the devotion to her child is unquestionable. Unfortunately, it is an uncontrollable situation which drives this mother to do unspeakable things which she sees as her only alternative. She is the mother who ends her child's life because she does not want her child to suffer further horrors. For some, it is difficult to comprehend how a woman could possibly murder her child. For others, it might be seen as an act of love to end a child's life rather than see that child suffer.

Another example of a child sacrificing mother is a woman who abandons her children hoping they might be saved from a life-threatening situation. This woman places faith in strangers to care for her children in dire circumstances, from which she feels she must escape.

IV. The Self-Sacrificing Mother Portrayal

The self-sacrificing mother gives up everything that she values, including her personal and emotional worth, for the “good” of her children. She willingly sacrifices her chances in life

to save her children. This woman offers up herself for something which benefits her children; sometimes this need is obvious, other times intangible, and occasionally ethereal in nature. She values her children, not herself. Her only concern is for the safety of her children. She does not fear what will happen to her, only what will happen to her children. She is the mother who finds a way to feed her children when there is no money to buy food. She is the mother who puts the welfare of her children ahead of any desires or goals she might personally harbor.

V. The Substitute Mother Portrayal

The substitute mother portrayal is often admired since this woman willingly accepts the responsibility for another woman's offspring. She commands respect from everyone. She is a woman so much in touch with her maternal instincts, that for her, every child is born from her heart, not necessarily from her womb. Her heart holds all the hopes for the future, the anguishes of the past, and the realities of the present. This unselfish woman extends her hand and heart to a child in need of protection, encouragement, and security. In the case of this unselfish mother, an abandoned child, who is leery of everyone, has the opportunity to grow to his or her potential with the support of unconditional love from this substitute mother. All this happens when an unencumbered heart opens itself to an unwanted child.

CHAPTER 3:

DISCUSSION OF CHOSEN NARRATIVES

As an example of the self-absorbed mother, Edna Pontillier of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, offers a vivid portrayal. This character represents many of the more obvious characteristics of a woman devoted to herself much more than to her family. Edna Pontillier intends no harm; she merely desires personal freedom, and for her, the direct route to that freedom is sans her children. She feels she must choose between her sanity and the nurturing of the children. For years, she places the welfare of the children first; however, her survival of "self" wins out in the end, even though the outcome of this decision means her death.

Another interesting portrayal of the self-absorbed mother is Joan Crawford, mother of the author, Cristina Crawford, in *Mommie Dearest*. In this autobiography, Cristina Crawford describes her mother as a woman whose life has been spent in the limelight of show business. For Joan Crawford, an accomplished actress whose career spanned five decades from 1925 through 1977, motherhood was a way to boost her popularity with the general public. In 1939, after more than ten years in the public eye, her popularity was wavering. She had been married and divorced, and the one thing lacking in her life was a child. As a woman of means, it was easy for her to adopt a child. The public saw this as an extremely generous action by a woman who had money, prestige, and power. The adoptions of several children served their purpose, and Joan Crawford's faltering career was back on track in a very short time thanks to the children whom she displayed as prize possessions.

The characteristic of a self-martyred mother is aptly shown in Fae M. Ng's *Bone* by a secondary character named Mah. Leila, the oldest of three sisters, narrates the sad story of a

family dealing with the tragic suicide of Ona, the middle daughter. Mah, mother of the three girls, takes the blame for her middle child's choice to end her life. She believes she has failed to provide something that Ona needed and devotes her life to finding that missing piece of the puzzle. Her journey is one filled with self-accusation, self-loathing, and self-deprecation expressed through multiple happenings.

Another self-martyred mother is Helen Van Deventer from John Steinbeck's *The Pastures of Heaven* who lives a life filled with self-inflicted torture. Her self-imposed martyrdom which fuels her devotion to her demented daughter serves as the basis for the all-encompassing maelstrom in which she thrashes. However, she enjoys the attention she receives from others who observe her misery. Eventually, she must choose between her daughter's life and her sanity. Remarkably, her choice is another action which provides for even more personal torture.

The third example of the self-martyred mother is Addie of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Addie is intensely unhappy with her lot in life before she becomes a mother, and she carries this unhappiness through the mothering process of all five of her children. Each is neglected in their own way by their mother, and each suffers because of this absence of her love and support. For Addie, her life is absent of fulfilling circumstances which she accepts willingly, and it is simply the time in between birth and death.

An example of the child-sacrificing mother is Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a woman suffering from an anguished psychosis that demands the ultimate sacrifice of a child. She relinquishes her most prized possession, her toddler daughter, for what she believes is for the good of her child. Sethe's part in the death of her child is understandable in her heart because she sees herself as the woman who must make this sacrifice which she believes will stop the agony her daughter would suffer. Sethe feels helpless regarding the choice she must make to

protect her daughter. Since there is no hope, Sethe chooses to murder her own child to save her from what Sethe believes is a worse fate--slavery. She does not believe she can stop what will happen to her daughter. In Sethe's mind, her daughter's death is the first step to salvation of an innocent child.

Another example of a self-sacrificing mother portrayal is Suyuan Woo of Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* who must relinquish her twin daughters to save their lives. As she flees the invasion of a fierce Chinese army, she leaves the babies along the road with a note and a few valuables hoping that kind people will take them into their home and raise them with the love they deserve. Throughout her life, she longs for these babies. She makes a decision which she sees as best for her daughters. For some, leaving these babies behind is unacceptable; for others, it is a decision made with the survival of the children as paramount. She does not live to learn their fates, but another daughter finds them when they are grown and tells them of their mother's sacrifices and dedication to their survival.

Annie, the self-sacrificing mother of two girls doomed to a life filled with both physical and sexual abuse, tries to provide for her daughters in the best way she can. In Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*, this woman does whatever it takes to give her girls what she hopes will be a better life than that which they are currently living. She works multiple menial jobs until she finds a man whom she hopes will provide for her and her daughters. Unfortunately, Annie has no idea that the man she is willing to marry will abuse her children, physically and sexually.

Annie sees this man as someone who can help to provide monetarily for her daughters. Like many women lacking an education, she can provide only in very basic ways by working many jobs, plying various men with pleas for help, or by using her feminine wiles. She is the

self-sacrificing character who places her children ahead of herself until she no longer has anything to sacrifice.

Another self-sacrificing mother, Evelyn Lehman Ryan of Terry Ryan's *The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio*, is a woman who gives up her personal dreams to care for a drunkard and ten children. She sacrifices all that might make her personally happy to nurture her children. Her dedication is the reason her children are successful in life. For her, the sacrifices are returned through their successes.

In "Trip in a Summer Dress" by Annette Sanford, an anonymous fifteen year old gives birth to a boy and reluctantly turns the baby over to her mother to raise as her own. Her self-sacrifice is confirmed when she watches the sacrifices of a mother bird. It is then that she finally comes to the conclusion that what she has done is right. She accepts her choices and begins her journey of healing.

Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees* offers up an ensemble of loving women who provide substitute mothering to a lost adolescent seeking solace in her heart. Three sisters provide stability, freedom, and protection for Lily, a confused child. In addition to the sisters, Rosaleen, the housekeeper, stands by Lily throughout the journey to fulfillment which Lily must travel to answer her questions about her dead mother. Each woman has a piece of the puzzle which Lily must fit together to guide herself safely toward adulthood. These women exemplify the role of substitute mothers by individually providing love, guidance, escape, and security, sometimes even crossing over roles when necessary.

In Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*, Bush, Agnes, and Dora Rouge, a triad of substitute mothers, willingly accept the positions of mothers, healers, and teachers for a lost soul seeking a place in life. Without the unselfish dedication of these three women, Angela would be lost

forever to the misery of an abusive mother and an unfulfilled life without roots or love. They teach her to value herself and to search for what she rightfully deserves. These women provide variations of the substitute mother roles.

The chosen texts speak to five categories which have been repeated over and over in literature. Each of these portrayals represents only a portion of the reality of motherhood in literature. The varied texts chosen are representative of American literature and American writers. The biography, *The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio* by Terry Ryan and the autobiography, *Mommie Dearest* by Cristina Crawford are written with their mothers as the primary characters in the books. *Bastard out of Carolina* is based on an autobiography of Dorothy Allison. *The Joy Luck Club* is based on stories told to the author by her mother and aunts. *Bone*, *The Awakening*, and *The Secret Life of Bees* are novels written by prominent American women Fae Mayenne Ng, Kate Chopin, Sue Monk Kidd, respectively, who had stories to share. *Solar Storms* is written by a Chickasaw woman, Linda Hogan, who tells the story through authentic eyes. "Trip in a Summer Dress" is part of an anthology written by an American author Annette Sanford. John Steinbeck relates the mournful tale of Helen Van Deventer, and William Faulkner brings Addie to life through the journey of the family to bury her. The women writers were chosen because they represent varied genres, time frames, ethnicities, and viewpoints on motherhood. Steinbeck and Faulkner were chosen because each writer seems to have the gift with words to express a woman's perspective on motherhood.

Some of these books were recommended by avid readers, others by teachers or professors, and some because they are classic works of literature worthy of representation in any discussion of motherhood. Other texts are examples of the varied genres available to any person who wishes to partake in reading. As is the case with everything in life, some are more valuable

to certain readers than to others. These texts are merely a sampling of some of the many opportunities that literature affords those who read for pleasure and those who read for enrichment of knowledge.

CHAPTER 4: THE SELF-ABSORBED MOTHER

Edna Pontillier of *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin and Joan Crawford of *Mommie Dearest* by Cristina Crawford

Undoubtedly, one of the most self-absorbed mothers ever represented in literature is Edna Pontillier from Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Edna values her essential self over the desires of her family. What she values goes against what is expected of a woman married to a rich man in 19th century Creole society. This seems like a minor offense by modern standards, but she is judged by the standards of her time, and her obvious neglect of her children would have set tongues wagging in her time and in modern society. A quadroon nurse assumes much of the responsibility for the minute to minute care of the children, which would have been expected in upper class families in the late 1800's by a predominately patriarchal Creole society. Still, Edna is expected to nurture and teach her children manners and the finer aspects of societal expectations. She chooses to ignore even these small duties of mothering.

Unconcerned with cultural norms of the Creole society, Edna chooses to leave her husband and children so that she may swim in the middle of the day. The Creole society expects her to put the needs of her family first, but she leaves her children with the nurse and tends to her own needs rather than the needs of her children (Chopin 7). Edna's blatant disregard for strict Creole societal expectations points her toward a self-absorbed lifestyle for which she yearns.

Later that same evening, Leonce comes in late and wakes her only to be ignored by Edna just as he had ignored her earlier in the evening. Leonce expects her to check on the children, but she shows no interest. He is disappointed that she refuses to put the children ahead of her

comfort. Leonce finds this behavior "...very discouraging that his wife...the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him..." (12). To be at Leonce's beck and call is more that Edna can stand. According to Elizabeth Fox Genovese, author of "*The Awakening* in the Context of Experience, Culture and Values of Southern Women," for Edna, "women are cast as the object of others rather than as free subjects of their own fate" (62). Edna, who was not born into the Creole society, wants desperately to be free, not just of her children, but also of any responsibility that this foreign society might place upon her.

Leonce's concerns are not the concerns of Edna, and further, they never will be. A. E. Barr, noted conservative moralist and commentator, is quoted in the *Routledge Library Sourcebook on Kate Chopin's The Awakening* as saying that Edna chose to abnegate "maternal responsibility...in favor of personal fulfillment" (11). Edna lacks maternal instinct; instead, what instinct she has is one of emotional survival. Even though Leonce believes that Raoul, their son, has a fever, Edna chooses to sit on the porch and contemplate her own sadness and not the welfare of her son. Edna experiences "an indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some familiar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with vague anguish" (Chopin 14). The anguish is not for her son; it is for whatever is missing in Edna's life. Strangely, even Edna is not sure what makes her sad; even so, her desire to be happy, regardless of the affect of her actions on her husband and children, is paramount. Nothing is more important to Edna than her personal satisfaction. She, along with noted author, E. F. Genovese, believes "Marriage [and motherhood] imprisoned women and stunted their development" (62). Edna feels the same way, and she hungers for her freedom.

She may be incredibly sad; however, she gets no sympathy from her husband. Instead, "he reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children" (Chopin 13).

Leonce realizes that Edna is not that concerned with her children, and it is also becoming painfully apparent that the children are not interested in their mother as much as Leonce thinks they should be. They appear to be rather independent for such young children. They do not need her constant attention, for which Edna is grateful. Defending her actions by saying that she is doing what her children want, she absolves herself of all guilt. She is an acceptable mother in her mind, doing what is absolutely necessary, but not going above or beyond those minimal duties. She believes what she does is for the betterment of her children. Edna does not have her heart in raising this family. In Edna's defense, much of the hands-on raising of the children would have been left up to the quadroon nurse. However, Edna would have been expected to be the doting mother after the day to day work of raising the children was complete. But for Edna, even that small part of mothering is not of interest to her.

With a freed conscience, she is grateful when her children visit their grandmother. She never misses them and sees this time away from them as an opportunity to pursue her own interests. She seeks personal fulfillment which she cannot find in her children. Her desire for personal pleasure overrides her maternal duties and any semblance of responsibility she should feel. At that time, it would have been "a monstrous thing to consider the care of children a waste of their [the mother's] own life" according to the ideas in A. E. Barr's article "Good and Bad Mothers" from *The North American Review* (22). Unintimidated by the community standards, she enjoys the hours spent by the sea which are times of reflection and solitude or better yet, time spent flirting with Robert Lebrun. According to the narrator, "Mrs. Pontellier liked to sit and gaze at her fair companion as she might look upon a faultless Madonna" (Chopin 20). Her adoration is reserved for Robert, not her children. It might be expected of her to look upon her children with such heavenly admiration, but this obsession with a man not her husband feels

foreign and most assuredly unacceptable to the reader, but not to Edna. For her, it is a natural state. Her true interest lies with Robert, an unattached younger man, and not her children. Her children do not enter into her mind. To spend time away from them whenever possible is truly her desire.

On a Sunday morning when she should be enjoying a leisurely breakfast with her husband and children, she furtively searches for Robert, and they plan a day away from her husband or children. Edna does as she pleases, and “She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility” (55). Her impulse is to satisfy her need for attention. Her excursion with Robert only moves her farther from her children, both physically and emotionally. “Edna felt as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast—whose chains had been loosening—had snapped the night before when the mystic spirit was abroad leaving her free to drift withersoever she chose to set her sails” (58). This comparison to a ship moored where it does not belong further supports Edna’s desperation when dealing with motherhood. She is a ship chained to an anchor so that it cannot fulfill its true calling: to sail the seas of life. Without obligation to her sons or Leonce, Edna sneaks off with Robert. Her desire is to be the master of her ship and thus, her fate. Essentially, she has broken the chains from the anchor and figuratively, set her ship free to sail to new adventures.

Unfortunately, the calm waters she originally set sail on have become a tempest. When she returns, she finds that her youngest child, Etienne, has refused to sleep. Now she is forced to be a mother to him and spend time holding him until he drops off to sleep exhausted. To add insult to injury, Adele, the perfect mother with whom she has an uneasy friendship, is the substitute caretaker for the irritable child in Edna’s absence. There is nothing Edna can do but

“coddle and caress him ...soothing him to sleep” (66). “Coddle” and “caress” are an odd pairing. One word indicates an action by a mother who spoils her children, while the other word is an action of thoughtfulness and love. Edna is not committed to either action or its connected emotion. She is neither thoughtful nor loving, and she definitely does not spoil her children with too much love or too much attention. Ivy Schweitzer in her article entitled "Maternal Discourse and the Romance of Self-Possession in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*" relays that "the oppressive demands and responsibilities attached to all the demands of motherhood" are so overwhelming for her that when she tries to put her children to bed a few days later, both she and her sons are frustrated by her lack of maternal instinct (89). Edna again fails at a simple task of motherhood.

In an odd moment, while expressing fleeting interest in her sons, Edna scolds the nurse, who is responsible for much of the mothering of the boys, for allowing them to get sunburned. The concern is not so much for her children as it is for her position in the community, which is out of character for her since she usually does not care about the expectations of society, especially the Creole society, into which she was not born. Her concern is not so much for the children as it is for the gossiping members of the community whom she normally ignores.

For Edna, supervising the help is one responsibility that she relishes. Scolding the nurse allows Edna to feel a modicum of power over someone. With this task, she has a bit of control over her life and theirs. While she is willing to allow the tongues to wag regarding her minor dalliances, she is not willing to let the servants appear to get the best of her in the community's eyes. At least with them, she can be in control.

In a discussion of her personal freedom and responsibilities several days later, she shares confidences with Adele, the one woman with whom Edna has formed a fragile, distant

relationship; she tells Adele that she would never sacrifice herself for her children or anyone else (Chopin 79). She firmly asserts her importance over her children. That pleasure seeking nature will not be stymied by her children, her husband, or the community members. Nothing and nobody will get in the way of her pursuit of pleasure. She tells Adele that the worst thing she could lose would be her identity which is the center of her soul, her essential self.

As addressed in "Maternal Discourse and the Romance of Self-Possession in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*" authored by Ivy Schweitzer, "Motherhood and individuality seem mutually exclusive" for Edna (89). She cannot manage a simple truce between the two concepts of motherhood and individuality. Donald E. Pease, author of *Revisionary Interventions into the Americanist Canon*, believes her struggle "for autonomous selfhood entails a rejection of her responsibilities as a mother" (162). For Edna to be an individual, she must separate herself from her position as a mother. For her, one usurps the other. In Edna's self-absorbed world, she "fails to perceive that the relationship of a mother to her children is far more important than the gratification of a passion which experience has taught her is by its very nature, evanescent," according to writer Laurie Fink, author of *Feminist Theory. Women's Writing* (167). Edna chooses to invest her time in the "gratification of passion" rather than the gratification of motherhood (167).

Adele presents herself as the exact opposite of Edna. Happy as mother and as a wife, Adele is the perfect foil to Edna. She feels valued in all her efforts. Her duties as a mother are treasured times she spends with her children, nurturing and adoringly focusing on their every need. For Adele, the idea of being self-absorbed is completely foreign. She lives for her children and devotes her every waking moment to their happiness. To Edna, this woman is an enigma, one which Edna chooses to never understand.

Just as Edna cannot understand Robert, she also cannot understand why Robert Lebrun has left her. With Robert absent from Edna's life, she is forced to face her obligations of mother, wife, and hostess in the community. However, his absence has dissolved what little interest in these obligations which had previously existed. She further ignores her children, her husband, and her social obligations. These obligations do not supersede her insatiable desire for pleasure. Her relationship with her children and her husband escalate to hostility at best. They continually confront each other over minor issues.

Arguing with her husband over her intentions to paint has become a frequent occurrence. Interested only in her art, an egocentric satisfaction, she completely ignores her duties, especially her children until another distraction, a handsome young man, Alcee Arobin, enters her life. Now she has someone else to replace her mothering duties again, and she is more than interested in the attention this new man could offer. But after a few days of giddy happiness, she finds herself once again extremely unhappy without understanding why (Chopin 130). Her perpetual search for personal happiness is never-ending.

Reacting to this sadness, Edna, impulsively, chooses to leave her sons and her husband's house. In a cursory gesture of motherhood, she sends a box of chocolates with a note to her children and a note to her husband explaining her decision to leave (136). Even though a note and chocolates most certainly would not give her solace, she foolishly, believes they should offer comfort to her husband and children. She is, of course, substituting these material things for her attention. She underestimates her husband and gives no credence to the feelings of her children. While she is accomplished at writing letters of explanation and sending welcomed gifts, she is indeed inept at carrying through with maternal actions. A. E. Barr believes "the father is the head and hands of the family" but "...the mother is the heart" (22). Accepting this

as a tenet of a family means that the Pontillier family is now without its heart. It is a family floundering.

After a separation of a few days, Edna graces her children with a few attentive days at the house of her mother-in-law. When she first embraces them, "She wept for very pleasure when she felt their little arms clasping her" (156-157). For a week, she is the mother that her children have done without for most of their lives. Playing with them and putting them to bed is a gift to the children which is irreplaceable, but short-lived on Edna's part. She leaves just as stealthily as she arrives. "All along the journey homeward their presence lingered with her like a delicious song. But by the time she regained the city the song no longer echoed in her soul" (158). The moment the children are out of sight, they are out of mind, too, and so the maternal display of affections is short-lived.

Her friend and her doctor attempt to intervene on behalf of the children. Even though both Adele and Dr. Mandelet implore Edna to think of her children, she tells them that she wants to live alone. For Edna, "Robert's going had some way taken the brightness, the color, the meaning out of everything...her whole existence was dulled" (77). When she is spurned by Robert, she chooses to ignore her responsibilities as a mother since she feels these responsibilities are the source of her discontent. Edna wants only to be a mother peripherally. She does not want to be a full-time mother. She believes the children will swallow her soul if she does not separate herself from them. Her only choice is to end her obligation to her children by whatever method possible. Her alternatives are few and grave by nature, especially now that she thinks of herself as a lost soul.

While she wants to be with Robert, she knows that he too would "melt out of her existence, leaving her alone" (189). Flippantly, she mentions that "Today it is Arobin; tomorrow

it will be someone else" (188). While Robert is part of her decision, he is not the entire reason she chooses to die. She thinks of Arobin also. Hers is a search to find what is absent in her life. She believes she will achieve peace as her own person and not as a mother, a wife, or even as the lover of either Robert or Arobin, but instead, by releasing herself from all of her obligations. Everyone is an obligation she must juggle. She does not see Robert or Arobin as powerful in her life as she sees her husband and children whom she believes "could possess her, body and soul" (188). She does not see this desire of her family to possess her as love.

Seeking refuge, Edna calmly walks into the water confident that she will be reborn in another world where her essential being is protected and nurtured, where she will find absolute pleasure. Her final thoughts are of the children and Leonce, explaining her rationale for ending the pain she cannot control. "Good-bye --because, I love you" (188). "She thought of Leonce and the children. They were part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul" (188). As Edna walks to the sea, the vision of "The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her, who had overpowered her and sought to drag her into soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them," (189). Walking into that water alleviates the control they exert over her. She is now at peace.

According to Catherine Lundie in her article "One Need Not Be A Chamber To Be Haunted" in *The Canadian Review of American Studies*, "heroines accept death as a welcome alternative to continuing on in a loveless marriage" (249). While her husband, Leonce, loves her in his own way, Edna does not perceive her situation in this manner and thus chooses to end her earthly misery permanently, thereby gaining ethereal pleasures. She equates her death with her freedom from the obligations of a failed marriage and unwanted motherhood. In the late 1800's when *The Awakening* was originally published, it was considered "a serious danger to

impressionable young, female minds, threatening irreparable damage to family values, womanly duties and morality" (Barr 6). In addition, A. E. Barr also writes, "through Edna, Chopin managed to undermine the entire social fable of middle-class America, with constant rejection of...the traditional expectations of womanhood" (10).

Other readers might see Edna as a woman who is starved for attention. She is a woman in a foreign community of the Creole society with a group of people who see her as an outsider because she was not born into the Creole culture. Edna, a protestant from Kentucky, knows that behind closed doors, the community members look down upon her. She has no friends she can count on because she is not one of them. They treat her with civility, but not with warmth. She does not understand their ways, and it is the fault of her acquaintances and of herself that she is not accepted as one of them. She has kept a comfortable distance between herself and the members of this tight-knit community. Although she gave birth to the children, they too feel as foreign to her as the community and its members. She is caught in a situation she feels she cannot change. It is easy to see how she could lose hope and see the end of her life as a solution to all the emotional pain with which she lives. Perhaps her suicide is one way of freeing her children, and her husband from an unhappy woman who has become an ineffectual mother and wife.

Another example of an ineffectual, self-absorbed mother, Joan Crawford, maintained that she was not an abusive parent; instead, she said she believed in discipline, dished out with the harsh realities of life. Joan Crawford, one of the most well-known mother portrayals in the modern world, when asked by the media about her parenting style, quickly replied, "I was a strict disciplinarian, perhaps too strict at times, but my God without discipline what is life?"

("Biography of Joan Crawford"). Cristina Crawford didn't see it that way in her autobiography *Mommie Dearest*. In Cristina's mind, Crawford was much more than strict; she was cruel.

Crawford lived a life of privilege, filled with money and fame. An accomplished stage and screen actress with a long running career, Crawford felt her personal and professional life needed something more to be satisfying. In an effort to add to her life, Crawford adopted five children over seven years, but one son returned to his biological mother at the end of a year. On the surface, offering her home to five motherless children appears to be quite selfless; however, according to the oldest daughter, Cristina, that is the absolute opposite of the truth.

Initially, Joan Crawford appears to be the perfect mother, extremely doting and attentive. "During my infancy, she showered me with the pent-up outpouring of love and affection that had been stifled for so many years," and "she would rush home [from the studio] in time to feed me and give me my bath," Cristina recalls as she fondly remembers how her mother would "sing lullabies to me and rock me to sleep" (21). But within three years of the adoption, everything changes. With Crawford's career ending at MGM Studios, she marries another actor and adopts another child, hoping these events will give a needed boost to her career, according to Cristina Crawford. At this point, Cristina begins to understand that her life is rapidly taking a turn for the worst.

As Crawford rebuilds her faltering career, she ignores Cristina in favor of publicity opportunities including parties and traveling except when her children add to her persona of the perfect mother. The second, third, and fourth birthday parties for Christina became media events, each progressively grander, featuring full merry-go-rounds, clowns, a trained pig, an organ grinder with a trained monkey, magicians, hundreds of balloons, and most importantly, a "gathering of the progeny of Hollywood's royalty " (31). Cristina describes herself as "the

perfect child in every respect," beautifully dressed with impeccable manners (32). She is the perfect accessory for a woman who wishes to make a statement about herself as not only successful in her career, but also in her personal life. Joan Crawford created Cristina in her own image. She and Cristina dressed in exact copies of the same dress. "Mommie had created me in the image of perfection and then created these birthday parties to celebrate another successful year of happiness with that creation," laments Cristina (32). Crawford and the media get what they want: publicity photos of the beautiful, grateful, adopted child with the adoring, selfless movie star mother. Joan Crawford engineers a self-serving photo opportunity to rebuild a floundering career. It is especially difficult for Cristina considering just a few days before that fourth birthday party, she punishes Cristina by violently shredding her favorite dress with scissors because she peeled wallpaper in her nursery when she was supposed to be napping (33).

To further prove her point, Crawford forces Cristina to wear the shredded dress for one week. This is but one in a long line of abusive incidents which Crawford uses to teach Cristina lessons in life. She is tied up and left in the shower, locked in a linen closet, humiliated in front of her mother's friends, spanked with hairbrushes, wooden hangers, and yardsticks leaving "large painful blisters and long red welts" (49). Crawford doesn't stop the punishment even on Sundays. Sunday mornings are also photo opportunities for the actress regaining her place in the world of film. She dresses her daughters in white gloves, crinolines, and hats and her son in his finest outfits so that they can pose as the perfect family as they enter and exit the church (50). The point of attending church is not to introduce religion into the lives of these children. It is to provide a photo opportunity for the media and positive publicity for Joan Crawford, according to Cristina.

Prone to compulsive behavior, Crawford insists that the children clean the house even though there are servants to do this work. The children never please her, and she punishes them in a multitude of ways, including beating Cristina with a can of scouring powder until the can is destroyed. The following morning, Crawford acts as if nothing has happened (59). Shortly thereafter, she follows this action with a midnight foray into the garden where she cuts down every rose bush and an orange tree and gets the children out of bed to carry the branches covered with thorns to the garbage (61).

Joan Crawford teaches Cristina, who is about six, to mix drinks for the many "uncles" who visit her mother and expects her to entertain them until she is ready to see them (74). Cristina is expected to be the perfect hostess to this cavalcade of men. Joan Crawford uses her child as a social secretary to the many men in her life, promoting Cristina as a happy, productive little girl who is outgoing and involved in her mother's life. In Cristina's mind, nothing could be further from the truth. Instead, she is a child used by her mother to further her career by charming these men into believing that her mother is loving and kind.

Christmas is another time when Crawford uses the children and the holiday to further her reputation as generous and caring. A few weeks before Christmas, the Crawford house is turned into a "production line" where hundreds of packages are wrapped and then distributed to people who are not as fortunate as they are. Cristina claims, "It was geared to impress strangers with my mother's generosity" (88). This is only one of the many acts in the publicity showcase Joan Crawford perpetrates. Crawford chooses a few gifts from her fans and from the things she has given her children and then gives the more expensive gifts to other children often as birthday gifts, "because Mother didn't want to be embarrassed by giving children of other people cheap

presents" (89). Although Joan Crawford had money, she chose not to spend the money on other people's children.

The other gifts are presented ceremoniously to hospitals or children's homes as the Crawford brood parades before the media while their movie star mother smiles benevolently. Cristina and her siblings feel embarrassed by the attention from the media, but in Cristina's words, "Mother seemed to take delight in finding ways to make us look foolish...in front of everyone..." but "she was at her best in front of an audience," claims Cristina (89). Every action, no matter how charitable, always has underlying motives, namely to promote Joan Crawford's career and her public persona. Her actions are usually not meant to aid society; instead, they are done to aid her personally, especially to promote her floundering career.

In a 1949 radio broadcast, Crawford and her children are interviewed about their Christmas rituals. She appears as the ever doting mother as she talks about how she teaches her children to be respectful of others who are not so fortunate and to be grateful for the life they lead, especially since her children are so blessed. The American public looks lovingly at Joan Crawford and her children after this interview "proving her not only successful but also morally superior" because in her "generosity" she has taken "not one, not two, but four orphaned children into her home," according to her downtrodden daughter (99). Cristina states, "One minute we were treated like privileged royalty...and a few minutes later we were little more than extra servants doing Mother's bidding" (99). In the eyes of the public, Crawford succeeds with every staged effort.

In a home filled with contradictions, Cristina is either the "golden-haired princess" surrounded by luxury or the "extra servant" locked in closets and forced to eat in the pantry (109). Her place in the household is tenuous at best. When the cameras or the photographers are

present, she and her siblings become the prized possessions of a woman obsessed with her career and her media presence. Every media opportunity works to the favor of Crawford perfectly.

Even a vicious argument, instigated by Joan Crawford, that escalates into a physical battle, works to boost her public persona. Although, Cristina has a cut lip, black eye, and a hand print on the side of her face, when the police are called by Joan Crawford, she becomes the victim and Cristina is threatened with juvenile hall for her supposed actions (157). At one point during the argument, a secretary intervenes and pulls Crawford off her daughter, but still the authorities are willing to help Joan Crawford and not her daughter who has obviously been beaten. It further escalates when Crawford tells the directors of the boarding school that she can no longer abide this "incorrigible" child, bringing disgrace to her daughter (159).

With every action Crawford builds her public reputation and looks more and more like the omniscient, benevolent benefactor to this ungrateful grouping of unwanted children. According to her daughter, Christina, her perpetual mistreatment of her children works in her favor, time and time again. The public sees her as the quintessential mother of four adopted children. When in reality, her self-absorbed ways benefit her personally and professionally and certainly do not benefit her children who simply want to be loved. Daintee Glover Jones in her National Women's Studies Association journal article, entitled "'Mothers: Is It Really Mommie Dearest? Daughter-Mother Narratives in Young Adult Fiction,'" says all children "...need and want their mother's love, they want to bind, not sever the relationship they share with their mothers; when that binding occurs, it aids in healthy development through...adolescence" (218). In the case of this family, this is not what is happening.

Joan Crawford does have the last word. In her will, she leaves no inheritance to either Cristina or her brother. The parting words in her last will and testament informed both adult

children that they would receive no money or property "...for reasons which are well known to them" (Crawford 304). Crawford's actions are told by her adopted daughter Cristina, and Joan Crawford does not get the opportunity to deny or accept responsibility for her actions. The possibility remains that she may have been a strict mother, but not a self-absorbed mother. Her side of the story died with her on May 10, 1977. As "one of the most famous mothers in literature" she "checked her reflection, heard the magic words, and knew there would always be two faces in the mirror on the wall, hers and her daughter's" states Kaite Mediatore Storer author of "Fairly Good Mothers" (27).

CHAPTER 5:

THE SELF-MARTYRED MOTHER

Mah in *Bone* by Fae Myenne Ng and Helen Van Deventer in *The Pastures of Heaven* by John Steinbeck, and Addie in *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner

A negative characteristic of motherhood, which is often tied to self-sacrifice is self-martyrdom. *Webster's New World College Dictionary* defines martyr as "a person who assumes an attitude of suffering in order to arouse the feeling of pity or guilt in others." The self-martyred mother, who places everyone before herself, is often treated with disrespect by her children, yet admired by outsiders as a woman who values modesty and humility. While outsiders might see her as a humble, giving woman, her own children often see her as shrewish, lacking in self-confidence, and undeserving of their respect. A woman in this position maintains a martyr-like existence from which she most assuredly receives some sort of personal gratification. This gratification is a personal impetus for her loss of self in a multitude of ways. She is always at the mercy of others for gratification. Incapable of finding value in herself, she accepts blame for many of the ills of those who surround her. By shouldering this burden, a woman in this position, achieves a place for herself, a place of distinction. Her life is a paradox: to have a position in life, she must pretend she deserves none. Uniquely, this brings gratification to the self-martyred mother.

One such mother is Mah from *Bone* by Fae Myenne Ng. Mah, a Chinese immigrant raising three daughters in San Francisco's Chinatown, is unassuming, hard-working, and filled with guilt over an affair she had with a former employer. Mah is part of two cultures: the Chinese culture of her birth and the American culture in which she now lives. She must move

between the two worlds and live in both cultures satisfactorily. She must honor the land of her birth and respect the land where she now earns a living. For her, life is balancing two cultures.

In addition to the cultural difficulties, she also suffers an inconsolable grief: her middle daughter, Ona, jumped to her death without leaving any inkling of why she chose this way out. Leila, as the oldest daughter, must tell her mother about Ona's death. She remembers how "Mah had cried so much the last few days the salt traced lines down her cheek" (Ng 132). At the funeral, her mother "crumpled to the floor... 'My daughter, my daughter,' she wailed" (143). Mah's anguish is overwhelming. Tortured by this horrendous loss, she can never come to terms with it. It is a pain that will never go away, and she has no choice but to bear the sorrow for as long as she draws a breath. She bears the encumbrance of Ona's death all the while believing that she is being punished for the transgressions of her past.

One reason Mah cannot move on with her life is her guilt over Ona's suicide. Her daughter's death is just one more thing for which Mah feels responsible. She believes it is punishment for an affair she had with an employer named Tommie Hom many years ago. Her daughter's loss is more than she can bear. She carries the burden of Ona's death in her heart and "...blamed herself for what happened. She locked herself in the bedroom and pulled the curtains closed" (104). Since Mah cannot rise above her past transgressions and with this overpowering burden, she cannot move on with her life.

According to Simone De Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* because many women find "the roads to transcendence are blocked...they do nothing, they fail to make themselves anything" (1411). This is what happens to Mah. She is nothing to herself and nothing to her children. All she has are her sorrows and disappointments. Emmanuel S. Nelson, author of *Asian American Novelists: A Bibliographical Critical Source Book* offers a reason for Mah's sorrows and

disappointments. "Mah has no success stories to share with her family and friends. She searches for sympathy and solace" (262). Her guilt is so great that she shuts out the world, including her friends and her family. Although Mah seeks sympathy, she pushes those away who are willing to give it to her. The guilt she feels is just one more thing she hates about herself, and it is just one more reason for her to believe she is worthless. She purposely excludes her "sewing ladies," the women who are her safety net and who offer comfort and sage advice in grand doses. They know "how to draw out Mah's sadness and then take it away" (Ng 105). Even when she builds walls to keep them out of her life, she is unsuccessful in doing so. They refuse to allow her to push them away; still, they cannot take away Mah's guilt. Mah also cannot go on with her life because she is afraid of "what the people in Chinatown were saying" (112). She takes the blame for all that is wrong with her family, but she refuses to let the people closest to her know how she truly feels. The need to save face is much greater than the need to provide an environment which offers support for her daughters. Ona's suicide is linked to Mah's silence since she refuses to talk about the demons Ona wrestled with in her life and in her heart. Mah fears that the demons she harbors are the same demons that took hold of Ona and destroyed her.

The demons Ona felt were transferred to Mah when Ona took her life. The mysterious demons take possession of Mah at the police station when Mah receives the details of Ona's death. Mah could only "look up calmly, the calm breaking into sobbing" (122). She could not speak or relate to the circumstances. She keeps to herself and thinks of the mistakes she has made in her life, relating those errors to the death of her middle daughter, believing that all the mistakes in her life are what caused Ona's death. Her anguish is so burdensome that neither her best friends nor her daughters can comfort her in this devastating time. She cannot come to grips with her guilt over her daughter's death, nor with her personal indiscretions. Mah's "eyes

dimmed from crying and then from anger. She was inconsolable. She went to bed with questions: "Tell me how to live? How to face life? How to see people" (188). This self-martyred woman never finds the answers to her questions, never finds peace, and never finds happiness. Attached to this need for self-martyrdom is the need to bear the guilt of a thousand consciences in her heart and soul. Worse yet, she believes she is the reason for all these sadnesses. This decision to take on these burdens is merely another form of self-martyrdom.

Many of these self-martyred mothers are at the mercy of others for gratification. Incapable of finding value in themselves, they accept blame for every error, whether personal or global, and then shoulder that blame to gather attention from others. By shouldering the responsibility for every issue, Mah, like other women in her position, achieves a place for themselves, a place of distinction, one she can hold while believing she deserves neither love, nor gratitude, nor respect. Ng's writing can be "chilling and painful, but the overall tone is one of introspective sadness" according to writer Suzanne Samuel, author of "Time Heals No Wounds: Review of Bone" (28). This is true of Mah. Mah's sadness is all-encompassing; it is deep in her soul. Her life is a trade-off; she must believe she deserves nothing to feel worthy of attention from her family and friends.

The same is true of another self-martyred mother, Helen Van Deventer, one of John Steinbeck's tortured inhabitants of *The Pastures of Heaven*. She loves her daughter, Hilda, and finds it difficult to accept the truth about Hilda's mental illness. Tragically, Hilda is just one of the many losses that Helen must endure. She spends her entire life suffering losses, and her daughter is but one more loss that she must bear.

Helen's first loss was her beloved Persian kitten. For six months, she agonized over its loss "...with a subdued voice and a hushed manner" (Steinbeck 55). While the loss of a

treasured pet is devastating to a young child, it does not compare to the devastation Helen suffers at the loss of her devoted father. Her beloved father's death heaped tragedy on her fragile heart (Steinbeck 55). She did not scream her pain out loud as most children might; instead, her heart hides the pain quietly where it grows like a disease which destroys her slowly, heartache by heartache.

Helen Van Deventer "...hungered for tragedy and life had lavishly heaped it upon her" (55). Her husband of three months is killed in a hunting accident, and Helen finds herself three months pregnant with Hilda. Hilda is born from a woman suffering from life's fateful punishments, a woman who carries the horrors, real and imagined, in her soul and who passes those horrors to her unborn child, unknowingly. Born of this anguished woman, Hilda is susceptible to not only physical illness, but also emotional suffering. Violent outbursts and delusional behavior are but two of the frightening characteristics with which Helen must cope.

Although Helen tries desperately to soothe her daughter often she "...succeeded in increasing the temper..." and "...the pathway of her anger..." (56). Nothing appeases this child. While a doctor believes Hilda is beyond help, Helen believes that her daughter is her burden to bear. "We take what is given to us. No amount of tragedy can break down my endurance," she stoically proclaims to the doctor (57). She is convinced that her daughter's infirmities are a result of the losses she has suffered, especially the tragic loss of her husband. Helen laments, "She was born at the wrong time. Her father's death--it was too much for me. I didn't have the strength to bear a perfect child..." (56). Helen takes responsibility for her damaged daughter even though the doctor doesn't agree that it is her fault.

Dr. Phillips believes that there is the possibility of help for this emotionally disturbed little girl, but Helen chooses to "...just watch her and care for her" (56). She can continue to

remain the martyr in her own eyes as long as she refuses outside help. "That seems to be my life," she confides to Dr. Phillips, but he believes that she "forces hardships upon..." herself (57).

When she chooses not to follow his suggestions, he turns against her. "If I were Fate...I'd be tempted to smash her placid resistance too," decries Dr. Phillips (57). Phillips feels that she causes much of her distress by not standing up to these miseries which seem to frequent her daily. Looking the doctor in the eyes, Helen declares, "I can endure anything" (60). While Helen hopes for sympathy, she draws no sympathy from anyone, even herself.

As Hilda's emotional disorder grows daily, Helen accepts more and more of the responsibility for these outbursts and attempts to placate her beloved child by sitting at her daughter's bedside throughout the night, hoping this will convince her that these demons she confronts nightly do not exist. Although unsuccessful at banishing these delusions from her daughter's mind, Helen never gives up. She presses the doctor for the answers she hopes to hear, but they will never be heard. The advice Dr. Phillips offers is that Hilda is approaching maturity and with the physical changes come serious emotional changes which "...invariably intensifies mental troubles" (59). Helen refuses to take his advice to have Hilda committed to an institution where she can do no harm. For Helen, this is not the ethical thing to do.

Her obligation to this child does not end when Hilda is deemed mentally ill at six years of age, but rather it begins with this second confirmation of her daughter's emotional state as she enters adolescence. Undaunted, Helen gathers this pain of her daughter's illness and buries it deep in her soul stating, "She is mine, and I'm responsible for her. I'll stay with her myself...I won't let her out of my sight" (60). For Helen, it is easier to cope with the pain of mental illness than to cope with the loss of her daughter at this point.

Phillips decries, "Why should you take this load of misery and danger on your own shoulders?" (60). It is all to no avail because Helen has decided that she alone is responsible for the problems her daughter suffers from, and she alone must bear the consequences. Phillips believes she has chosen to wear a "hair shirt" to punish herself for real and imagined sins (60). Just as the hair shirt was a self-inflicted punishment centuries ago, Phillips compares Helen's desire to take on these responsibilities filled with anguish to wearing a hair shirt. The doctor believes this is an innate need to be punished which leads her to some demented personal fulfillment in his eyes and her heart. It is an expression of self-martyrdom. After many years of reasoning with her, the doctor has run out of patience and tells Helen that he wishes to never see her again. Strangely, this is but one more self-destructive issue that Helen can assume with zest. Sadly, even a man who has sworn an oath to care for those who cannot care for themselves has dismissed Helen from his sight forever.

Ignoring the counsel of Dr. Phillips, Helen decides that she can repair the damage to her daughter by changing the scenery, and she moves to what she believes might just be her saving grace, in a community called the Pastures of Heaven. Outwardly, she replaces one place of anguish with another. Inside, she knows that she is the person who bears the duties of caring for this child who is mentally ill. Caring for her daughter is just another way to suffer for her supposed duty, and that is what she needs to survive her piteous life.

However, when Hilda lies to a stranger, claiming to be kept prisoner because she is rich, and then threatens to run away with a man she doesn't know, Helen realizes she must intervene. In a moment of painful epiphany, Helen understands that she has "resigned herself to a feeling of hopeless gloom" in which she "must resist sadness, by not trying to escape from it" (66). At this point, she begins to feel a "new sense of peace" which has eluded her for her entire life (67). It

is then that she commits herself fully to what she must do to solve her daughter's torment and her personal torment, which is a constant need to accept as a personal punishment the transgressions of her mentally ill daughter. She decides that she must end her daughter's misery when she gets a shotgun and begins the search for her daughter. Ironically, what she is about to do is the most horrible personal punishment for any mother--her beloved child must die. Additionally, it is the most horrific act any mother can perpetuate. She will end the life of her daughter. With Hilda's death, Helen will find another misery, but this misery will bring her sympathy from everyone. She will find another reason to wear the hair shirt. With this self-inflicted misery comes a warped sense of satisfaction as she continues to suffer these personal torments which paradoxically, she also relishes.

The creation of this tale of a woman tormented by guilt and disappointment who wallows in self-martyrdom and who somehow evokes sympathy and empathy from the reader is one of Steinbeck's greatest talents. His "realistic characters...cross indistinct lines between fact and fiction," according to Jan Whitt in her article entitled "To Do Some Good and No Harm: The Literary Journalism of John Steinbeck" (48). Whitt quotes Steinbeck as saying, "The hardest thing about writing is telling the truth" (47). His calculated portrayal of Helen Van Deventer accomplishes this. Although Helen murders her only child in cold blood, Steinbeck's presentation of the issue is a possible albeit troubling end to a life filled with despair and torment not only for Helen, but also her daughter Hilda. Helen is free of Hilda physically, but not the memories of what Helen has done. Warren French, author of *The Social Novel of an Era*, analyzes Steinbeck's presentation of characters stating he "stresses constantly the essential loneliness of the individual and the necessity of the individual accepting the often unpleasant responsibility for his actions and decisions" (46). The overwhelming loneliness and

responsibility Helen copes with daily is more than she can bear. This may be the reason that Helen chooses this heart-wrenching choice. Steinbeck's purpose in creating disturbing characters like Helen is "to increase people's awareness and lead them to action on behalf of others" (Whitt 43). For Helen, intervention by friends and family is too late. Helen will carry this burden for life.

The final portrayal of the self-martyred mother is Addie of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Not all martyrs make a public spectacle of their suffering. Some swallow the hot coals of life and separate themselves from those who might provide comfort to them. Such is the example of Addie Bundren. Addie has chosen to absent herself from any opportunity for happiness. She marries a man she doesn't love, gives birth to five children, and keeps all of them at arm's length. She chooses this self-imposed isolation which supports her taciturn martyrdom.

When the novel begins, Addie is dying. Her oldest son, Cash, is building her coffin outside her bedroom window so she can supervise the construction of her final resting place. Her second son, Darl, cannot deal with her impending death. Her third son, Jewel, reacts with violence. Her daughter, Dewey Dell, is more concerned with her own unwanted pregnancy than her mother's death, and the youngest child doesn't understand what is truly happening.

Long before Addie dies, she makes her husband promise to take her to her home town that is miles away when it is time to bury her. The five children and her husband, Anse, load her coffin in the back of a wagon and set off to bury her in the town where her family lived. For Addie, this is an act of a vengeance against Anse; however, it is also an act of vengeance against her children because they must suffer through the journey with her husband. Coerced into one last journey, her family obediently obliges her last request. The journey takes nine days from her death until her burial and is filled with multiple difficulties.

Before Addie marries Anse, she is a school teacher. She is not a woman who enjoys her work. For her, the charges she cares for are nuisances. Addie describes the end of the day disparagingly. "In the afternoon when school was out and the last one had left with his little dirty snuffling nose, instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them" (Faulkner 169). Her disgust for her students overwhelms her. She says she sits in solitude with "the quiet smelling of damp and rotted leaves" (169). For her, life is just like those leaves, rotting away. In an odd way, she enjoys the idea that she must toil at a job she dislikes, just as she must live her life pushing away all those who might love her. Addie tolerates her students, her obligations, and her life. These issues and her father's philosophy on life are the reasons she chooses to become a martyr.

Addie's father is in many ways to blame for how she manages her personal and professional life. Her father often told her "that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time," and Addie wishes that her father had never "planted" her since all she has to look forward to is her death (169-170). Because Addie's father has filled her head with the belief that she is on earth only to prepare to die, she lives her life as a martyr, a woman with no purpose in life except to wait for death. Because of this, she has no reason to live life, only to exist.

Paradoxically, even though she doesn't have a zest for life, she still wants to be remembered in some way, whether it is positive or negative. When she speaks of her students, it is with great disdain. She says she could hardly wait for her students to misbehave so she could punish them. "I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them," she expresses with delight (170). With every welt she inflicts, she is sure they will be aware of her presence for a lifetime (170). Her desire is to make her mark on them with the switch and with her presence. Addie wants to be remembered; she wants to remain in their thoughts "for ever

and ever" (170). Her cruelty leaves an imprint on each child, and thus, they will carry her with them always. This is the act of martyring: to torment or torture, according to *Random House Webster's Dictionary*; and Addie enjoys inflicting this malevolence on her charges.

Unhappy as a schoolteacher, Addie marries to escape the doldrums of her position. When Anse asks her to marry him, she sees him as that opportunity for change. There is no love, no respect, just a desire for change. She trades one unhappy situation for another when she marries Anse who offers her change and not much more, and with the birth of her first son, Cash, she knows that life is difficult, and it will not get better. She is a wife and a mother and nothing more. She has agreed to a life of hard labor with little to look forward to. Worse yet, she is sure that "living is terrible" (Faulkner 171). Her father's words echo in her head reminding her that she is just marking time before she dies. With this paradigm of life, she continues to isolate herself from any chance to love or be loved. Her self-imposed isolation is characteristic of martyrdom.

Further, she has come to the conclusion "that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn't care whether there was a word for it or not" (171-172). She knows that mothering is much more than any word could ever describe. Her frustration with life spills over into her frustration with mothering. Addie realizes that mothering is much more encompassing than just a simple word could represent. "You wouldn't need a word for that [mother] anymore than for pride or fear," she laments (172). Addie understands that mothering comes from deep within the human spirit; unfortunately, she also understands that this essence does not exist in her spirit because she chooses not to love or be loved.

With the birth of her first child, Cash, Addie has the option to open her heart to this innocent child, but within three months of Cash's birth, Addie is pregnant again. She has not had time to bond with her first child before another is on the way. This time she is angry with Anse, her husband, and believes she could kill him (172). She felt "tricked by words older than Anse or love" and that ... "revenge would be that he would never know that [she] was taking revenge" (172-173).

For Addie, motherhood means just one more step on her way to death. While she has affection for Cash and Jewel, she keeps Darl, Dewey Dell and Vardaman at arm's length. In that way, she is not responsible for their emotional well-being, just their physical care. In Addie's mind, these children are a burden; still, they are an understood part of her duty to her husband. She pushes three of them away and thus, deprives herself of their love. This self-imposed deprivation is also a sign of her self-imposed martyrdom.

In Addie's empty life, every task is drudgery. Her life is filled with day to day self-inflicted unhappiness. She sees no joy in the daily activities of mothering. She garners no satisfaction as a mother. She is cold to her children, and they, in turn, are cold to her. Addie is a shell of the woman she could be, but her philosophy that she is simply waiting to die enables this caricature of an unfeeling woman. She separates herself from those who might love her because she sees no purpose in nurturing an attachment which most assuredly will end with her death. Her life is a self-fulfilling prophecy of sadness and loss.

Addie wants only to wait for death. She lives her life as a martyr, as a woman devoid of love, devoid of companionship, devoid of a desire to nurture her offspring, and finally devoid of the desire to be happy. These self-imposed absences keep her separated from the warmth of those who want love her. She serves her husband and her children as she waits impatiently for

death. There is no pleasure in her life, only what is expected of her--to have children and complete her duties as a wife and mother.

Even a tryst with her preacher is another act of martyrdom. She waits for him in the woods and thinks of him and herself "as dressed in sin" (174). This sought out sin only adds to her list of acts that seal her fate in her mind. In addition to this reason to think of herself as a martyr is another even greater sin contributing to her self-professed martyred life--the son they conceive as a result of this tryst, Jewel.

Jewel is born ten years after Darl because Addie has refused any relationship with Anse for ten years. Two years after Jewel, their only daughter, Dewey Dell, is born, followed by another son, Vardaman, several years later. She suffers in silence, believing her lot in life is to perform her obligations without love or devotion and keeps an emotional distance from all of her children. She interacts peripherally with all five children, never allowing them to truly be part of her life.

Keeping this distance, Addie matter-of-factly states that she "gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel...gave him Vardaman to replace the child [she] had robbed him of" (176). In her mind, the tryst with the preacher is negated because she gives birth to two more children after the illicit affair which produced Jewel. Now she is a martyr because she "unselfishly" produced two more children she didn't want, but she felt she owed to Anse, the cuckolded husband. Deborah Clarke, author of *Robbing the Mother: Women in Faulkner*, believes Addie unfortunately has been "betrayed by both the figurative word and the literal experience...[so she] finds no comfort in maternity once it becomes repetitious" (38). After five children, Addie has no desire to be a mother.

Cora Tull, one of the few women in Addie's life, tells her that she "was not a true mother" (173). Cora feels that way because Addie doesn't mother her children in a way that Cora respects, but Addie has no desire to mother these children in the way that Cora mothers her children. "God gave you children to comfort your hard human lot and for a token of His own suffering and love, for in love you conceived and bore them," Cora preaches (166). In Cora's estimation, Addie "took God's love and her duty to Him too much as a matter of course" (166). Addie carries the bitter truth; she does not love Anse, and she never did. Cora warns Addie that "such conduct is not pleasing to Him" (166). Adamantly, Addie states, "my life is an acknowledgement and expiation of my sin" (167). She feels that she expresses her trespasses in the way she lives. This display of wrongdoings is another example of her martyrdom. She wears her disobedience to God for all to see as she waits for Him to take her.

Additionally, with each of her children, she is a martyr. To Cash, her first-born, Addie assigns the duty of building her coffin. She lies propped up in her bed so she can watch him build the pine box which will contain her mortal remains (23). According to Donald M. Kartiganer, PhD., in his book entitled, *The Fragile Thread: The Meaning of Form in Faulkner's Novels*, "Addie is critical of Cash even as he builds her coffin with her supervision" (30). Cash does his mother's bidding because it distracts him from the reality of her death, and he hopes this will be the one thing he can do to express his love for this woman who had never been able to return his love as a mother should. He is unsuccessful in his efforts. Cash occupies his time with the precise details of the coffin, going so far as to plot the exact alignment of the seams to prevent the wood from collapsing and beveling the edges to keep water out. Each finite detail is carefully supervised not just by Cash, but also by Addie. This is an act of martyrdom on Cash's part and also an act of unreturned love for his mother.

"Cash shares his mother's virtues--industry, pride, and reticence--but not her cruelty," relays Ryuichi Yamaguchi, in his book *Faulkner's Artistic Vision: The Bizarre and the Terrible* (128). Cash is a hard-worker; he is concerned with the quality of his work, and most of all he refuses to believe that Addie is dying. Along with his good characteristics, he still bears her need to be the martyr. As an example, Cash suffers a broken leg on the way to Jefferson to bury his mother, but he refuses to complain about the pain. Suffering with unimaginable physical agony, he too, has learned to be a martyr like his mother.

Darl, the second born son, is the sensitive child. He accepts Addie's ways and does not question her motives. He understands his siblings and accepts their strengths and weaknesses. Since Darl is the primary narrator, the reader sees most of the action through his eyes and hears the thoughts of other characters as Darl might hear them. Author Donald M. Kartiganer believes that even though it is Darl's place to tell the story of the Bundren odyssey and of his self-martyred mother, he must face "alienation from the other members of the family [as] the price of his remarkable vision" (28). Darl tells the stories of his father and his siblings with little emotion. Even his own story is told stoically, as though he has a "total lack of involvement with those events" (28). His responsibility for the fire that nearly took his brother's life eventually sends him to the insane asylum. As he boards the train, he gets the last laugh though; he is free of the Bundren family at last. Confinement in an asylum is preferable to his life without love and a life of constant suffering which has led him to the asylum.

Because Darl feels deeply, the family is convinced that he is odd. Cora describes him as "queer, lazy, pottering about the place no better than Anse" (Faulkner 24). In her opinion, while Darl is kind, he is useless also, but Cora believes that Darl longs for the love his mother can not give. As Addie dies, Darl "...just stood and looked at his dying mother, his heart too full of

words" to speak (25). In truth, Darl wants Jewel to leave; his heart may be full of words, but they are not words of love for his mother. They are unvoiced words of anger and jealousy directed Jewel.

Even though Darl is jealous of the relationship between Jewel and his mother, he is still a caring, pensive individual who eventually suffers at the hands of his family. Because he seeks his mother's love, he decides to protect her by burning the barn where her body lies. Darl is convinced that his mother wants him to protect her from "the sight of man" (215). He believes he can hear her talking from within the coffin, and he thinks she is talking to God, asking Him to help her. Darl becomes a martyr, risking his freedom and his sanity, because he thinks he can hear his mother talking to God. He is willing to do what he must to protect her at any cost, even the reprisal of his family which results in confinement in a mental institution.

The third son, Jewel, is the product of a "blasphemous adultery" with Whitfield, the preacher (Yamaguchi 135). He is violent, hot-headed, and difficult to deal with. Jewel inflicts suffering on others as a way to cope with the pain of the loss of his mother. Jewel is the one child that Addie values; she looks out for him the best she can, considering she is cold and often unresponsive. Although Cora believes that Addie is "too committed" to him, his relationship with Addie is also strained (Faulkner 167). His one connection to her is his horse. He treats the horse the same way he wants to treat his mother, with love and with violence. He stokes the horse and at the same time, pushes its head back as it strains against his hand. With one hand he gives love and with the other, he pushes it away. In an act of love for his mother, he must sell the horse which he prizes to buy mules so that the family can get Addie's body to Jefferson for burial. The horse is the only possession Jewel owns and the only thing that he loves in his own way.

Addie tells Cora that Jewel is her cross to bear and her salvation. "He will save me from water and from the fire," she prophesizes (168). Jewel does just that. When the coffin is knocked off the wagon, Jewel nearly drowns to save it, and later when Darl sets the barn on fire, Jewel single-handedly carries the coffin out of the flaming building, badly burning his back (222). But for Jewel, this is an act of love, one his mother can never return and his private indulgence in martyrdom. These are the acts of a martyr, a person who risks his life for what is important to his beliefs.

After Jewel, Addie gives birth to Dewey Dell. At sixteen, Dewey Dell is pregnant by a local boy who has no intention of marrying her. His best offer is the \$10 he gives her to go to the druggist and get some medicine to cause a miscarriage (246). When Addie dies, Dewey Dell "flings herself across Addie...clutching her, shaking her with furious strength" (49). It is her last act of love for her mother and her one attempt at martyrdom as she suffers the loss of her mother. She, too, has never had the love of her mother and further is willing to live her life void of the warmth her mother should have provided her.

Her father tells all of the children to move on to their chores. "God's will be done," Anse sighs (52). Dewey Dell knows that she must do what her father asks, and she knows that she can get that medicine to cause the miscarriage when they deliver Addie to Jefferson for burial. That is the goal that keeps her going through all the difficulties this family traverses, from losing the coffin in the river to chasing the buzzards away from her mother's malodorous coffin.

The last child born to Addie is Vardaman. Addie believes that Vardaman is the child she gave to Anse in exchange for Cash whose love she believes she stole from Anse. Vardaman is probably the most deeply affected by her death. He refuses to milk the cow and strikes out at the horses which pull the doctor's wagon (55). All of his actions are childish and not thought

through. He cries quietly, "feeling and hearing [his] tears" (56). He believes his mother is a fish, and that is a way for him to cope with her death (84). When she dies, he cries and blames the doctor. "He kilt her. He kilt her... You kilt my maw," he screams in frustration (54). He has so little understanding of what is happening that he drills holes in the coffin so his mother can breathe. In the process he drills into her face (73). Vardaman is the only child who does not martyr himself, probably because he is too immature to understand the true implications of Addie's death and how it will affect his life as an adult.

Even though she has a family, Addie sees life as a step to the grave thanks to her father's haunting words. She would "think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless" (173). But in reality, words encircled her entire life and closed in like a noose to strangle her. Her father's words are the tenets by which she exists. Her actions support her words. For Addie, "terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle one to the other" (173). Peter Swiggart, in his book *The Art of Faulkner's Novels*, states that Addie "declines to make the social gestures of love and acceptance of family responsibility, and her resulting alienation is mirrored in the maladjustment of her children" (116). Addie cannot straddle her personal needs and the needs of her children. Even though she feels the stabbing daggers of her father's words, she still continues to act in ways which cause even more damage. Addie tries to straddle the words and the actions which only increase her pain and the pain she inflicts on her children. Because of this, her children are distant and cold just like her. Four of them suffer the anguishes of martyrdom just like her, and the fifth child is well on his way to the same place in life.

For the Bundren children, living with a martyr has been the only way they could have a mother. Although she has never held them close or expressed her love for them, she is all they

have ever had, and they each love her in their own way. Her death serves as a reckoning for each of them. Each child is forced to confront their losses, envelop them, and move on with their lives. According to Peter Swiggart, "the reader is given the impression that even in death she [Addie] dominates and corrodes the family's emotional life" (116). More than anything, Addie wanted to leave a mark on those who survived her. Since she taught her children by personal example to be martyrs in her image, she seared that mark in their hearts and souls. She will forever be remembered.

CHAPTER 6:

THE CHILD SACRIFICING MOTHER

Sethe in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison and Suyuan Woo in *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan

Sacrifice can manifest itself in a multitude of ways. The most horrendous of those ways is the ultimate sacrifice of a child's life. While Helen Van Deventer of Steinbeck's *The Pastures of Heaven* kills her only child, it is not done as much to relieve the suffering of the child as it is to relieve the suffering of the mother. However, Sethe of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* sacrifices her daughter believing she can prevent the impending suffering of her daughter. Sethe feels that the death of her children will free them from the degradation and cruelty of slavery. When Sethe believes that the white men who are the slave masters are about to injure her children, Sethe commits the ultimate sacrifice. She murders her daughter and attempts to murder her other children, too. Sethe chooses to "slit her baby's throat rather than return her child to the slavery by which she herself had been violated" states Kristin Boudreau, contributing author to *Understanding Toni Morrison's Beloved and Sula: Selected Essays and Criticism of the Work By the Nobel Prize Winning Author* (258). Three of her children are saved and one is lost forever. This loss of her daughter's life is something Sethe believes is for the good of this child. In her heart, the death of her children will save them from a life of beatings and imprisonment. Sethe succeeds in delivering her youngest daughter from her nightmarish existence, while the others are saved from this devastating fate.

Sadly, Sethe is willing to surrender the lives of her children believing their deaths will keep them from experiencing the atrocities she witnesses daily. In her heart, she is protecting her children from a life Sethe sees as much worse than death. Author Toni Morrison is quoted in

Jean Wyatt's article, "Giving Body to the Word: The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," as saying, "It was absolutely the right thing to do...but it's also the thing you [as a mother] have no right to do" (235). "A mother desperate to save her child from slavery," Sethe does what she feels is necessary (Wyatt 231). She believes she "has the right to use any means, including death, to protect [herself and her children] from a return to slavery" (Wyatt 230).

In *Understanding Toni Morrison's Beloved and Sula: Selected Essays and Criticism of the Work by the Nobel Prize Winning Author*, author of *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, Deborah Gray writes:

"In 1830, a North Carolina slave woman was convicted of murdering her own child. A year later, a Missouri slave was accused of poisoning and smothering her infant, and in 1834 Elizabeth, one of [President James] Polk's slaves was said to have smothered her newborn. No one will ever know what drove these women to kill their infants, if they did. Some of the whites thought slave women lacked maternal feelings, yet a few women who killed their children claimed to have done so because of their intense concern for their offspring" (82).

This information seems to explain, at least partially, why Sethe would murder her child. Sethe also feels this overwhelming concern for her children and especially for her daughter. For Sethe, killing her daughter is the only option which can prevent her from experiencing a life of misery, for which no remedy presents itself.

Since Sethe is a dutiful mother who loves her children with all the devotion she can muster, she guards them at all costs. "I'll protect her while I'm alive and I'll protect her when I ain't," swears Sethe (Morrison 54). Through thoughtful devotion, Sethe is always near her children, even when the world builds barriers to separate her from them. She provides a home with what meager items she can scrape together and emotional support with what little peace of mind she can find within the shambles of her heart. "...When I tell you you mine, I also mean

I'm yours. I wouldn't draw breath without my children," Sethe vehemently states as she shares her sentiments on motherhood (240). "Grown don't mean nothing to a mother. A child is a child," Sethe confides to Paul D (54). What she has to offer comes from her heart and soul. It is the pledge of undying love and devotion, but she is "absorbed by forces beyond her control" states Laurie Vickroy in her essay titled "*The Force Outside/The Force Inside: Mother-love and Regenerative Spaces in Sula and Beloved*" (298). The first-hand knowledge of what awaits her daughter is more than Sethe can allow her daughter to experience. Her desire to protect her children "ends up harming her children" rather than protecting them in the eyes of her family and the community (Vickroy 298). Professor Emeritus Howard W. Fulweiler, author of "*Belonging and Freedom in Morrison's Beloved: Slavery, Sentimentality, and the Evolution of Consciousness*," believes community members hold her responsible for the baby girl's death and isolate her as punishment (122). This is a reason why Sethe lives a life of self-imposed solitude with her children, until Beloved, whom Sethe comes to believe is the daughter she killed as an infant, suddenly appears.

With little outside contact, Sethe becomes the keeper of memories. Filling her children with stories of their past and hopes for their future, Sethe relays the painful details which have formed their family, especially to Beloved who is filled with curiosity about the past. "It amazed Sethe," that Beloved, the child-like reincarnation of her murdered daughter, wanted to know so many memories, "because every mention of her past life hurts" (Morrison 69). Sethe never does tell Beloved that she murdered her own child to save her from the horrors that Sethe personally experienced. She also doesn't tell Beloved that she believes she is the reincarnation of that murdered child.

Although the memories fill the minds of her children with bits and pieces of their past, they dredge up painful incidences many of which Sethe would prefer stay buried in her thoughts. These bitter memories are the reason that Sethe sacrifices the life of her daughter, Beloved. She knows that these past memories can become present memories, and with this rebirth of the past can come horrors for the future. This is why Sethe fears the memories. Deep in her soul, she knows those memories which are shockingly dreadful can resurrect themselves any time, and the same terrors can happen again with renewed violence.

Because Sethe must save her daughter in whatever way possible from the perceived dangers of the white men who have menaced her in the past, she feels cornered and without options. Her only way out is to end the suffering before it begins; that is to end Beloved's life. Sethe can only save her children by killing them. Author Laurie Vickroy states that with the horrifying circumstances which Sethe fears for her children, "any choice...would have tragic circumstances" (298). Fearing the retribution of School Teacher, Sethe makes a choice no mother should have to make. Prophetically, Sethe shares her feelings. "Unless careful, mother love was a killer" (Morrison 155). She knows that the love of a mother is all-encompassing, all-knowing, all-powerful.

To be constantly present, knowledgeable of every minute action, and controlling of every movement can be the negative effects of this mother love to which Sethe refers. These traits are double-edged swords. Depending on the point of intersection in everyday life, they fall into either description, negative or positive. This powerful expression of maternal love served up by Sethe--"Mother love was a killer"—becomes a portentous saying considering it is the love of the mother that does kill the child. In Sethe's mind, hers is a "fierce love," one that protects at all costs, even by death, which Sethe deems necessary (Vickroy 299).

In addition to this powerful love, Sethe uses songs to keep the memories alive also. She chants lullabies to share the memories with her children. “I made that song up,” says Sethe, “...and sang it to my children” (Morrison 207). While Sethe refers innocently to lullabies which she sings to her children, therein lies a much deeper meaning to these songs of comfort. The songs she croons lovingly relay the pain in her heart. It is the anguish in her soul for what she will sacrifice and for what she will lose. “Nobody knows that song but me and my children,” Sethe cries proudly (207). It is much more than a lullaby. Indeed, it is a song of comfort, but one that produces an eternal sleep. Its meaning is much deeper than just a melody to soothe her babies; it is an explanation of their lives, of her devotion to them, and her unfathomable sadness expressed through song. Sethe wants her children to know “her” truth, and for her that song she sings, which only they know, is another way to share her memories with them, especially with Beloved whose curiosity is insatiable. Only she and her children understand the true meaning of the lullabies which are the signals of the lives of the children soon to begin—or to end.

Recanting the horrors of her past, “...headless, feetless torso,...bubbling-hot girls in the colored-school fire...gangs of whites invade her daughter’s private parts...” Sethe vows this will not be her daughter’s fate (196). With these fears in mind, Sethe refuses to allow these memories to become embedded in her children’s memories. She keeps them alive in her mind so she will not forget all the petrifying experiences that she has lived through, while she tries to protect her children from the vicious truths of slavery until she has no recourse and must end the children’s lives to save them from this cruel fate. Her only alternative is to sacrifice their lives before they suffer the same horrors she has. She does not want these horrific memories through which she suffered to be part of her children's lives.

With little to share except her love, Sethe offers the only thing she can be sure will make a difference not only for her daughter, but for all the children. She explains why she killed Beloved and how she could not sit by idly and allow others to destroy all that she has hoped for, all that she had worked for, and for all she has sacrificed. Sethe laments, "She had to be safe and I put her where she would be" (236). Carl D. Malmgren, author of "Mixed Genes and the Logic of Slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" describes this decision as "a mother's moment of choice" (190). She could run into the woods. She could wait to learn their fate. However, she believes she must protect her child the only way she knows how. Since she feels there is no other choice, the greatest personal sacrifice she could make would be choosing death over slavery. However, it is a choice that no mother should ever have to make. Only Sethe can understand how she dragged "the teeth of the saw under the little chin; to feel the blood pump like oil in her hands,...to hold her face so her head would stay on..." (295). Sethe sacrifices her daughter. Only a mother so filled with fear and anguish could understand choosing death over a life of misery. She has the power of God in her hands, the power of life and death. Because she uses this power, Sethe must bear this cross for eternity.

Elaine Tuttle Hansen, in her book *Mother Without Child. Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood*, sees "...black motherhood as one of infanticide, outrage, and conflict" (66). Sethe feels the same. For her, everyday is a struggle to survive, physically and emotionally. She is outraged at society, both black and white, because she is truly helpless to affect any changes. Caroline Rody's in her article "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: History, 'Rememory,' and a 'Clamor for a Kiss'" suggests the realities of slavery are a "catastrophic destruction of community" (89). Sethe understands this premise. She sees her children as the key to making an attempt at saving other children of slaves. Still, the idea that Sethe suffers

from the horrors of slavery which may have driven her toward insanity is viable. Some might feel that a sane mother would not kill her children regardless of the circumstances. Arguably, if a parent had to choose between watching her child suffer, physically or emotionally with no relief in sight, the choice to end the life of the child might not seem so horrific. It might even seem merciful. Sethe may have felt that way also.

In her heart, the traumas she has experienced, specifically the actions of School Teacher and the boys who attacked her, are "responsible for Sethe's unnatural murder of her child," states Howard W. Fulweiler in his article "Belonging and Freedom in Morrison's *Beloved*: Slavery, Sentimentality, and the Evolution of Consciousness" (120). She has been "robbed of human dignity" and reduced to a "soulless mechanical" entity (120). For that split-second when Sethe chooses to drag that saw across her baby daughter's throat, she is "absorbed by forces beyond her control" (Vickroy 296). At this point, she cannot stop her actions. Her decision is made. She is a "mother desperate to save her child from slavery" in any way she can (Wyatt 233). She chose to end the misery before it starts. One thing is certain. Sethe has no hope for a better life for her children. In this state of hopelessness, she seeks immediate relief of pain and that is not always the sanest choice available to those who have never experienced that loss of hope.

This loss of hope is also exemplified in *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan. Fortunately, not all sacrifices result in the death of a child. This is true of Suyuan Woo, another mother who suffers the loss of her children when she leaves them along the side of the road as she flees the Japanese invasion of Kweilin, China. In 1937, the Japanese invaded Nanjing, the capital of Jiangsu Province, committing unspeakable atrocities against the Chinese people. They continued to invade much of China raping and pillaging, leaving many dead men, women, and children in their vicious wake ("Nanjing Massacre"). Everyone living in China at this time would have

known about the cruelties and would have feared these Japanese soldiers. Japan reigned terror on China until they surrendered to the United States in 1945 ("Nanjing Massacre. Commemorating 60th Anniversary").

In 1944, when the Japanese were in control of much of the Chinese homeland, Suyuan Woo, one of the four mothers in *The Joy Luck Club*, begins her flight to Chunking hoping for safety at the end of her harrowing journey. Instead, she suffers great anguish and must abandon not only all her possessions, but also her twin daughters alongside the road to Chunking to spare them from a fate she perceives as hopeless. In author Wendy Ho's article entitled "*Swan-Feather Mothers and Coca-Cola Daughters: Teaching Amy Tan's The Joy Luck Club*," she states Suyuan is faced with "economic turmoil, revolutionary changes, poverty, floods, [and] famine" as part of her daily life (108). She believes her fate and the fate of her daughters is starvation or worse, a merciless death, should the Japanese military find her with her children. In an attempt to save her children, she reluctantly places them under a tree with a note and valuables tucked inside their clothing. She hopes someone will find kindness in their heart to take these children into their home and provide a safe, temporary environment for the girls.

When Suyuan begins her journey to safety, she borrows a wheelbarrow and packs what she believes to be her most prized possessions: a mahjong table, clothing, food, and her twin daughters. She pushes the wheelbarrow until the wheel breaks, and she is forced to surrender the largest item of her treasures, the mahjong table. In despair after hearing the news that the Japanese military is advancing, she ties "...scarves into slings and put a baby on each side of [her] shoulder" and "... carried a bag in each hand, one with clothes, the other with food ...until deep grooves grew..." in her hands (Tan 26). As she walks tirelessly for hours on end, she sees the possession of others who fled the Japanese soldiers, including silver urns, paintings, bolts of

cloth, even animals. By the time she arrives in Chunking, everything but three silk dresses have been left to the care of strangers, including her twin daughters (26).

Suyuan must abandon her daughters so that they might be found by a loving woman who would nurture them. She chooses to save the lives of her babies by leaving them with a paper explaining who they are and offering a reward for their return to their rightful family. She attaches a letter to the infant girls stating, "Please care for these babies with the money and valuables provided. When it is safe...bring them" to their family (282). Even though she is fleeing soldiers who intend to do great harm to her and her children, she purposely identifies her daughters and leaves money and jewelry to help with the cost of caring for the girls until she can claim them again. She "lives out the rest of her life feeling the absence of those babies and desperately attempting to discover their fate" quotes E. D. Huntley in his book *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion* (51). Sadly, Suyuan does not live to see her babies. She dies before the girls are found. She did not know that a Muslim couple found her babies and raised them with love and respect. Mei Ching and her husband, Mei Han, lived in a cave along the road where Suyuan had placed the girls. Fortunately, this couple chose to care for the twin girls.

Suyuan never abandons the idea that she will one day be reunited with her daughters. She and her new husband return to the village where she left the children and remain in the area searching for them for three years to no avail. In 1949, heartbroken, they come to the United States to begin a new life and escape the horrors of the war (Tan 285). Writing letters to all of her family and friends that she could find, Suyuan keeps a flicker of hope alive that the girls would be found and reunited with her. A schoolmate of Suyuan does find them, but it is too late for Suyuan to put her arms around them as a mother longs to do (286). By this time, Suyuan is dead.

"If 'hero' means someone who takes decisive action during a time of crisis, then for Suyuan Woo, whose life is in crisis, survival itself became a decisive action--a heroic action" according to author of "Memory and the Ethnic Self: Reading Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*" Ben Xu (46). Suyuan makes a decision to save her children and in turn, herself. She is willing to put her daughters in danger so that they may have the opportunity to live. She risks their lives by leaving them along the side of the road. For many, this would not be heroic. For some readers, this act of endangerment of the children is in Suyuan's confused mind the only choice to save them from what she believes might be a worse fate--torture and murder by the invading soldiers. For others, it is a decision which ultimately could cause the deaths of the children. For the most part, it is certainly not a heroic choice. Either way, it is a horrifying decision which no mother should have to make.

Suyuan's story is based on Amy Tan's mother's story. She, too, fled China and left three daughters behind. She, too, kept this incident a secret from her daughter for many years. For Tan's mother, her story ended happily. In 1987, Amy Tan and her mother made a pilgrimage to China to meet these twin daughters her mother had left behind.

CHAPTER 7:

THE SELF-SACRIFICING MOTHER

Anney in *Bastard out of Carolina* by Dorothy Allison, Evelyn Ryan of *The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio* by Terry Ryan , and the unnamed teenage daughter in "Trip in a Summer Dress" by Annette Sanford

The self-sacrificing mother puts the needs of her children first and gives up her own life in the process. She does not sacrifice the life of her children; instead she sacrifices her own life in some fashion. Dorothy Allison's novel, *Bastard out of Carolina*, depicts a woman who gives up much for her daughters. By the time Anney is nineteen, she has two children and is widowed. She is poor and uneducated. She is on her own with little opportunity for either herself or her children, and worse yet, she knows that is the case. She sets out to give her girls a good life, but the fates do not cooperate.

From the very beginning of her oldest daughter's life, Anney battles the bureaucracy over the nature of her birth. The state chooses to label Ruth Anne as illegitimate, but Anney refuses to accept that title and wages a battle for many years to clear up this discrepancy. Anney's anger boils over when she thinks about how "The stamp on the birth certificate burned her like the stamp they'd tried to put on her. No good, lazy, shiftless" (Allison 3). She did not want her daughter to carry the shame; however, Anney never manages to remedy this problem. The birth certificate is just one item on a long list of things that Anney wants to take care of for her girls. She fights the government knowing that angering these authorities might cost her custody of her daughters, yet Anney risks everything to clear her daughter's name.

Anney never gives up the fight; she labors hard to provide for her children. She works as a waitress, stacks boxes at a grocery store, sits bent over for hours on a line in a factory, and eventually goes to a diner where her tips compensate her for the menial job. Anney figures out the power of her feminine ways when the manager compliments her. “‘You’ve got a way with a smile,’ the manager [of the diner] tells her. ‘Oh, my smile gets me a long way,’ she laughed” (8-9). She counts on her charms to get everyone from the truckers to the judges to tip her well so that she can give her daughters a decent life. She is willing to give up her pride to make a living, but she “...firmly passed back anything that looked like a down payment on something she didn’t want to sell” (9). Even though she has opportunities to get more for her girls, she is not willing to give up what little dignity she has. She maintains some of her pride, but just enough to insure the free flow of the tips. She sacrifices just enough of herself to get what she wants, but not so much that she loses her self-respect.

She learns to laugh at herself before others can laugh at her. Again, she sacrifices her pride to fend off the pity and hatefulness of her family and so-called friends. She “learned to laugh with them, before they could laugh at her, and to do it so well no one could be sure what she really thought or felt” (10). Her self-sacrifice is part of her everyday survival. Her easy smile saves face in public, but in private, she cries the night away for the husband who died too young and for the kind of life she knows she will never be able to provide for herself or her girls. Hope springs eternal, and Anney continues her sacrifices for her children with a flicker of faith that each sacrifice will prove to be the last. For Annie, the end to sacrifice is not in sight.

“An aura of sadness” encompasses her in all she does (13). She cannot release that pain which lies so deep in her soul, but she shows a brave front to the world. Her constant search for happiness and a better life leads her to Glen Waddell, a man she thinks might make a good father

for Ruth Anne and Reese. Nothing could be further from the truth. Anney ignores what her heart tells her, and she doesn't follow her instincts. Had she given credence to those instincts, she would have known this man is hiding despicable truths which will manifest themselves in horrible ways. Unfortunately, her desire to provide for her children and herself blinds her to the ugly secrets that Waddell guards zealously. The constant personal sacrifices which Anney willingly accepts to keep him happy make no difference to him. He sees her sacrifices as a weakness he can successfully exploit to his advantage.

Anney's difficult jobs and painful life have a profound affect on her physically and emotionally. She "...seemed old, worn-down, and slow, born to mother, nurse, and clean up..." (23). Instead of a young, vital woman in her early twenties, she is exhausted physically and mentally. She has sacrificed her body and her soul to raise her children. Her "eyes were soft with old hurt and new hope" (43). The pain she feels frequently overshadows the hope she continues to nurture. In her heart, she believes her personal sacrifices will help her children, and she is willing to do what is necessary to make her wishes come true. At this time, there is no hill too high and no sacrifice too great to ensure their future.

When the grandmother of her younger daughter, who is also the mother of her dead husband, wants to spend time with her daughter Reese, Anney decides to keep the truth from her present husband Glen. She sacrifices the trust she hopes for with Glen so that her daughter Reese can have a relationship with her dead father's family (61). This is a dangerous thing to do since Glen, a volatile individual, is capable of inflicting bodily harm without a second thought. Anney is willing to take the chance of angering Glenn to do what is right for her daughter and her ex-mother-in-law. It is a chance Anney is willing to take even with the known risks. Sadly, the only sacrifices Glen acknowledges are those that Anney makes for him, and in his mind, she

owes him those in exchange for all he believes he does for her and her daughters. Anney puts herself second to her daughter and her ex-mother-in-law who needs to be with her granddaughter, and in doing so, she risks physical harm from Glenn because he is jealous of her dead husband and his family. He would see this deed of kindness as betrayal which deserved swift, cruel punishment for her and her girls. Aware of the consequences she might suffer for this decision, Anney risks angering him to do what is right for her daughter.

Since Glen is unstable in a multitude of ways, Anney can never establish a real home for her girls. The oldest daughter describes the ramshackle conditions they survive over a period of years. "We lived in no one house more than eight months" (64). "...Rented...leased...shared...a promise to buy...friends of friends who knew somebody...friend of a man [who] had an eye on Mama..." (64). Anney longs for a home just as her girls do, but this wish is never to come to fruition.

The embarrassment is never ending for Anney and her girls, but she is determined to provide a home for them regardless of the difficulties she must cope with daily. They move so often that the "cardboard dish barrels, the pads and cords and sturdy boxes" are never discarded (65). With every move, Anney plants a vegetable garden and flowers, but rarely is she ever anywhere long enough to harvest the vegetables or smell the scent of her flowers. Even small pleasures like eating the fresh vegetables or picking a bouquet of flowers she has planted elude her. In addition, she sews curtains and scrubs windows and floors in an effort to create a home for Reese and Ruth Anne. Every effort regardless of importance is worth it for her. Anney's sacrifices are never ending. She suffers in silence with every breath. Her face is lined with worry as she tries to "make do" and "try again" (65). She spends every Sunday trying to juggle the bills and decide what absolutely must be paid and what can wait for another day. Even a

cheap pair of shoes is out of reach for the children. There simply is not enough money for even the most basic of necessities. Anney sacrifices her pride over and over again, and still that is not enough to save her girls.

Going without shoes that fit is an embarrassment, but eating ketchup and crackers for dinner is an abomination. As a mother, not being able to feed her children must be the cruelest of all fates. Anney cannot provide even eggs and bacon for them. Instead, she fixes crackers with ketchup and pepper and tells her girls stories of “real hunger, hunger of days with no expectation that there would ever be biscuits again” (72). She tells her daughters that she remembers how she “wrestled her sisters for the last bacon rind” (72). She describes the game her siblings played where they passed plates and pretended there was food for each of them. The entrees included “frog’s tongues with dewberries...fried rutabagas...steamed daffodils...sugar-glazed turtle meat with poison greens and hot piss dressing” (73). She makes the children laugh with her tales about her brothers and sisters. She touches them gently, hoping she can distract their minds long enough to stave off the hunger pains. Anney does not eat even the crackers and ketchup. There simply isn’t enough.

Although Annie is hungry, too, she does not consider her hunger, when she faces the possible reprisals from her cruel husband. Annie is fierce in the face of her hateful, lazy, whiney husband, Glen. When there is no food for her daughters, Anney screams at Glen. "'Soda crackers and ketchup,' she hissed at him. ...I had to feed my girls that shit while you sat on your butt all afternoon, smoking and telling lies” (73). Finally, she has no fear of him. Undaunted, she has no pride left to sacrifice. Everything of value, her pride included, has been destroyed by either her husband or society as a whole. Anney must give even more of herself when she goes out to find a way to feed her girls, but she does what she must to feed her children.

Mary Wollstonecraft, in "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," says that for a woman "whether she be loved or neglected, her first wish should be to make herself respectable, and not to rely for all her happiness on a being subject to the like infirmities with herself" (593). Anney has taken this to heart and finds self-respect in doing what is necessary to provide for her children. She does not rely on other women or other men to lead her to respectability. She knows that she has only herself to count on for that. Anney takes the initiative to build her own definition of respectability. She replaces her respectability with her maternal need to fill the hungry stomachs of her children. So that her children can eat, she dresses in "black patent high heels...cocking her hip and swinging to one side" and goes out seeking a solution to this problem (Allison 74). In a few hours, she returns with flour, jelly, butter, tomatoes, fatback, and eggs. No one questions her. Glen especially knows better than to challenge this mother lioness as she provides for her children. Wisely, he does not.

"We're not bad people. And we pay our way. We just can't always pay when people want," Anney exclaims with false pride (82). Even though she has no real pride, she musters up a pseudo-pride to give her daughters some semblance of worth. She hopes her children will grow up with self-respect.

In dealing with this need to develop self-worth, Anney must teach a valuable lesson to Ruth Anne regarding stealing. Both Anney and Ruth Anne must apologize for the theft of Tootsie Rolls. It is an embarrassing moment for both parties and a character building event which strikes fear in their souls, but fosters dignity in their hearts. Each sacrifices what little pride that dwells in their hearts. Anney confesses the truth in her heart. "You're my pride. You and your sister are all I really have, all I ever will have" (94).

Nicole Slee in her book *Women's Faith Development* stated,
"Women may have to choose between the acceptance and

affirmation of significant others and their selfhood, paying a high price in rejection or punishment for daring to challenge the nominative patterns set down by society and for choosing to develop their own strength and power of selfhood" (112).

When Anney learns that Glen has been molesting her daughter, she leaves him. Unfortunately, that choice is short-lived. Although she fights to save her girls for many years, she eventually returns to Glen and leaves her daughters behind. She is all too aware of Glen's shortcomings, but in the end she is not strong enough to develop this power of "selfhood" to which Slee refers.

While her heart is in the fight, her soul is too worn out to continue the battle. She dooms herself to this lost life, leaving her daughters and her self-respect behind as she ventures forth with Glen who cares about himself much more than he could ever care about her or her children.

Anney's life is filled with sadness and sacrifice. It is a life which will never be filled with love, appreciation, or hope; instead, it is, at best, a fight for survival, and she knows that to be the truth only too well. Anney lives with rejection, humiliation, and on the surface, denial of all that she faces daily. Her denial is the only thing that keeps her chipping away at the horrors in her life. Denial is her only chance at emotional survival. Sacrifice is her life.

Another woman who knows that sacrifice is what will save her family is Evelyn Lehman Ryan. *The Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio* by Terry Ryan is a biography of this remarkable woman who does what ever is necessary to keep her family afloat. A promising writer with a small, but up-and-coming newspaper, Evelyn Ryan sees a future in journalism. She is competent in every job from typesetting by hand to writing everything from political news to obituaries and even distributing the hometown newspaper. Her future is bright when a handsome, blue-eyed, Irish Catholic tenor steals her heart, and she forsakes her writing to be his wife and eventually, the mother of ten children. She trades her pen for pots and pans. She expects to follow the life of many women in the 1950's. She will stay home and raise her children while her husband

makes a living and takes care of all of them. Unfortunately, along with her husband's good looks and charm comes a penchant for drink. His drinking habit makes keeping a job and providing for his family a pipedream at best. Evelyn has to do what she can to take care of the ever expanding brood. She puts her writing ability to work and enters countless contests.

In the 1950's and 1960's, multiple companies from Proctor and Gamble to Western Auto offered the chance to win everything from soap powder for life to automobiles. Evelyn Ryan has a knack for words and a knack for winning. She keeps a notebook with her at all times and jots down every idea that pops into her head, never knowing when that bunching of nouns, verbs, and adjectives might just be the answer to a dilemma of how she might get food to feed her brood or to put clothes on their backs.

Evelyn, Kelly, and the children are not even lucky enough to live paycheck to paycheck. The family is dependent on the kindness of others to put food on the table, glasses on the children, and clothes on their backs. An aunt often buys groceries for the family. The Lion's Club provides glasses for the children who cannot see the chalkboard at school. Wealthy family members present the children with hand-me-down clothes so they can have something to wear to school every day. All the while, Evelyn does the best she can to take care of their needs.

Kelly stays drunk and occasionally sobers up long enough to get a job and contribute in some small way. Unfortunately, he consumes a six pack of beer and a fifth of whiskey nightly which doesn't leave much from the few checks he earns to cover the day to day expenses of any family much less one consisting of twelve persons. Evelyn is forced into accepting the position of the breadwinner for the family by creating endless entries for every contest, regardless of the expected prize. Without her fortitude, the family would starve and be homeless.

Evelyn gives up a promising job in journalism to support her husband and children by writing the fourth line to a jingle or 100 word essays on what happens in a typical day at her home. She calls on past experiences with her family and happily embellishes the stories with a fantasy that satisfies the ideas she conjures (Ryan 156). Each of these entries offers sometimes odd, sometimes lifesaving prizes. She wins watches, coffeemakers, frying pans, blenders, toys, cases of candy, even accordion lessons, and occasionally, much needed cash (18). She exchanges her words for these items which kept the family going even though her husband takes every opportunity to ridicule her for always noting ideas in her notebook.

He tells others that his wife is getting old, and that is the real reason that she is tired. The indisputable fact that Evelyn has ten children and is always thinking of new ideas to win the various prizes doesn't seem to carry much weight with her husband, Kelly. He likes to remark that her life can't be that difficult because she is at home and not all the children are with her all the time (157). Often, she sits down on the sofa after cooking, serving, and cleaning up dinner for twelve people and falls "asleep after a few minutes, notebook on her lap, postage stamps and other effluvia of contesting slipping out the pages and onto the floor," oblivious to the world around her (20). Her husband's contribution is complete when he walks through the door every evening. He does not believe it necessary to help her with the children or the household chores in any fashion, and he offers no help with a clean conscience.

Her first effort at contesting began with Burma Shave sign rhymes in the 1950's. She concocts stories and then skillfully sweeps those stories into short bursts of poetry. Terry Ryan, daughter of Evelyn and author of the biography, remembers "...seeing Mom, pencil behind her right ear; spend hours each day at the ironing board" (20). As she irons other people's clothing, she "kept an open notebook of current contest jingles and entries in various stages of

completion" (20). Terry Ryan remembers that, "Our kitchen cabinets were crammed with shoeboxes full of entry blanks and labels that Mom was saving for future use..." including cereal boxes, canned food labels, candy, soap, wrappers, and various assorted other products which might have a contest at a later date (23). Nothing is thrown away; every jar, box, and container of any sort is saved and carefully catalogued for future contests. She writes personal thank you letters to every company gifting her with anything over \$25 in value, including The Ed Sullivan Show for an RCA TV which arrived at the perfect time after the old TV stopped working (26). She never forgets her responsibility to set the example for her children of good manners and appreciation.

Early in 1953, the family hits some bad luck and the rented house where they live, a compact, modest two bedroom home with no bathtub, two adults and nine children at that time, was to be reclaimed by the original owner for his daughter. Not only did they not have enough food to eat, or new clothes to wear, or adequate medical attention, now they would have no place to sleep. The father is not concerned with the small bump in the road, "assuming that a solution would appear in time," and he is right (30). Evelyn, solely, took on the worry about the move and about where she would find the money to manage the relocation. In the throes of this conflict, one of the boys is struck by a car while delivering newspapers. Along with the injury to her son, comes the knowledge that the pittance her son earns is now missing, and the money to pay the cost of medical treatment is something else that she must find.

Fate and her talent walk hand in hand; the boy's injuries are confined to a broken arm with bumps and bruises although his bicycle is destroyed, but as the evening sun sets on one problem, a new contest appears with the dawning of the morning sun. Western Flyer offers a new bicycle, a washer and dryer, and \$5,000 in cash to the person who could complete a

sentence about why they liked Western Flyer bicycles (32). With nine children and innumerable bicycles handed down over the years, Evelyn Ryan feels confident enough to write the winning entry. A few weeks later, she and her family have the prizes, and an opportunity to buy a house with the \$5,000 cash prize (36). As icing on the cake, her son got his paper route back.

Thanks to her creativity and a short sentence, the family now has a four bedroom house which they describe as "palatial" (39). More challenges lay in wait for this family. Because food is scarce, Evelyn rations it out. Initially, she keeps it high above the stove in a cupboard she thinks the kids can not reach. As kids are often inventive, they stack chairs and climb over the stove to reach the food. One of the children suffers burns from the melting pajamas she is wearing when they catch on fire from the open flames of the stove. After that incident, Evelyn hides the food in the dryer because the door to the dryer is noisy and she can hear if the children try to get it. This would end in a less serious incident when the items carefully placed in the dryer would be mixed with the clean clothes set to spin dry (43). This is a minor mishap for Evelyn. The extra work to rewash the clothes is nothing compared to the upcoming obstacles Evelyn will have to hurdle for her children.

Kelly collapses and spends days which blend into weeks in the hospital suffering from something undiagnosed resembling a combination of a heart attack and a nervous breakdown. As the dutiful wife, Evelyn walks two miles to the hospital and two miles home everyday (102). An old blue Chevy sits in the driveway, but she has no license to drive it. Her husband doesn't think it necessary for her to learn. "With Dad in the hospital, [Mother] realized more than ever that the burden of the family's survival--and sanity--rested entirely on her shoulders," according to the author (105). Evelyn begins even more furious attempts at winning as many contests as possible. She is their sole support, emotionally and economically.

After Kelly is released from the hospital, he is bedridden for weeks. The small amount of money he does provide from his infrequent jobs no longer exists. The milkman is days from stopping delivery; the grocer calls every night threatening the same fate. Even the benevolent aunt cannot help them (112). Their only income is from the contest winnings. After a few weeks of recuperation, Kelly begins to get his strength back and with that strength comes his desire to drink again. Evelyn is back where she started only with a large hospital debt to pay.

Kelly's rants continue with every contest win. The family seems to get deeper and deeper in debt even though Evelyn wins a fair amount of contests. Every item she wins goes into a closet to be distributed at Christmas for the children. It seems as though the fates intervene again, and Evelyn stops winning. The only thing Evelyn can do is keep entering contests. Giving up is just not part of her nature.

Although Kelly complains when she wins, he complains even more when she does not win. He belittles her saying that all she does is lay around all day and "write in those stupid notebooks" (169). Evelyn reaches her limit and screams back at him that "...those stupid notebooks are the only reason we're not living in debtor's prison" (169). Her sense of frustration has peaked. She has sacrificed for years for the children and for him, and he sees it as a petty contribution from her. She has begged from family and strangers alike to provide for them. She has belittled herself in front of disparaging nuns so her children could get a good education. She has lied to the grocer and the milkman. She covers up for him and lies for him to his family and their friends. She has swallowed her pride and been the butt of his insecurity via acerbic jokes about what little she contributes to their family. Now she is about to experience his physical abuse, too.

His impotent attempt at providing for the family erupts with physical violence, and he pushes her with enough force to cause her to hit her head and knock her unconscious. After she is taken to the hospital and returns home, she still has to listen to his reasons for the unprovoked attack. Kelly blames her for what has happened and tells her his co-workers taunt him relentlessly. "We know who the real breadwinner in the Ryan family is...and it ain't you, Kelly!" (171). The co-workers go on to say they believe that she must be cheating, because it is not possible to win so frequently. When Evelyn asks if he feels that way, he answers "no," but she is sure that he truly means "yes." She is crushed to know that her sacrifices are in vain as far as he is concerned (172). Fortunately, Evelyn has "the ability to side step adversity and meanness with grace" according to John Esther, author of an article entitled "Writer-Director Jane Anderson Learns to Cherish the Moments with the Prize Winner of Defiance, Ohio" (34). As she tries to heal physically and mentally from the attack, she receives some good news to temper the emotional pain she weathers daily.

To bolster her chances of winning things, she always sends in entries with names of the children or with initials, any way to get more entries and increase probability in her favor. When she receives a call from a private detective, her first thoughts are that one of the boys has been involved in some sort of serious incident with the police. She wonders if she will sacrifice her pride and maybe one of her sons. That is not the case. An entry she sent to Beechnut chewing gum won first place; it was one to which she had signed her son's name. The prizes were a Triumph TR3, a jukebox, and a weekend trip to New York to appear on the Merv Griffin show. The car alone was worth \$2,700; she had been saved once more. The most satisfying prize came when Merv Griffin asked her son, the supposed prize winner, to pick any girl out of the audience to dance with him. Instead of choosing from the many girls available, he chose his mother.

Fortunately for Evelyn, "He stepped on her toes only once" (Ryan 180). In her heart, that dance erases some of the pain of the sacrifices she had made.

Little is discussed about how she manages to find all the box tops, can labels, and other parts of products that she must have to enter the contests. Each entry calls for something that is representative of the product. Evelyn tells her friend Dortha that she goes regularly to the town dump and sifts through the trash to find the tops and labels that she cannot afford to buy. She sacrifices her pride for a few minutes so that she can enter the contests. Her daughter is appalled that she would root around the dump to find these things, but Evelyn knows that she really has no choice (199). Without these labels and box tops, Evelyn has no chance to win anything and no chance to feed and clothe her family. Foraging through the dump is but one of the demeaning acts she performs daily.

Life never gets easy, not even comfortable for Evelyn. A phone call from the banker informs her that her husband has borrowed against the house without her knowledge and now the entire amount is due. The choices are both impossible: either pay the entire amount due or move out of the house within a few days. When she confronts her husband, he tells her, "I had a feeling that the day might be creeping closer" when he would have to tell her what he had done (310). On his part there is no real remorse. "I felt like a drowning man," he explains (311). Now she feels like she is drowning too and taking her children to the same watery grave thanks to him. Evelyn's only recourse is to persuade the banker to give her an opportunity to get the money. The bank officials are not receptive, and she has thirty days to save their home. All of her hard work pays off once more with those long nights of worry while writing silly jingles; she wins first prize in a contest for Dr. Pepper: two weeks in Switzerland, a Ford Mustang, two Longines watches, and best of all, \$3,440.64 in cash (323).

In the case of Evelyn Lehman Ryan, her personal sacrifices pay off many times. She raises ten children; seven of them graduate from college to pursue professions ranging from nursing to teaching to writing. Two of them play professional baseball for a short time with the Detroit Tigers. All of Evelyn Ryan's children credit their success to her and her selfless sacrifices to make their lives better. "She was a very smart woman, who could have sunk into a deep depression, but she used what she had and she stuck in there" (Esther 34). Her example shows each of them the way to a good life. Roxanne Farmanfarmaian, writer for *Publishers Weekly*, is quoted as saying "She [Evelyn] gave her children the best gift of all--a love of life so deep that they grew up knowing that they, too, were winners" (21). For Evelyn, doing the right thing for her family is not a difficult task personally. For others, it is a journey of maturation and self-awareness.

One such journey is "Trip in a Summer Dress," a narrative in an anthology called *Lasting Attachment* by Annette Sanford, that presents a young mother who also sacrifices for her son. Her maturation from selfish child to sacrificing adult takes more than six years. The daughter of a woman who marries early and at fifteen gives birth to a daughter repeats her mother's errors, only she does not have a husband to help her through the trials and tribulations of motherhood. She, too, is but a child who does not understand the responsibility of raising a child at such a young age, and she has no idea what lies ahead for her or her son.

When the short story begins, the birth mother is twenty-one and has managed nearly six years pretending that child she gave birth to belongs to her mother. Well before the baby was born, she, her mother, and her father cook up a scheme to keep the details of Matthew's conception and birth a secret from most of the outside world. They agree among themselves to say that the baby is the grandmother's child and not the daughter's child. They concoct an

elaborate ruse that the grandmother needs "...fresh air and a brother's sympathy..." and as a family they go to the country where few people know them, and they can hide the truth from most everyone (Sanford 59).

Even Matthew is not to learn the truth of his parentage. His grandmother, who cares for him as her own, does not want him to know the truth. The grandmother reasons with her daughter qualifying her argument with heartfelt logic, "...you didn't pass around a child like a piece of cake, and you didn't own him like a house or a refrigerator, and you didn't tell him one thing was true one day and something else was true the next" (59). The daughter goes along with the idea since she is allowed to name the child. She names him Matthew because "It made him mine" (60). Her mother's advice echoes in her conscience and in her soul. She knows that allowing her mother to raise him as her own is the right thing to do, but that does not compensate for the pain she feels with every small milestone that Matthew accomplishes.

On the way back to their home after Matthew's birth, frustration overcomes her and she screams at both of her parents, "He's not your child! I birthed him. I'm his mother, and I'm going to raise him up to know I am!" (61). It is the first of several outbursts by the selfish child inside the girl's body which has performed the duties of a woman. When Matthew is an infant, she carries him and tells him the true story of his birth in a version only she can sanctify. It is a version filled with untruths and sanitized realities. She tells him that she will never leave him and that she has "a plan that would save..." them (61). It is far from reality, but bears the truths that she must have to make for this sacrifice to relinquish the bond to which she tries to hold on to desperately.

Nearly six years after Matthew's birth, the child mother who has become a woman, comes face to face with what is true and just, courtesy of her son. On what becomes a last outing

with Matthew, they wander upon a nest with a small mother bird feeding a large chick, and Matthew sees immediately that something is not quite right. When she tells him that it is the mother bird, he argues that it is not possible since the baby bird is so much larger than the mother. She tries to explain that the mother bird cares for the baby no matter to whom it really belongs. She tells him that "...she [the mother bird] keeps taking care of it because it hatched in her nest and she loves it" (62). This is the pivotal moment when she realizes she must sacrifice this relationship she envisions to protect Matthew. Matthew is unaware of this monumental epiphany which has taken place thanks to his innocent banter.

Matthew's logical curiosity takes over, and he questions her further about why the mother of the chick would leave it for someone else to raise. She qualifies the action telling him that sometimes it is necessary to give up something you love so that it can be better cared for by others. Matthew is too young to understand the gravity of what he has been told. He is non-plussed by what he sees as an unsatisfactory answer and reacts with mild anger stating that he doesn't like those birds. Knowing that she had done the same thing with Matthew, she takes his comment to heart and tries to explain that "They just got off on the wrong foot--wing" (63). The child does not agree with her explanation and tells her that he would never accept someone doing this to him. Without knowing what pain he causes, he steadfastly tells her that he would "...tell her to go away and never come back" (63). It is this child's comment that will come to be truth in a few short hours.

When they arrive home, Matthew shares the experience with his "mother," who in reality is his grandmother. Excited to share his recent adventure, "...He crawled up in his mother's lap and kissed her a million times. He told her he was mighty glad he belonged to her and not to a cowbird..." who might abandon him in someone else's nest (64).

Once again the selfish part of this birth mother rears its ugly head and she "...told her [mother] now was the time to set things straight..." (64). Unfortunately for this birth mother, the adopted mother does not want to tell him the truth. Carefully, but firmly, the grandmother tells the daughter not to interfere. The grandmother reminds her, "You don't come along later just when he was thinking he was a rose and tell him he was a violet instead" (59). It may be sage advice, but it does not help the daughter cope with the decision to leave and allow the boy to be raised by his grandparents. She understands it is the unselfish decision for this child. The difficulty lies with accepting her decision with strength and commitment. She knows that Matthew will be raised with values and morals. Someday he will be a good man of whom she will be very proud. Now, she knows what she must do.

As she boards the bus to start a new life free of her family, free of her past, and free of Matthew, she will not look back at him. He stands waving at the bus, not knowing that she is his mother. She wants a clean break and refuses to look out the window. On the bus, she is befriended by a child who is alone and looking for someone to whom she can talk. The little girl fills her full of stories about her mother and how her mother doesn't really want her. At the end of the trip, she sits patiently with the small child waiting for her mother. When she meets this woman, she knows that the stories the child has told are true, and this insight into an unwanted child's life is the affirmation of her epiphany. Now she understands her fate is to be unselfish and to allow her son the opportunity for a good life with someone who is stable and loving, someone who will provide a place in her heart and her home so that Matthew can grow into a good man. Her sacrifice will be the saving grace for this child. He will have a chance at life with suitable circumstances that will nurture him into manhood safely.

Sacrificing her mothering bond with Matthew is the best way to ensure that Matthew has a safe, loving environment which a fifteen year old school girl could not provide. Now, nearly six years later, she is able to provide for him by sacrificing her position in his life for something much better, a stable home with a stable mother. Her mother reminds her gently to "...set him down in the safest place you can find" and allow him to be "taught...the rules and let him go" (59). When she finally puts her child's welfare ahead of her selfish heart, she accepts what must be done.

The portrayal of the self-sacrificing mother is both envied and despised. The character of Anney did sacrifice much for her daughters, but the one thing she does refuse to give up is the man who is responsible for much of the difficulties she and her daughter suffer through. Her personal needs eventually win out over the needs of her daughters. Conversely, Evelyn Ryan gives up the opportunity to be a writer to raise her children, but her ability to write is the reason her family won so many contests. While she sacrifices one career for another, the skills she plies to journalism saves her family from complete poverty. The young woman who gives up her son also prospers. She has the opportunity to build a new life, possibly a better life than she would have had trying to care for a child on her own. Regardless of the result, the path for these mothers is fraught with painful experiences.

CHAPTER 8:

THE SUBSTITUTE MOTHER

August, May, June, and Rosaleen of *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd and Bush,

Agnes, and Dora Rouge of *Solar Storm* by Linda Hogan

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, three sisters, August, May, and June, along with the maid, Rosaleen become substitute mother figures. Those who are willing to sacrifice their lives to maintain and nurture others may be the silent heroes in this world. They are the saviors of the unwanted, downtrodden children. The gift of nurturing given freely by these substitute mothers represents the pureness of their hearts. To take on the responsibility of another's body and soul while asking nothing in return is remarkably altruistic. This is the case of the women in *The Secret Life of Bees*.

In *The Secret Life of Bees*, Lily finds a clue to her mother's past and sets off on a journey to find answers to questions which have plagued her for several years. Lily's mother died tragically years before, and Lily wants answers to vexing questions which her abusive father will not answer. A label with a black Madonna sends her on a journey to reconstruct the details of her mother's life. Rosaleen, the housekeeper and substitute mother since Lily's mother died, is with her helping her during this journey of discovery. The journey begins when Rosaleen is assaulted by three men and taken to jail. Lily knows that she must find a way to help Rosaleen, so she calls the hospital and pretends to be the wife of the jailer telling them that the policeman guarding Rosaleen is needed at the station. Her plan falls in place, and she helps Rosaleen escape. They head for Tiburon, South Carolina, the town on the label with the "black Mary" as Lily calls it (Kidd 43). The journey is difficult, but Lily is determined to find the woman who

makes the "Black Madonna Honey" whom Lily believes knows something about her mother (68). When she and Rosaleen arrive at the home of the Boatwright women, Lily feels like she is home. They welcome both of them, instinctively knowing these two wanderers need their help. They teach Lily lessons about life as they teach her about the bees from which they harvest the special honey.

Lily, the narrator of *The Secret Life of Bees*, proclaims, "The body knows things a long time before the mind catches up to them" (Kidd 69). Lily, whose heart and soul has suffered the greatest of losses with the death of her mother, knows these welcoming women are her substitute mothers when she first appears on their doorstep. They become her core of being, her strength that has been denied her for as long as she can remember. With these women, Lily begins to assemble a unique family structure with four mothers, each of whom gives unselfishly of herself to provide a facet of motherhood for a child who is essentially an orphan. Lily, willingly but with caution, accepts this offer of unconditional love from these four women. From this unique group, August Boatwright steps forward as the most powerful substitute mother figure. Her place in Lily's life is one of stability and structure.

August, the beekeeper, is a woman who commands respect from the bees and from those humans over whom she reigns. August is the queen bee who surrounds herself with a circle of attendants: her sisters, Rosaleen, Lily, and a sisterhood of women who respectfully support each other in times of need. Lily describes August as capable of snapping "me back to my ordinary senses" (71). When Lily loses touch with reality, even for a few moments, August is her anchor. This ability to moor Lily to reality serves as the stability and acceptance for which Lily longs. August allows Lily the opportunity to dream while providing a stability that only a mother figure can offer with love and gentle guidance. Katherine Emanuel, in her journal article "The

Archetypal Mother: The Black Madonna in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*," states August befriends Lily "...by not delivering edicts and punishments...she lets Lily find her own way" (116). Through gentle guidance, August does not force her to accept what she feels; instead, August shows Lily what is in her own heart and allows Lily to make up her own mind.

As Lily searches for answers about her mother's death, she finds solace, advice, and acceptance in the home of August and her sisters. As a white child in a Black household during the 1960's, Lily is aware of many difficulties this situation might cause. She worries about other white people in town, in particular, how they would feel about her living with the Boatwright sisters. She is concerned that the sheriff would question why she is there (195). All of these worries are set aside because for Lily this home she has found with the Boatwright sisters is much more than just four walls; it is an "ashram," a place of peace and tranquility, where Lily communes with nature and comes to understand her place in the world, according to Rosellen Brown, author of "Honey Child" (11). It is a place of safety and acceptance. It offers her harmony and solitude, not only with the beauty of nature, but with the other women, and most importantly, with herself. "Some people have a sixth sense..." Lily shares "...because the moment I stepped into the house [of the Boatwright sisters] I felt a trembling along my skin, a traveling current that moved up my spine, down my arms, pulsing out from my fingertips" (Kidd 69). Lily knows in her heart and soul that the Boatwrights are the answer to her prayers; they can provide not only the answers to her questions, but more importantly, the balm to heal her wounded soul.

This solitude Lily finds with the Boatwright sisters is a welcomed substitute for the anxiety Lily has learned to cope with daily. Her life lacks love, consideration, and appreciation. T. Ray, Lily's father, is cold and distant. Lily's one pleasure in life is reading; unfortunately, her

father, T. Ray believes reading is a waste of time. For this reason, she smuggles books out of the library, reading in secret, knowing if her father caught her "he would half kill [her]" (15).

When Lily seeks solace from her lonely existence, she goes to the orchard where she has hidden a box containing a few of her mother's possessions. With the full moon illuminating the orchard, Lily holds the precious white gloves to her bosom as "the night settled on [her] skin" (23). These few moments bring her close to her mother. They are all that she has left. T. Ray does not believe that she is only trying to keep her mother's memory alive; he believes she is with a boy and screeches, "You act no better than a slut" (24). He punishes her by pouring grits on the wooden floor and forcing her to kneel on the mound for more than an hour (24). The next morning her knees are "swollen with hundreds of red welts, pinprick bruises that would grow into a blue stubble across [her] skin" (25). His cruel actions and caustic words cut Lily to the bone. She does not have a mother, and her father treats her with disdain.

Lily takes partial responsibility for what she lacks, and that is why she searches for answers to her mother's death. Additionally, that is why she searches for acceptance from August, May, June, and Rosaleen. For Lily, the only remedy available to her is to befriend these women with hopes of finding what is absent in her life--someone to love. She wants to "win August over," to be in her good graces as any child would who has learned to cope with a life void of love and stability (81). Lily becomes a willing student for her substitute mothers, in particular, August.

With August, Lily finds the peace which has long been absent from her life. A mother provides a safe environment which nurtures a child through difficult times. To accomplish this duty of motherhood, August opens her home and heart to Lily and Rosaleen and shares herself, her sisters, and their way of life, all the while asking little or nothing in return. Not only does

August give of herself, she also opens the land she loves to Lily, knowing that Lily will find peace as she wanders the fields.

The twenty-eight acres of farm land is more than just fields and orchards; it is a haven for a girl who missed out on childhood. These twenty-eight acres are much more than just hills and valleys; they represent freedom and strength for a child who has been confined and stripped of self-respect and value. In these hills and vales, Lily finds solace and safety which have been missing in her life since the loss of her own mother. When she wanders the fields of this farm, she gathers her shattered life and begins to heal, to find power within her heart to go on with her quest. The fields help her regroup her thoughts and enable her to find strength. She also finds the "interconnectedness of life, nature, and spirit" (Emanuel 116). Her new found connectedness to the land helps to bridge this gap of what is absent to what she seeks for herself which is the power to understand and control her life; it fosters an uplifting, personal sense of empowerment.

For a woman to become empowered, she requires "three very similar things: a soul of one's own, the ability to voice it, and the courage to voice it at all," comments Dr. Elaine J. Lawless, author of *Women Escaping Violence: Empowerment through Narrative* (18). These are the things that Lily searches for and things that her substitute mothers hope to help her find. This lost child's truest wish is to acquire a voice. She is silenced by her father and by society because she is a child. Since she is no longer in jeopardy, she feels free to say what she thinks. Through the peace and happiness which graciously surrounds her in the loving environment of the Boatwright home, Lily finds the courage to voice her feelings.

Intuition plays a part in the duties of a mother. Mothers must not only empirically know that danger exists for their children, they must sense it well in advance. August explains her thoughts to her sister regarding Lily. "I just have a feeling about this, June. Something tells me

not to send her back to some place she doesn't want to be" (Kidd 87). August shares her personal feelings with June although she has no proof to back-up what she feels. August's intuition tells her that neither Lily nor Rosaleen has told the entire truth about why they have come to the three sisters' home. June affirms her suspicions, "You know she's lying," but August tells her "...they're in some kind of trouble...Who's gonna take them in if we don't--a white girl and a Negro woman?" (86). August's intuition, along with her kind heart, leads her to give aid to these strangers, Lily and Rosaleen, who by using their presentiment, found their way to the home of August, May, and June.

Another important aspect of motherhood is teaching a child to nurture others. August does this primarily through the bees. Lily spends hours working with Zack, a neighbor boy, who helps the sisters care for the bees, but she doesn't learn to nurture these amazing creatures until one of her substitute mothers, August, begins the lessons. These lessons offer much more than just basic care of these living creatures; they teach Lily how to care and nurture all creatures, including humans. When Lily is stung, August soothes her, telling her "Count yourself initiated. You can't be a true beekeeper without getting stung" (167). For Lily, this is a true compliment. According to Lily, "The words caused a fullness in me and right at that moment an explosion of blackbirds lifted off the ground...and filled up the whole sky" (167). This experience also fills Lily's aching heart.

August teaches Lily the interdependence necessary for the bees to survive. Just like humans, the bees need to be part of each others' lives to flourish. August serves this same purpose as she helps to fill Lily's life with a sense of self-worth. Just as bees need each other to survive, so do humans. As the bees nurture each other, so does this substitute mother nurture this child with a heavy heart.

When August takes Lily out to the hives to help her, she explains how the bees protect and provide for each other, just as a mother must protect and provide for her child. From August, Lily learns there are field bees who must gather nectar and pollen to feed the queen, bees who must remove what is no longer necessary from the hive, nurse bees that care for the larvae, and the queen who is the heart of the hive. Through these lessons, Lily understands these extraordinary creatures are each performing the duties of a mother in some fashion. Just like the bees, a mother must find food for her child, remove things which are no longer useful or which provide a danger of sorts, take care of the child's physical needs, and be the heart of the home. As Lily learns about the bees, she also learns about mothering (148). In particular, Lily realizes what she is missing. She recognizes "the motherless place" in her heart that begins to ache (151).

Through these life lessons gently taught by August, Lily learns that an extremely important job of a mother is to be the keeper of memories. She must continue the legacy of the family through remembrances passed from mother to child. Her duty is to encourage the constant flow of memories, both pleasurable and painful. Each memory has an important message which must survive time and its interfering tribulations. In August's case, she has the only physical memories that exist of Lily's mother in a gold and white striped hatbox which she ceremoniously hands over to Lily when she feels Lily is ready to think about her mother again (272). Accepting this sacred duty without question or reservation, August kept the box of memorabilia for more than ten years, unsure what would happen to it or if there would be a time when these items would be of value to anyone. Instinctively, she cherishes and protects the items to preserve the past and to sustain the future. She is the guardian of memories of a lost mother who could not continue her duty.

After August presents the hatbox of memories to Lily, she gives her advice that Lily will carry with her forever. "Listen to me, Lily. I'm going to tell you something I always want you to remember..." (288). Her words of wisdom go straight to Lily's heart. "You have to find the mother inside yourself. Even if we already have a mother, we still have to find that part of ourself inside," August quietly instructs Lily (288). August tells Lily that the mother inside her will always be there to remind Lily when she is downtrodden to "Get up from there and live like the glorious girl you are" (288). August is the primary substitute mother who offers lessons in life, but her sisters, May and June, and the housekeeper, Rosaleen, each have a sacred assignment to care for this injured child.

May is the earth mother. She refuses to hurt any creature, going so far as to leave a trail of graham cracker crumbs to get the roaches to leave the house, so that she would not have to injure them in any way (172). She catches spiders and carries them in dust pans out of the house, gently setting them free, just as she gently sets free the worried souls she encounters. Unfortunately, she is also the mother who sacrifices herself as she carries the pain of the world in her heart. May's sister, August, shares her perception of May saying, "Everything just comes into her—all the suffering out there—and she feels it is happening to her. She can't tell the difference" (95). The pain she carries is scooped from the anguished souls she protects. Like a good mother, May tries to take away the pain her child feels. She wants to protect Lily from the agonies of life, all the while thinking that absorbing the pain herself would save her adopted child from the hurtful experiences of life. May builds a rock wall to contain all the pain, and into this wall, she tucks notes about all the fears, nightmares, hopes, and dreams, but this wall is not sturdy enough to save this substitute mother. Her heart is overflowing with the wretched agonies of others she knows or others she has heard about, and she can survive it no longer. May ends

her life when the worries of those people she has chosen to carry in her heart become too much for her to swallow. She leaves a note for her sisters explaining why she chooses to die. "I am sorry to leave you. I am tired of carrying around the weight of the world. I'm going to lay it down now. It's my time to die, and it's your time to live. Don't mess it up," laments May (210). May simply decides that she has done all she can in this world, and it is time to go on to the next world. As May's coffin is loaded into the hearse, "bees buzzed" and the "bee hum swelled and blended into the late-afternoon colors" (212). The humming bees comfort all of the women.

June is the strict mother who provides structure and stability for Lily. To enforce the rules, to be the jailor, to stand alone as the warden, and inflict the punishment is the cruelest of all jobs for a mother. This is June's duty to Lily. She watches Lily from a distance, all the while setting an example for her to follow. While supporting her sisters in their endeavors, she is the teacher, professionally and in her personal life. Her job is to light the way for those in her care. She is the bearer of the lamp of knowledge, the purveyor of reality and candor. She always tells the truth no matter how painful it may be. According to Sue Monk Kidd, the author of *Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine*, "The truth may set you free, but first it will shatter the safe, sweet way you live" (5). The truths Lily learns do shatter her life, but with the loving care of the four substitute mothers, she begins a reconstruction as she heads toward adulthood.

Along with June, Rosaleen, the woman who has cared for Lily for many years, also provides a sense of truth and stability for Lily. Forgetting that Rosaleen has cared for her when no one else would, Lily orders her around and treats her disrespectfully, but when Rosaleen moves to another part of the house, Lily is terrified for her to leave. Lily's need for independence is not as strong as her need for security which Rosaleen provides (120). Rosaleen is a source of

strength and stability. Without her, Lily is lost just as she would be lost without June's guidance and August's straightforward advice. Like a good mother, Rosaleen reassures Lily that she will always be there for her. She keeps this promise always for this lost child. Rosaleen, along with June and August, are excellent portrayals of substitute mothers.

Substitute mothers provide love and stability for abandoned children. In *Solar Storms* by Native American writer and member of the Chickasaw tribe, Linda Hogan, another gathering of women accepts the responsibility of helping an abandoned, wounded child find her way to peace. A young woman who has spent more than fifteen years in foster care returns to the North Country community where she was born to reconnect with the family she does not remember, but paradoxically, cannot forget.

Angela was removed from her abusive mother and grandmother and placed in foster care at an early age. It is likely that she would have been placed with a white family. She would have been taught the ways of the white family, and her Chickasaw customs would have been ignored. As a result, Angela would neither Chickasaw, nor white and would have been part of neither community. Angela would have to relearn her native customs.

Fortunately, the women in this narrative of abandonment, of loss, and finally, of hope band together to aid Angela as she strives to heal deep wounds caused by her abusive mother and to reclaim her culture. Katherine B. Chandler, author of *"How Do We Learn to Trust Ourselves Enough to Hear the Chanting Earth?: Hogan's Terrestrial Spirituality,"* explains that each woman has accepted the job of "restoring, renewing, and restructuring the human mind" as they provide solace and truth for Angela while she "reconnects" with her past and bridges the present (25). *Solar Storms* laces anger, pain, and rebirth to form a mighty web of support for an injured

young woman, sorrowfully seeking answers from her mother, great grandmother, great-great grandmother, and a surrogate mother.

Angela begins her search for understanding when she returns to her homeland to find her mother. Hannah is the mentally ill mother who abused Angela when she was a child until the state stepped in and placed her in multiple foster homes. As the years pass, Angela wants desperately to find answers to why her mother could have treated her with such hatred. To discover the truth, she must return to her past. To find her mother, she must find the women who cared for her before she was taken away. They are the key to purging the anger which controls her.

Bush is the woman who unsuccessfully tries to save Angela from her emotionally damaged mother. Agnes and Dora Rouge, her great grandmother and great-great grandmother, provide some of the keys to explain what happened to her in those early years which Angela has erased from her memory. They offer the direction Angela needs to complete this quest. Even the elder women, Bush, Agnes, and Dora Rouge, are comforted by women of the village who provide shelter, food, and emotional support to them as they relive the painful truths of their lives while they help Angela. All of these women, including the group which supports the older women, serve as substitute mothers to Angela and each other. Each woman aids Angela in her "search for a new way to speak," and a way to discover "a new way to live in this world" (31).

Bush is the wife of Angela's grandfather, a man who ran away with another woman and sired Angela's emotionally damaged mother. Dora Rouge, Bush's mother-in-law, describes Bush as "...timid and small and not very pretty, either, until you got to know her. Then she'd look beautiful" (Hogan 38). Even though Bush carries the personal anguish of a cheating husband who abandons her, caring for Angela is utmost in her priorities. This inner beauty defined by

Dora Rouge intensifies with the acts of kindness that Bush gives so freely to those around her.

Such is the case long before Angela is conceived; Bush cares for Hannah, her husband's daughter by the woman he ran away with so many years before. But by the time Hannah comes into Bush's life, she is emotionally and physically damaged beyond repair by her abusive mother, Loretta. Bush welcomes this sorrowful child into her home and attempts to provide the stability which she has lacked from the beginning of her teen years. She hopes to stem the cycle of abuse by providing a stable, loving home for this broken child. Unfortunately, she is unsuccessful in her actions.

Even with the devotion of a substitute mother like Bush setting an example of love and support, Hannah continues the chain of abuse, inflicting the emotional and physical damage on the innocent Angela. Hannah's soul is so damaged that Bush cannot save her from her inner demons. Bush intervenes numerous times to save Angela from her mother. She is so deeply connected to Angela on an emotional level that she hears Angela crying even though she is nowhere near (13). Bush's heart breaks, but she is helpless to stop the anger which controls Hannah. All Bush can do is provide a haven for Angela when she gathers this child in her arms for a few moments of peace.

In Bush's house, a small altar contains three pictures of Angela circled by constantly burning red candles, statues of saints, eagle feathers, and tobacco. One photo is Angela and Hannah, who holds her daughter "uncomfortably" as her daughter looks at her with "frightened eyes" (71). In another photo, Agnes, the great grandmother, holds Angela's hand, and in the third photo, Bush lovingly "gazes" at Angela as she sits comfortably on Bush's hip gripping her tightly at the waist. Angela is most happy with Bush who has provided a safe haven from birth for her. Angela can not remember the photos, nor can she remember feeling loved and protected, but

Bush remembers, and her feelings are strong enough to carry the weight of the pain that Angela feels. She shares only what she believes Angela can cope with successfully. She is Angela's protector long after the danger has fled.

Agnes and Dora Rouge, great grandmother and great-great grandmother of Angela, provide the moral compass which Angela so urgently seeks. Both women are the keepers of memories and the voices of reason. Both women provide a wealth of knowledge which is unbiased and directly connected to their belief in the power of the land and the animals. Agnes is stern and wants Angela to remember what she has suffered, while Dora Rouge is the gentler woman who wants Angela to make peace with her past. Even though Agnes is the sterner woman in this mix, she is also the one who provides money for Angela to visit her place of birth so that she can connect with her maternal ties. Agnes understands the gravity of Angela's visit, but cannot separate her desire to see this child again even though she knows this journey of discovery will cause great pain for Angela who already carries so many physical and emotional scars caused by her mother. Dora Rouge held on tightly to the belief that Angela would find her way home to those who love her, and with Agnes' help, that does happen. Agnes knows that Angela's reconnection with the past is the only way she will heal her wounded soul and move on to her future. When Angela encounters this deep strength in Dora Rouge, she describes it as a "light" which fills the room as it allows Angela to open her heart to the love from these women who surround her (31).

Dora Rouge is a healer who provides for the resurrection of Angela's body and soul. When she learns that Angela cannot sleep, she offers her a potion to ease the insomnia. Dora Rouge teaches her to connect with the plants in the native soil which can provide a peace and contentment that Angela does not have. When Dora Rouge learns just how much anger and all-

encompassing pain exists in Angela's heart, she offers her emotional support and a shoulder to bear some of her burdens. To mend her soul, author Barbara Cook, in her article "Hogan's Historical Narrative: Bringing to Visibility the Interrelationship of Humanity and the Natural World," says Angela's "healing [must be] brought about through the strength of the community and the spiritual links to ancestors, stories, and healing plants" (49). The "interconnectedness" of the women, the land, the animals, and the plants serves as the glue to hold them together and to help Angela heal the dolorous misery she has carried for so many years (Cook 47). Both Agnes and Dora Rouge give from their hearts and souls to ease the anguish Angela lives with daily as they teach her to reconnect to her spiritual beliefs. This paramount gift of faith makes all the difference for Angela and her quest to find what has been missing from her life.

Author Linda Hogan is quoted in Katherine Chandler's article "How Do We Learn To Trust Ourselves Enough to Hear the Chanting Earth?" describing this journey of reconnection which Angela must experience as "raking," a process of gathering, heaping up, and smoothing the broken ground (30). Hogan and her adopted daughter were both abused by their mothers according to Ann Fisher-Wirth, contributor to *From the Center of Traditions: Critical Perspectives on Linda Hogan* (61). Just like Hogan and her daughter, Angela must rake her life into some sort of order to survive. In this case, Angela must gather the people and the memories; she must heap them together, and she must use this accrued knowledge to soothe her pain. For Angela to heal, she must reconnect with her family, her environment, and herself by gathering these interwoven experiences and using them as an unguent to soothe her pain. This quest for healing teaches Angela to stand-up for herself and gives her a voice which has been absent her entire life.

Undoubtedly, women walk this earth who have ulterior motives for every effort put forth.

These are the women who want what they have never worked for, who deceive others believing they have a right to anything they desire, and who leave a trail of injured parties all in the name of what is just in their way of thinking. There are substitute mothers who do not care for the children who have become their charges. They are the classic wicked step-mothers who appear in fairy tales and in real life. One difference between these loving substitute mothers and the calculating substitute mothers is the nature of the acquisition of the children in their care. The loving substitute mothers welcome these children into their lives with open arms. They invite these motherless waifs into their circle of love. However, the calculating mothers have these children forced upon them as part and parcel of another situation they truly desire. These women are not and never will be open to accepting this job of mothering; it is forced upon them as part of the situation they truly prefer. If they were given the opportunity to avoid it, they most assuredly would.

Fortunately, there are those who believe that this lack of mothering can be compensated for by other means. Elaine Tuttle Hansen, in her book *Mother Without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood*, mentions that some children are lucky since "...one child may have a genetic mother, a gestational mother, and a custodial mother, each of whom is a different person" (1). Interestingly, there is always hope that one of these mothers will provide some part of an example which may benefit the child. Gratefully, with the possibility of three separate mothers, the child may have a fighting chance of seeing more positive aspects than negative aspects of mothering and possibly be loved by three women who will teach that child how to love in return.

CHAPTER 9:

CONCLUSION

The self-absorbed mothers, Edna and Joan Crawford, the substitute mothers, August, May, June, Rosaleen, Bush, Agnes, and Dora Rouge, the self-martyred mothers, Mah, Helen Van Deventer, and Addie, the self-sacrificing mothers, Anney, Evelyn Ryan, the unnamed teenage mother and the child-sacrificing mothers, Sethe and Suyuan Woo, have similar connection. Each of these women sets their own standards as necessary while they are performing their duties of motherhood. Some mothers are the keepers of memories, even though some memories are painful and some are filled with love. Some women are competent mother to the best of their abilities, while others are careless with their charges. Perhaps the difficulties they encounter in mothering manifest themselves when outsiders try to force these women to abide by principles which are not their own .

Some of the mothers in literature don't give the love and support necessary for their children to grow up with happiness and security. Some are cruel in their actions and words. Some don't protect their children from the abusive men or the abusive society in which they live. Some kill their children while under the stresses of their surroundings or abandon them along an isolated road with hopes that they might be saved, either spiritually or physically. All of these actions are in the name of all that is sane in the minds of these women. Still others sacrifice their own lives to protect their children. Additionally, there are those women who are fortunate enough to raise children in a house filled with love and stability, where they make the correct decisions, use the appropriate words, and produce children who are successful personally and professionally.

The one clear connection among all of these possible aspects of motherhood in literature is that women often traverse these at some point in time and with varying degree of participation. At some time, even the worst of mothers is caring and concerned; at other times, even the best of mothers can be cold and self-absorbed. With the opportunity to move among these antithetical characteristics, literature illustrates multiple examples which contain varied portrayals of mothers.

Thinking of these characters brings to mind the truths of motherhood as expressed in literature. Mothers are neither portrayed as completely perfect, nor completely flawed. Most mothers stand somewhere in between these two absolutes of perfection and imperfection. Most mothers are loving, caring, concerned, and devoted. A few are hateful, cold, unconcerned, and without consciences. Like most professions, there are those who excel at their jobs, those who are a detriment to all around them, and those who go through the motions oblivious to what good or worse yet, what evil they do.

Literature may provide an affirmation of what the reader may already believe. It may help the reader find relevance in everyday experiences involving motherhood. Perhaps the greatest miracle of literature is that all these portrayals of motherhood are available to everyone through the simple act of reading.

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