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THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMANHOOD:

FEMALE PRE-ADOLESCENCE IN AMERICAN NOVELS WRITTEN BY WOMEN, 1970 TO THE PRESENT

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kristi Lewis Fejedelem

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my son,

Edward George Fejedelem, III,

who has always given me a reason to persevere.

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I would like to express my gratitude to the members of my committee for their support and guidance. I especially thank my major professor, Dr. Mary E. Papke, for her invaluable criticisms and patience. The other members of my committee, Dr. George Hutchinson and Dr. Richard Penner, provided excellent suggestions and support over the last year.

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ABSTRACT

Female pre-adolescence, a rarely studied subject, has increasingly become a theme of women writers since the 1970's. The increase of novels dealing with this subject may be a direct result of the feminist movement of that time, since virtually no novels dealing with this subject are to be found prior to this period. Thus, it is only now that a comprehensive study of this subject can be made.

Notable sociologists believe that the period between eight and ten years of age is an especially crucial time in the lives of young girls because it is at this time that they form the patterns for all interpersonal relationships. That is, it is at this time that girls learn about "proper female behavior." Since women are the primary socializers of young girls, it is with them that these girls experience problems of connection as they are pushed toward the adult female role. As exhibited by the novels included in this thesis, the most important, although turbulant, relationships girls experience are with their mothers and girl friends.

The importance of this period in women's lives is witnessed by the fact that women novelists of different cultural backgrounds repeatedly return to this subject. Thus, the novels included in this thesis, as well as the discussion of them, bind women together across cultural

lines through the discussion of common experiences, and link women's writing to specific sociocultural realities.

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Introduction

Sydney Janet Kaplan, in her article entitled "Varieties of Feminist Criticism," discusses what forms feminist criticism should take in the future. She posits that it is necessary "to go beyond similarities of image, theme, and structure, and to consider issues that link women's writing to specific sociocultural realities." Kaplan goes on to suggest studies that concern a certain age or school (47). Female pre-adolescence, a rarely studied subject, has increasingly become a theme of women writers since the 1970's. The increase of novels dealing with this subject may be a direct result of the feminist movement of that time, since virtually no novels dealing with this subject are to be found prior to this period. Thus, it is only now that a comprehensive study of this subject can be made.

Carol Gilligan, in her recent Making Connections: The Relational Worlds of Adolescent Girls at Emma Willard School, when explaining the importance of the pre-adolescent period in girls' lives, uses women's novels as support for her argument. She declares that women educated in the Western tradition tend to begin the time of their novels not in infancy or early childhood as men do but "at the edge of adolescence with a girl of eight or nine or ten" (2). Gilligan believes that this period is of especial importance to young girls because it is at this time that they form the

patterns for all interpersonal relationships. Gilligan also declares that women are taught then to make decisions by excluding either themselves or others, "by being a good woman or being selfish" (9). Emily Hancock agrees, saying that females grow up learning to "put aside their own needs in favor of tending to the personal comfort of those who surround them" (188). It is during the pre-adolescent period that women begin to learn this lesson (Gilligan 9-10). Thus, the emergence of this subject and the discussion of it can, as Kaplan demands, link women's writing to the sociocultural reality of women, just as that writing already reflects that reality.

Since Gilligan believes that this decision making process is a learned process rather than an inherent one, she uses primarily a developmental psychological rather than a psychoanalytic approach in her studies. Gilligan argues that because it is other women from whom and with whom girls must learn this process, it is particularly with them that young girls experience problems of connection. Gilligan specifically mentions problems between young girls and their mothers, female teachers, and peers (11-12). These problematic connections to other people do, indeed, regularly appear in the coming-of-age stories of American women.

However, despite the importance of the pre-adolescent period in women's lives and its increasing appearance in

women's fiction, it has been studied neither as a subject in and of itself nor as a part of a larger study involving any of the key issues to be discussed in this thesis. The articles and books examined in the following part of this introduction comprise some of the few that deal either explicitly with the female adolescent in literature or the topics considered most important to adolescent girls which will be discussed in this thesis.

A Summary of Previous Work

One of the first literary studies to mention female adolescence is Rollande Ballorain's article entitled "From Childhood to Womanhood (or from Fusion to Fragmentation): A Study of the Growing-up Process in XXth Century American Women's Fiction," published in 1981. Ballorain begins by dividing her study into three parts according to the publication dates of the novels she considers. She believes that the outcome of the characters in these novels corresponds to the status of the feminist movement at the time. For example, in the works from the first period (1910-1930's) when the first wave of feminism swept America, Ballorain proclaims young female characters to be "strong in all meanings" (98). In sharp contrast the middle period works (1936-1966), written when the feminist movement was dormant, contain many female characters who commit suicide

before reaching adulthood. Ballorain attributes this to the fact that it may have been difficult for women to imagine themselves as adults at this time. The third period Ballorain merely labels "Our Time." She then pronounces that in this period female characters are represented as adults who more fully understand their victimization than do the characters of Group II. Woman is no longer isolated but found among other women. Despite the title, then, this article deals with the adult woman's ability or non-ability to come to terms with her self rather than the actual growing up process.

The second appearance of a study concerning female adolescence occurs in 1983 with an annotated bibliography by Jane S. Bakerman and Mary Jean DeMarr entitled Adolescent Female Portraits in the American Novel: 1961-1981. This bibliography includes works focusing on young women from the age of twelve to twenty-two. Works focusing on younger girls are rarely included and then only if those girls can be considered as extremely mature. This study also limits itself to works in which female adolescents have "genuine importance to the plots or theses." Bakerman and DeMarr list fourteen common female images that emerged in their review of the fiction. Included in these are "Love-Struck Girls," "Friends and Sisters" who "huddle together" seeking in different ways and degrees to achieve maturity through relationships with others who help them to define

themselves, and "Rebellious Daughters" who reject the values of society and their parents and create their own standards and values.

In 1985 Barbara A. White's Growing Up Female: Adolescent Girlhood in American Fiction was published. White's study, like that of Bakerman and DeMarr, focuses on older, post-puberty girls, from age twelve to nineteen. She does not, however, include any works by male authors or novels intended for adolescent readers. White's study covers novels published from 1920-1982 and includes a bibliography of all primary and secondary works discussed in the book. Like Bakerman and DeMarr, White points out that certain themes recur in virtually all of the novels of female adolescence. Two of these are the focus on girls' sexual experiences and male sexual harassment or violence. White goes on to say that these themes have become more explicit in women's writing since 1970.

In 1986 two more studies of female adolescents emerged. Although Katherine Dalsimer's Female Adolescence: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Works of Literature uses early works to illustrate her points, the issues discussed are much the same as those seen in modern novels of female adolescence. These issues would seem, then, to cross historical or temporal boundaries. Dalsimer outlines some of these major issues in her introduction. Two of these are changing attitudes toward parents and the search for new

relationships, usually same sex but often tinged with eroticism.

A second study to appear in 1986 was also the second, larger study by Mary Jean DeMarr and Jane S. Bakerman, The Adolescent in the American Novel Since 1960. DeMarr and Bakerman here added novels of male adolescence to those in their earlier bibliography and divided their study into two parts: Female and Male. The chapters within each section are organized similarly in order to facilitate comparison if so desired. Seven areas of interest relevant to the adolescent characters were discovered. These include, among others, love and sexuality, family relationships, and friendships. DeMarr and Bakerman also look at the phenomena of the death of a parent and daughters who function as parents to their own parents. The girls in this study range in age from twelve to twenty-two.

Charlotte H. Bruner's article entitled "First Novels of Girlhood" appeared in 1988. Bruner identifies the focus on girlhood as new in the novels of African and Caribbean literature. Two themes that become central in her descriptions of novels are female friendship and mother-daughter conflict. Thus, these issues must cross cultural boundaries as well as historical ones.

Dana Heller's The Feminization of Quest-Romance, published in 1990, originated as a full-length study of American literature on the female's coming of age. As her

research progressed, however, Heller grew more interested in the motif she identified as a "female version of quest-romance." Many of the characteristics of this motif are also present in female coming-of-age stories. Heller lists two of these characteristics as the "thwarted or impossible journey, [and] a rude awakening to limits." The third characteristic, however, "a reconciliation to society's expectations of female passivity and immobility" (14), is not shared by the novels of adolescence, perhaps because the novels end before such a reconciliation can take place.

Directing attention now to specific themes, one of the few books devoting itself entirely to the subject of mother-daughter relationships in literature is Cathy N. Davidson and E.M. Broner's The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature, published in 1980. Davidson and Broner divide their study into seven sections. The first six are comprised of major sub-themes arising within the subject of mothers and daughters. The name of at least one of these sections is misleading, however. "The Lost Mother", the first section, is not about absent or dead mothers. Rather, it is about mothers who are present but about whom we have little information, such as the mothers in Shakespeare's works. Further, of the remaining sections, very few include any information about mothers and daughters in recent literature (that written since 1970). Part VII is a bibliography of representations of mothers and daughters in

literature. This bibliography is divided according to different genres. Since citations do not give the ages of the protagonists, it is difficult to decide which of these works might actually concern pre-adolescents.

Two chapters of Davidson and Broner's book, although they never mention adolescence in particular, do seem, however, to introduce issues relevant to this study. Lorna Irvine in her essay entitled "A Psychological Journey: Mothers and Daughters in English-Canadian Fiction" declares that the psychological journey which appears in so much of women's fiction reveals the ambivalent feelings daughters have for their mothers. Daughters often perceive their own efforts to achieve autonomy as a desertion of the mother at the same time as they begin to resent their dependence upon her (243-44). Natalie M. Rosinsky, in her "Mothers and Daughters: Another Minority Group," proposes, as Gilligan and Heller do, that being a "good" woman in a patriarchal society means conforming to feminine stereotypes; being a "good" mother thus means teaching one's daughter these false ideals (280).

Mary Anne Ferguson's essay entitled "The Female Novel of Development and the Myth of Psyche" echoes this belief. Ferguson proclaims that in the traditional female novel of development, women are initiated into the adult world through "learning the rituals of human relationships...so that they may replicate the lives of their mothers."

According to Ferguson's definition, any novel that deals primarily with interpersonal relationships is traditional (239). Simone de Beauvoir qualifies this, in her work, The Second Sex, by claiming that women who feel disgusted with their own sex react in one of two ways toward their daughters. They either try to impose their own fates upon their daughters or try to "compensate for [their] own inferiority by making superior creature[s] out of [those] whom [they] regard as [their] double[s] (518). Thus, women try to live vicariously through their daughters; while some reject "fate" through their daughters, others accede to it at the cost of their daughters' autonomy.

Heller, in her work, points out yet another theme dealing with parents--the absence of them. Heller notes that the modern female protagonist frequently lacks one or both parents. She goes on to explain that not only is this lack reflective of contemporary social conditions, but it also allows for the exploration of the "bonds that determine female development in relation to the presence or absence of one or both parents." The absence of the father, for instance, both allows a study of the importance of that role in female development and makes room for the exploration of maternal identification (29). Janet Todd acknowledges this theme as well but argues in simplistic fashion that the mothers of fictional characters are usually "bad and living or good and dead" (2).

Not surprisingly, many daughters, in an attempt to avoid the conflict of the mother-daughter relationship, place physical distance between themselves and their mothers. This phenomenon is explored in "The Daughter as Escape Artist" by Sue Ann Johnston. Johnston asserts that women must emerge from "overly close" identification with their mothers in order to become individuals (10).

While most critics lament the psychological condition of the mother-daughter relationship, there is at least a documented tradition for Caucasian women. Gloria Wade-Gayles discusses the lack of such a tradition for Black women in her essay entitled "The Truths of Our Mother's Lives: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Black Women's Fiction." Wade-Gayles believes that the Black tradition of mother-daughter relationships, if one exists, might be quite different from that of the white tradition.

While mother-daughter relationships have often been studied in other disciplines, they seem to have been marginalized in the literary world. This is especially surprising considering their importance in the lives of women and their frequent appearance in women's literature.

Female friendships have also rarely been discussed in the literary world. Further, the few studies that do exist all tend to include discussion of the same themes. For instance, Dorothy Jones, in her essay discussing female friendship in Australian fiction, proclaims that female friendship seems almost a non-existent topic in Australian

fiction when compared to the large number of male friendships discussed. When female friendships are portrayed, however, Jones maintains that they usually "allow scope for creativity, but [are] also an embattled region continually under pressure from external pressures and the inner tensions which these generate." Thus, these friendships both do and do not function as a refuge for the women involved (3).

While only some women seem to find refuge in their friendships with others of the same sex, women do frequently discover another part of themselves through these relationships. For instance, in much women's fiction one female character acts as the double for her female friend. These two friends, then, usually represent two extremes (Frye 99). According to Janice Raymond, however, friendship must begin with the relationship to one's self. Raymond believes that society has discouraged female friendship to the extent that women hate their "original selves" and are therefore indifferent to other women (5-6). She also asserts that this indifference is a reaction to the ambivalence of the mother-daughter relationship, the first relationship most women have with another woman (185-85).

Janet Todd has done the most extensive study to date of women's friendships in her book, Women's Friendships in Literature. Although Todd's study is limited to eighteenth century English and French novels, she does make several

general statements concerning female relationships. Todd believes that female friendships can be divided into five categories: sentimental, erotic, manipulative, political, and social. Todd does not seem to acknowledge, however, that a friendship might fit into more than one of these categories either at the same time or at different stages in the relationship.

Although the critical literature on female adolescence reviewed here primarily deals with girls older than will be discussed in this thesis, many of the issues that seem important to these girls also seem to be of great importance to the younger subjects here. As Gilligan has said, these important issues seem always to involve relationships of some kind. Therefore, the body of this thesis will be divided into three sections dealing with different types of relationships. Chapter I will examine the mother-daughter relationship and its effects on girls' lives. Chapter II will discuss the importance of female friendships and how they reflect the girls' feelings about themselves. Chapter III will deal with the girls' relationships with themselves as they move toward adulthood, examining their emotional, psychological, and physical changes. Although some of the novels discussed in this thesis do not contain all of the key issues or elements, and so will not be discussed in

every chapter, each novel does focus on at least one of these issues. Novel synopses are included in an Appendix in order to allow readers to see more easily which issues occur in each book.

The recurrence of these issues also seems to be cross-cultural. Although this study is limited to novels written by North American women, these, as well as their characters, have various cultural backgrounds. The process of maturation as represented in these novels is nevertheless remarkably similar even in these different cultures. The young girls discussed in this paper--an Antiguan in Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John, Black Americans (Southern and Northern) in Toni Morrison's Sula and The Bluest Eye and Dori Sanders' Clover, a Chinese-American in Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior, a poor Southern white in Kaye Gibbon's Ellen Foster, a Mid-Westerner in Louise Erdrich's The Beet Queen, a North-Westerner in Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, and a Canadian in Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye --present a full range of cultural differences, yet they share many of the same experiences in their growth to womanhood. It is these common experiences that bind women together across cultural and regional lines.

Chapter I : Mother-Daughter Relationships[1]

Adrienne Rich maintains that the "cathexis between mother and daughter...is the great unwritten story" (225). If mother-daughter relationships comprise an unwritten story, they also comprise a story of ambivalence. Gilligan declares that girls often experience turmoil in their relationships with their mothers because of the closeness of those relationships: "It is in close relationships that girls are most willing to argue or disagree, wanting most to be known and seen by those to whom they feel closest and also believing that those who are close will be there, will listen, and will try to understand" (20). Mary Daly believes that this acceptance does not occur. Instead, she declares that "Mothers in our culture are cajoled into killing off the self-actualization of their daughters, and daughters learn to hate them for it, instead of seeing the real enemy" (149). In other words, mothers have already learned the lessons that Gilligan says all women must learn and so have, as Heller describes it, reconciled themselves to society's expectations of women (53). Since women are generally the primary socializers of young girls, when mothers succeed in getting their daughters to buy into

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[1]This section also includes some discussion of fathers. The most important relationship, however, is usually with the mother. In fact, in many of the books included in this study, the father is physically absent. Only one of the books includes a positive image of a father.

society's expectations for women, they legitimize their own positions in some way. Hancock says that when a daughter looks at her mother in her cultural context, she necessarily sees her mother as devalued and weak despite the mother's individual strengths. The daughter, then, tries to deny that she is in any way a reflection of her mother's values. Hence the mother-daughter conflict. Perhaps it is because the mother-daughter relationship is so sensitive an issue, then, that it has been virtually ignored by literary critics.

Perhaps for the same reason it is a favorite topic of women novelists. All nine of the novels included in this study contain some discussion of mother-daughter relationships, and seven deal with the topic quite extensively. The mothers in these novels can be divided into two groups: good or good enough mothers, and bad or absent mothers. Good enough mothers are physically present through most of their daughters' lives and have some sort of strong connection to their daughters. This is not to say that there is no conflict. In fact, very often, as Gilligan has said, it is this sense of strong connection that causes conflict between mothers and daughters as the daughters move toward autonomy. That is, the daughter must be able to identify with her mother as a woman while at the same time distancing herself from her mother as a separate individual.

This can be a remarkably difficult adjustment for girls who have an especially close relationship with their mothers, as can be seen in Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John. Annie John shares a mutual adoration with her mother, and thus they do everything together:

> As my mother went about from pot to pot...I was ever in her wake. As she dipped into a pot...to taste for correct seasoning, she would give me a taste of it also, asking me what I thought (17).

Annie John and her mother also dress alike for the first twelve years of Annie John's life (25) and bathe together in a ritualistic fashion:

> My mother and I often took a bath together...a special bath in which the barks and flowers of many different trees, together with all sorts of oils, were boiled in the same large caldron. We would then sit in this bath in a darkened room with a strange-smelling candle burning away. As we sat in this bath, my mother would bathe different parts of my body; then she would do the same to herself (14).

As Helen Pyne Timothy has pointed out, Annie John's mother is intensely involved in every detail of her daughter's development until puberty. For instance, all of the mementoes of the stages of Annie John's prepubescent life are locked in her mother's trunk and the events lovingly recounted when the objects are taken out. When Annie John

begins to approach puberty, however, her mother "[doesn't] seem to notice" this stage of development at all. It is at this moment of separation that the problems begin between mother and daughter.

Prior to this moment, Annie John's identity is almost completely merged with that of her mother. This is symbolized best by the fact that they share the name Annie John. The daughter is referred to as "Little Miss" by both her mother and father, implying a diminutive of the mother.[2] In fact, when Annie John's mother first initiates a separation, she acknowledges the fact that she and her husband have been treating their daughter as a smaller version of the mother: "You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me" (26). Obviously, then, the mother had previously thought this acceptable. This voicing of the need for separation by her mother leaves Annie John feeling as though "the earth swept away from under me" (26).

Although Donna Perry insists that Annie John's mother initiates this separation because she "wants her daughter to become a woman," it is quite easy to understand why Annie John would react negatively. Her mother has continually used the withdrawal of her company and affection as a means

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[2]It is also of particular importance that Annie John, who narrates the story, does not relate this fact until quite late in the story when she is angry with her mother and beginning to plan a full, physical separation from her.

of punishment with Annie John: "As a punishment, I ate my supper outside, alone...and my mother said that she would not be kissing me good night later..." (12). This means of punishment seems especially cruel since Annie John seems to be terrified that her mother might abandon her in some way, as seen by her reaction to her mother's disappearance while swimming and the resultant nightmares (43-45). It is no wonder, then, that Annie John interprets her mother's acts of separation as a withdrawal of affection also, since they are essentially the same sort of acts with which she has usually been punished: "Because of this young-lady business, instead of days spent in perfect harmony with my mother, I trailing in her footsteps, she showering down on me her kisses and affection and attention, I was now sent off to learn one thing and another" (27). Indeed, Annie John's separation from her mother is so traumatic that it manifests itself in violent thoughts that she believes her mother shares: "My mother would kill me if she got the chance. I would kill my mother if I had the courage" (89).

Although Morrison's Sula does not react as strongly as Annie John, she does feel that there is "no other that you can count on" when she overhears her mother discussing her as a separate individual (118-19):

> "You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference."
>
> She only heard Hannah's words, and the pronouncement

sent her flying up the stairs. In bewilderment, she stood at the window fingering the curtain edge, aware of a sting in her eye" (57).

Sula's reaction may be less extreme than Annie John's because she has already separated more from her mother. (This is evident through Sula's increased attachment to Nel which will be discussed in the next chapter.) Sula has also grown up experiencing only a casual sort of love from her mother, for as Jane Bakerman has pointed out, Sula's mother is not "able to express her affection for her [child] in a way that is acceptable or apprehendable to [her]" (550). As when Annie John's mother forces a separation from her daughter, there is also a positive side to this separation in Sula's case according to Victoria Middleton. Sula's mother "[gives] her the right to live independently" (375). As Ashrof Rushdy maintains, however, that independence is gained at the cost of her faith in her mother (311).

Although the girls in these novels are ready to begin separating from their mothers, all seem to feel the need to do so at their own speeds. Indeed, the girls feel alienated and unloved by their mothers when the mothers try to hasten this separation. Thus, the mother-daughter relationship must maintain a precarious balance in order to avoid turmoil. Of the five "good" mothers discussed in this section, only one (who will be discussed later) seems able to achieve this balance. Annie John and Sula, as we have

seen, seem to experience the most difficulty with their mothers. Of the other three daughters in this category, two experience some slight separation or conflict with their mothers prior to puberty.

This earlier separation, because it is self-initiated, is much easier for the girls. Morrison's Nel and Kingston's narrator decide when they are young that they will not be like their mothers. For Nel this occurs through her assertion that she will be stronger than her mother, that she will not be subservient to the dominant white class. After she makes this vow, Nel comes into some fuller sense of herself:

> She got out of bed and lit the lamp to look in the mirror. She looked for a long time and suddenly a shiver ran through her.
>
> "I'm me," she whispered. "Me."
>
> Nel didn't know quite what she meant, but on the other hand she knew exactly what she meant.
>
> "I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me."
>
> Each time she said the word me there was a gathering in her like power, like joy, like fear (28).

This movement toward independence is tremendous for Nel, a little girl whose mother had long ago sought to destroy her imagination. For as Morrison makes a point of telling us, Nel's mother's chief joy was manipulating her daughter (18).

Kingston's narrator also decides at an early age that she will be a different kind of mother than her own mother has been. At this point Kingston's narrator has not come to terms with the differences in her mother's Chinese values and attitudes and the American ones which surround her (Kingston's narrator) outside of the home. Therefore, Kingston sees almost all of her mother's actions as wrong and repudiates her own similiarity past or future to her mother. She vows that "I'm going to remember never to hit or to scold my children for crying..." (46). Kingston's narrator virtually denies that she and her mother were ever close, although we do see incidents in which they give the appearance of being so: "I remembered that as a child I had followed my mother about the house, the two of us singing..." (20). Annie John and Kingston's narrator have roughly the same experience, then, but view it very differently. This is probably due in part, as has previously been mentioned, to Kingston's narrator's confusion between Chinese and American attitudes and customs:

> "I didn't say you were ugly."
>
> "You say that all the time."
>
> "That's what we're supposed to say. That's what Chinese say. We like to say the opposite" (203).

Further, Kingston's narrator grows up among sexist gibes such as "Feeding girls is feeding cowbirds" and "There's no

profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls." These gibes are made even more confusing by the fact that they are hurled by other women as well as men. When the narrator's mother yells "Bad girl!" her daughter screams back "I'm not a bad girl," yet she realizes at the same time that "I might as well have said, 'I'm not a girl'" (46). Kingston's narrator's glowing attributes have no value in her society because she does not value herself. As Jeanne Barker-Nunn remarks when discussing the relationship between Kingston's narrator and her mother:

> These painful episodes are a result of the difficulty mother and daughter have separating from one another; this is the darker side of connection. The daughters' resentment springs from what they see as a lack of willingness on their mothers' part to see them as they are, to accept them as having lives both different and separate from those of their own (59).

This remark could also be applied to most of the other novels included in this study.

The mothers in all of the novels discussed to this point intend to help and feel that they are helping their daughters to become separate individuals, but their actions are not perceived in that way by any of the daughters. The only daughter that seems to have genuine help from her mother in separating is Atwood's Elaine. Curiously, this is

also the mother-daughter relationship about which we learn the least.

Elaine's mother provides a continual presence in her daughter's life, but it is an obscure presence. Interaction between the two characters is rarely shown, possibly because there is no direct conflict in this relationship. Elaine's mother seems to feel no need to push Elaine toward autonomy because Elaine has grown up as an independent person. Mother and daughter have always existed on an equal plane in this novel. While Elaine is not yet an adult, she does not view her mother as one either: "My mother is not like the other mothers, she doesn't fit in with the idea of them...They seem to me grown-up in a way that my own mother is not" (166). Thus, Elaine's mother helps her daughter to separate by treating her as a separate, equal person. This is evidenced by the mother's understanding of Elaine's extreme problems with her friends, even though Elaine denies these problems. While Elaine's mother does try to offer her some sort of advice, she also admits that she does not know how to handle the situation either (166-67). With this confession she strips herself of any authority and positions her daughter as an equal. By promoting a gradual separating process, Elaine's mother becomes the only mother in the novels discussed in this study who helps her daughter achieve autonomy without sacrificing some part of their relationship.

The bad or absent mothers of this study, on the other hand, not only totally destroy their relationships with their daughters, but in many cases they also destroy the girls' chances of achieving autonomy. Since the parent-child relationships in these novels are, however, either nonexistent or entirely devoid of love, the girls usually seek inclusion rather than separation. In Morrison's The Bluest Eye, Pecola's parents have no sense of self-worth, and thus they also destroy Pecola's. Pecola's mother, Mrs. Breedlove, has accepted the white ideal of beauty which she has learned from watching movies. Mrs. Breedlove considers Pecola so alien to this sense of white beauty that she cannot love the child. Instead, she turns all of her attention to the child of the white family for whom she works (86-87). Pecola's anger at her parents is so great that when she hears them fighting, she can only "[struggle] between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself could die" (38). Pecola incorporates her mother's sense of beauty, however, and believes that everything would mysteriously right itself in her world if only she could adhere to the white standard of beauty by having blue eyes. Blue eyes would bring love and inclusion, she believes:

> If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say "why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad

things in front of those pretty eyes."...Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes (40).

Pecola, in her effort to attain blue eyes, drinks greedily from a Shirley Temple cup (22) and ingests great quantities of Mary Jane candies in the hope that she will grow to look like the little white girl on the wrapper (43). Instead, she looks like her own mother, and her father, overcome by both his desire and his inability to protect his wife/daughter, rapes Pecola (128). Even after this tragic event, Pecola receives no sympathy from her mother. In fact, she receives a beating instead (148). Thus, Pecola's parents destroy her sense of self-worth, her chances of achieving autonomy, and her mind.

Kaye Gibbons' Ellen Foster lives through an experience somewhat similar to that of Pecola, yet it is less devastating to her. Ellen's mother dies soon after the opening of the book. Consequently, the picture we formulate of her relationship with her daughter is filtered through Ellen's memory and consciousness. Ellen seems unable to escape from the memory of her mother. She sees both her mother's and her own tragic lives as the result of her mother's actions. This is reflected in Ellen's thoughts at her mother's funeral: "What did you expect? Marry trash and see what comes of you" (14). Ellen, due to her lack of maturity, is unable to understand the "guilt by association" that her relatives, especially her grandmother, attach to

her. She believes, instead, that she has done something wrong in their eyes and vows to spend her life making up for it if she is ever able to determine what it is (78-79). Thus, Ellen intends her life in some way to make up for her mother's mistakes.

Ellen also tries to take her mother's place in the household while her mother is in the hospital. She cooks and cleans for her father during her mother's absence (3-4). By the time her mother returns, there has almost been a reversal in the mother/daughter roles. Although now Ellen only assists with the housekeeping, she has moved to a caretaking role with her mother: "Get back in the bed, I say to my mama. Mama's easy to tend to...Not a bit of trouble...She starts to whimper and I say it is no reason to cry. But she will wear herself out crying" (6). Ellen, therefore, seems to function as more of a parent to her parents than they do to her.

Ellen's father, in sharp contrast to her mother, is the epitome of all that is evil. While Pecola's father's actions are unforgivable, Morrison makes some effort at portraying him as a victim as she does Pecola. Gibbons does not make this effort. Her novel opens, in fact, with Ellen admitting that she used to think of different ways to kill her father and that she is much better off since his death

(1)[1]. While such an assertion may at first seem heartless, we soon come to understand Ellen's point of view. Although we never learn anything of the early relationship between Ellen's parents (Ellen apparently knows little herself), we do see the final scene between them through Ellen's eyes. Ellen's father, after being terribly cruel to his wife, who has just been released from the hospital, watches her take an overdose and then refuses to allow Ellen to go for help. Instead, he tells Ellen to put her mother to bed and promises her that her mother will be all right (9). Ellen's mother then dies in her sleep, and what little trust Ellen had in her father dies with her mother.

Throughout the rest of the novel, Ellen's relationship with her father is primarily one of avoidance. When they are together, however, Ellen continues to function as an adult (24-25), and her father seems to see her as one. In fact, it is her father's confusion of her with her adult mother (as Cholly confused Pecola with her mother) which finally forces Ellen to leave the house:

Get away from me he does not listen to me but touches

---

[1]This is very similar to Pecola's wish that her parents would kill each other. It is also somewhat similar to Annie John's desire to kill her mother. All three girls desire the death of their parents because they want to be free to live their lives in the manner they desire: Ellen wants to live without her father's constant harassment; Pecola desires either to end the turmoil in her life or to end her life itself; Annie John wants to rid herself of her mother's influence.

his hands harder on me. That is not me. Oh no that was her name. Do not oh you do not say her name to me. That was her name. You know that now stop no not my name. I am Ellen. I am Ellen. He pulls the evil back into his self and Lord I run (38).

Even though Ellen apparently manages to make her father realize who she is and stops him on this occasion, he does try to attack her once again. It is perhaps even more obvious in this second scene that he does view Ellen as an adult. He comes to Ellen's school drunk, "waving dollars, yelling and undoing his britches...and telling Ellen dammit to come back he would pay for it" (54).

This lack of a caring parental figure leads Ellen on a search for a new mother. It is only inclusion in a loving family which will allow Ellen to come to terms with the events of her life and, consequently, to achieve autonomy successfully. Ellen in some way realizes the importance of a family and especially a mother to her. Therefore, she is careful about whom she selects for this position, going so far even as to interview her "New Mama":

I told her there was just a couple of things I needed to know before I unloaded my box and settled in that room she mentioned...I need to know if you are pretty healthy or if you have a disease or bad habits like drinking. Also are you generally friendly or do you have days when you act crazy or extra mean? (119).

Thus, Ellen quizzes the woman about virtually every adult vice which she has come up against. While she is concerned about the suitability of this woman, the idea that the woman will not want her either is simply terrifying to Ellen. On the way to the woman's house, Ellen constantly reassures herself that this woman will be the one to accept her: "She's bound to recognize me I thought. I am not just a face in the crowd" (116). When her new mother begins to question her about where she came from, Ellen is thrilled that the woman would be so interested in her (117). When Ellen receives a physical act of affection from her new mother, she declares that "it was just like I wanted it to be" (119). It is evident from the end of the book, however, that Ellen has a long way to go emotionally and psychologically before she will be able to achieve autonomy.

Ellen's search for a new mother is external, actually a physical search because there is virtually no woman in her life to whom she can attach herself. Dori Sanders' Clover also undergoes a search for a new mother figure. Her search, however, is more of an internal one. When Clover is left parentless, her relatives argue over who has the right to keep her. In fact, Clover, listening to the ensuing argument, thinks "One wants me to stay, one wants me to leave. I guess they will have to do like the wise old king Grandpa told me about. Just cut me in half" (27). Clover has several women with whom she can make a connection. Her

search, then, is for the one of these women with whom she can most identify.

The woman to whom Clover seems to feel the closest in the early part of the novel is her Aunt Everleen. Everleen and Clover's grandfather cared for Clover when she was very young (81). Everleen, then, has always been a mother figure in Clover's life. In fact, when Clover first learns about her father's impending marriage to Sara Kate, she is more concerned about the repercussions occurring in the rest of her family than she is about the actual marriage. Clover is especially distraught over the idea that she might lose her aunt:

> Everleen pulled me ...to her side. I buried my face against her sweaty arm, glad there was the sweat so she couldn't feel the tears streaming down my face. Her hot, sweaty smell, coated with Avon talcum powder, filled my nose. It was her own special smell. I felt safe..."Let me dry them tears," she said, dabbing at my eyes with the corner of her apron. I should have known, I couldn't fool her (7).

Clearly, at this time Everleen is the most important woman in Clover's life. Although Everleen continues to be important to Clover, after Sara Kate's arrival Clover seems to be torn between these two different mother figures.

Clover's new stepmother, Sara Kate, decides the question of where Clover will live by asserting herself with

her in-laws for the first time and securing Clover (27). While Clover has assured us that she certainly would not have picked Sara Kate for a stepmother (33), she does suddenly feel sympathy for Sara Kate when she encounters the ill feelings of Clover's relatives (28). These ill feelings stem from the family's racial prejudices; Clover's father, Gaten, is black, and Sara Kate is white. An interracial marriage seems almost too much for this family and their community to stand. It is at least partially these prejudices, which have surrounded Clover all her life, which make her reject Sara Kate at first. Clover, however, does not always agree with the criticism she hears about Sara Kate: "In spite of how hard they try to put down my daddy's new woman friend, trying to make her have some kind of sickness is bad. Next they will say she is retarded" (42). For Clover, then, the acceptance or rejection of her stepmother as a mother figure is inextricably bound up with mutual racial acceptance.

As Clover gets to know Sara Kate better, she is able to realize that the racial stereotypes she hears around her (67) are not necessarily true. The problems that Clover and Sara Kate do have with one another are cultural problems, such as Sara Kate's inability to cook grits (64). Clover feels protective of Sara Kate, however, and wants to prevent the community from thinking badly of her:

I guess, in a strange sort of way, I don't want anybody

> thinking like, well, that Sara Kate was strange and everything. Maybe in a sly way I was trying to protect Sara Kate even if I can't stand her sometimes. Somehow, I really believe it was because I'm trying to please my dead daddy (67).

Thus, it is because of Clover's lessening prejudices and her desire to do what her father would wish that Clover begins to become emotionally attached to Sara Kate. There also seems to be some understanding between them, as Sara Kate also tries to protect Clover (128). She does not always know just how to do this, however, and so she asks Clover's Aunt Everleen for help (154). After Clover's two mother figures join together, Clover begins to accept more fully Sara Kate as an authority figure. As Clover need no longer then feel torn between her affection for Sara Kate and her loyalty to her Aunt Everleen, she is now free to form a bond with Sara Kate. Clover begins to adopt Sara Kate's actions and ways of doing things: "in the middle was a big spider. I was all set to cream the thing, when I thought about Sara Kate...Sara Kate's thinking is rubbing off on me..." (162). This mutual acceptance and bonding between Sara Kate and Clover is symbolized best by Sara Kate's refusal of an offer of marriage and her pronouncement that "for now...loving each other is all Clover and I can handle" (175). Clover, then, is able to mature enough to accept the mother figure in her life by ridding herself of her racial prejudices; her mother figure is good enough that she does so for her.

As Ellen's and Clover's mothers do, the last two mothers in this section also abandon their children. Erdrich has Mary's mother simply fly away with a stunt pilot at the fair, leaving her three children behind. Mary essentially becomes a loner after this episode, although she does develop a close relationship with her aunt. Initially the relationship with her aunt and uncle was begun by Mary as an effort both to make herself useful and thus indispensable, and to spite her cousin Sita (19). The relationship between Mary and the aunt develops despite these initial motives, and when Mary hears of her mother, she effectively denies her and claims her aunt as her mother (57-58):

> "Write her back if you want, she's your mother. But I washed my hands of Adelaide when you walked in the door."
>
> Mary stole a look at Aunt Fritzie's expression. But Aunt Fritzie caught her eyes and Mary couldn't break free.
>
> "Don't go back to her, is all I ask," said Fritzie.
>
> Something like a tight band in Mary's chest snapped and she laughed, a sudden awkward bray of intense relief that embarrassed her.
>
> "Fat chance," she said. "you're more a mother to me" (57).

This incident indicates the deep resentment that Mary has harbored toward her mother over the years, even though she has never before verbally acknowledged it. This leads the young Mary to lash out at her mother. She sends a postcard saying simply, "All three of your children starved dead" (58). She obviously feels deep resentment toward her own mother for causing the ultimate separation between them through the mother's abandonment. We can also see that Mary needs this maternal attachment to another woman, and so she becomes close to her aunt.

Robinson's Ruthie and Lucille also experience a too sudden separation initiated by their mother. Helen abandons her two young daughters by committing suicide. Lucille and especially Ruthie, like the other girls discussed in this section whose mothers are absent, seem to need to attach themselves to another woman or mother figure. Lucille's and Ruthie's need to see their aunt as a mother to themselves, or even as Helen herself, is evident even before the aunt's actual arrival:

> She would be our mother's age, and might amaze us with her resemblance to our mother. She would have grown up with our mother in this very house, and in the care of our grandmother...We began to hope, if unawares, that a substantial restitution was about to be made (41-42).

The girls also begin to confuse their aunt Sylvie with their mother physically. Strangely, neither girl can remember

what their mother actually looked like, but both hope that Sylvie will resemble her (43). In fact, in their first conversation alone with Sylvie the first questions the sisters ask are about their mother (50). Ruthie and Lucille need their aunt to replace their mother so desperately that they are afraid that she, too, will disappear, leaving them behind (55-56). As Ruthie explains, "Lucille and I still doubted that Sylvie would stay. She resembled our mother..." (68). Nevertheless, the similarities between their mother, Helen, and their aunt, Sylvie, continually fascinate the girls:

> Sylvie's head falls to the side and we see the blades of my mother's shoulders and the round bones at the top of her spine. Helen is the woman in the mirror, the woman in the dream, the woman remembered...and her nerves guide the blind fingers that touch into place all the falling strands of Sylvie's hair (132).

This confusion of their mother's and Sylvie's actions and looks continues throughout the novel with Ruthie. Lucille, however, when faced with Sylvie's unconventional behavior, runs away to move in with the home economics teacher (140). Thus, while Lucille finally claims another, more socially accepted woman as her mother figure, Ruthie waits for Sylvie to claim her as daughter (106).

When this act of bonding does not occur, Ruthie still seems almost able to convince herself that her aunt is

actually her mother returned from the dead for her daughters: "I walked after Sylvie down the shore, all at peace, and at ease, and I thought, We are the same. She could as well be my mother. I crouched and slept in her very shape like an unborn child" (145). Ruthie uses this same birth imagery later in another description of Sylvie and herself in a boat: "I slept between Sylvie's feet, and under the reach of her arms..." (163). At the time of the first scene, Ruthie is still able to differentiate between the two women, but later, in the boat, this distinction becomes blurred:

> ...the faceless shape in front of me could as well be Helen herself as Sylvie. I spoke to her by the name Sylvie, and she did not answer. Then how was one to know? And if she were Helen in my sight, how could she not be Helen in fact? "Sylvie!" I said. She did not reply..."Helen," I whispered, but she did not reply" (166-67).

It would seem, then, that great conflict occurs between the girls and their mothers at this point in the daughters' lives whether the mothers are actually physically present or not. Those mothers who initiate separation with their daughters leave the daughters feeling unloved, even though the daughters themselves may desire the separation. In the novels in which the separation from the mother occurs too early or too abruptly, there is evidence of psychological

damage. This psychological damage manifests itself in the daughters' unusually strong needs for inclusion. Most often these needs lead the girls on desperate searches for other mother figures from whom, supposedly, they can separate at their own speed. Therefore, as these novels indicate, while the mother-daughter relationship may be an especially troubled one at this time, it is equally a crucial one.

Chapter II: Female Friendships

While girls' relationships with their mothers become more problematic during pre-adolescence, relationships with their peers become more crucial. As Gilligan explains, "girls are encouraged to remain fluid and ambiguous between their self-definition and external confirmation in self-definition; girls are oriented toward an external audience for a sense of self, for making judgments, and for signs that will confirm self-esteem." By comparison, boys are "prepared ...to take [the] role of the generalized other and to... deny involvement and connection" to others (165). Jerome Kagan agrees, adding that this desire for acceptance leads girls to conformity to the female role (152). Thus, when girls begin to separate from their mothers, they usually become emotionally attached to a friend who supplies these external cues. That is, girls typically transfer the intensity of their emotions away from their mothers to female friends (Timothy 235). For these girls, then, becoming independent is joined with being interdependent (Gilligan 49). As DeMarr and Bakerman have pointed out, friendships signal that one has been chosen as an individual rather than just accepted by virtue of birth (57).

Nearly all of the girls in this study experience some sort of close relationship with another young girl. For

many of the girls, these are self-affirming relationships in which they find the complete acceptance they once experienced with their mothers. For others, these relationships are destructive both psychologically and physically. In both cases, however, the relationships are so intense that there is almost complete identification between the two girls. Indeed, the relationships seem to resemble adult romantic relationships. These relationships, therefore, can be divided into two groups: "good girl" love and "bad girl" love.

"Good girl" love relationships involve friends of the girl whom the mother not only knows but of whom she also approves.[1] Kincaid's Annie John experiences this sort of relationship with her friend Gwen. The intensity of this relationship and how it replaces the relationship with the mother are verified by Annie John's description of her affection for Gwen: "Poor Gwen! When I first heard from her that she was one of ten children, right on the spot I told her that I would love only her, since her mother already had

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[1]At first glance, the girls in Ellen Foster and The Bluest Eye appear to be involved in intense friendships. These friendships, however, are intensified and may seem closer than they actually are because these are the only friendships in which these girls are involved. In fact, they are the only positive relationships they experience at all. Claudia in The Bluest Eye, though, does perform the ultimate act of friendship for Pecola: she tells Pecola's story for her because Pecola is unable to do so herself.

so many other people to love" (74). Annie John's and Gwen's special relationship is also evident to the other girls who refer to them as "The Little Lovebirds" (60). This relationship provides Annie John with a way to come to terms with the changes in her life as the two girls are able to "[tell] each other things we had judged most private and secret: things we had overheard our parents say, dreams we had had the night before, the things we were really afraid of..." (48). Thus, Gwen replaces Annie John's mother as her confidante. The one thing which Annie John seems unable to talk to Gwen about, however, is her relationship with her mother and its dramatic change (48). Once Annie John's relationship with Gwen ends, her problems with her mother again become the most important force in her life. Thus, the relationship with Gwen provides Annie John not with an end to this battle with her mother but merely with a reprieve.

Morrison's Sula and Nel also receive help from one another in separating from their mothers, and in their cases these are successful, permanent separations. Although Sula and Nel had known each other for five years before their friendship, they were not initially allowed to play together because Nel's mother considers Sula's mother "sooty." It is only after Nel's first separation from her mother that she is strong enough as an individual to go against her

mother's wishes. Initially, then, the relationship with Sula is an act of rebellion against her mother, although almost immediately Nel's mother accepts Sula (29). Nel continues this rebellion, however, as long as she is under Sula's influence.

Nel, too, aids Sula in her separation from her mother. It is Nel's voice calling to her that Sula hears after she has overheard her mother's horrifying proclamation of separateness. Thus, Nel saves Sula by "pulling her away" (57) from the anguish of her relationship with her mother. While Nel desires a separation from her mother but is not strong enough to initiate one without Sula's help, Sula is practically separated from her mother already but cannot psychologically deal with the knowledge of being so. Sula and Nel, then, as in most other ways, function as opposites to one another.

Both Sula's and Nel's imagined and actual meetings are symbolic of their entire relationship. Morrison describes Sula and Nel as extremely lonely little girls who live in a dream world inhabited by "a presence, a someone, who, quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream" (51). Nel's dream, however, is of waiting for a prince, while Sula dreams of galloping on a horse searching for something (51-52). Sula and Nel, then, although their dreams are different, meet in fantasy long before they do so in

reality. Each of the girls has wanted another person so badly, it seems that they almost dream each other into existence. Alienated from their mothers, the girls become close soon after their actual meeting. They become so close that they each seem to provide some missing element in the other's personality, and so together form one complete person (52-53). Nel is aggressive only with Sula's backing (83), while Sula is consistent only in her love and defense of Nel. In fact, her desire to defend Nel is so great that she willingly mutilates herself to do so (53-55). It is significant, then, that their first real meeting occurs through the ropes of a swing which form a sort of mirror frame between them (51).

This merging of identities is also evident to other people. Sula's grandmother pronounces them "Just alike. Both of you. Never was no difference between you" (169). Indeed, Sula and Nel fuse together so completely that they are able to understand each other without speaking. For instance, their confidence in one another is so great that although they are concerned with securing someone else's promise not to tell their greatest secret (regarding the death of a playmate), they never verbally have to make that promise to one another (61-66). As Karen Stein points out, although the relationship between Sula and Nel changes, it

"remains the deepest attachment and most profound influence on both of their lives" (147).

Like Sula and Nel, Erdrich's Mary and Celestine seem to have an instant understanding between them (71). In fact, they even seem to look alike when they are together and give the impression to other people that they are old friends even at their first meeting:

> Mary and Celestine smiled into each other's eyes. I could see that it was like two people meeting in a crowd, who knew each other from a long time before. And what was also odd, they looked suddenly alike. It was only when they were together. You'd never notice it when they weren't (32).

Mary and Celestine also provide support for one another after the loss of their mothers. Celestine's parents have died sometime before the beginning of the novel. Although Mary's mother is still alive, Mary claims that she is dead. Although Celestine knows the truth about Mary's mother, she accepts what Mary tells her without question. Thus, through the loss of and separation from their parents, the girls find a common bond.

Kingston's narrator and her sister are joined by their mutual difficulties in dealing with their parents' Chinese attitudes and customs as well as with the American world in which they live. Kingston refers to her sister as "my

almost-twin, the person most like me in all the world" (190).

Likewise, Robinson's Ruthie feels so close to her sister that she is able to "speak of Lucille and myself almost as a single consciousness" (98). This is evident throughout the book as the girls repeatedly act as one person. For instance, Ruthie seems to think it only natural to say, "We stayed awake the whole night because Lucille was afraid of her dreams" (32). When Lucille decides to do something against the rules, Ruthie automatically goes along with her, remarking only that the idea of both of them being in trouble "seemed oddly familiar and comfortable" (77-78).

Ruthie and Lucille begin to grow apart only because Lucille is unable to accept their aunt Sylvie as a mother figure. As Lucille becomes more discontented, a violent episode erupts between the two girls. Although the girls obviously care for one another after this point, their relationship is never thereafter quite the same. Very soon after this fight Lucille tells Ruthie that they each need other friends (130). While Lucille develops these friendships with other people to the point of moving in with the home economics teacher, Ruthie becomes closer to her unconventional aunt Sylvie. There is still, however, a sense of connection between the two sisters. At the end of the novel, Ruthie believes that even though she and her aunt

have left the town and are presumed to be dead, Lucille will constantly feel their presence: "No one watching this woman...could know how her thoughts are thronged by our absence, or know how she does not watch, does not listen, does not wait, does not hope, and always for me and Sylvie" (219). Thus, the novel ends with this affirmation of Ruthie and Lucille's relationship and family ties.

Although Ruthie and Lucille are able to overcome the violent episode in their relationship and be later united spiritually, if not physically, this episode is quite significant. The fight begins when Ruthie finds dried flowers in their grandfather's dictionary. She is fascinated and wants to preserve them in another book. Lucille is adamant, however, that they should be thrown away. A physical fight ensues when Lucille throws the flowers into the fire and Ruthie hits her with the dictionary (126-27). This scene is symbolic of how the attitudes of the sisters are changing. Lucille wants no part of anything which could be said to be impractical. She includes in this sense of the impractical anything which is merely sentimental and all connections to her own past. This is also why she has no patience with Sylvie. Ruthie, by comparison, is much more tolerant of other ideas and ways of life. She values and clings to her family's history as what makes her unique. Lucille strikes out at her sister

Ruthie's unconventional streak because she fears the same characteristic is in herself. Lucille also spends the entire summer before she leaves home preparing herself for what she sees as a normal life (132). It is not surprising, then, that she lashes out so viciously when she sees impracticality or radical difference in the person who is closest to her.

This need to hurt another person who reflects some hated characteristic of oneself is also a major element in the "bad girl" love relationships. These relationships are usually considered unacceptable by parents, or would be considered so if they were not kept secret. Many of the girls engaged in this kind of sadistic relationship are also simultaneously involved in "good girl" love relationships.

Kingston's narrator, for instance, while maintaining a good relationship with her sister, is cruel to another young girl. She treats the girl quite savagely simply because the girl reminds her of herself: "I hated her when she was the last chosen for her team and I, the last chosen for my team" (173). Most of all, Kingston's narrator hates herself and the girl for their inability to talk when and how they are supposed to talk. She informs the other child, "I am going to make you talk, you sissy girl" (175). In the description of the violence that ensues, Kingston's narrator's confusion of the other girl with herself is especially evident:

"Why won't you talk?" I started to cry..."I'm doing this for your own good," I said..."Talk. Please talk"...Her sobs and my sobs were bouncing wildly off the tile, sometimes together, sometimes alternating (175-81).

While Kingston's narrator cannot acknowledge why she hates this girl so much, Annie John has full understanding of her own cruelty. She admits that "sometimes, seeing my old frail self in a girl, I would be heartless and cruel" (49). She also allows herself to be treated cruelly by another young girl: "She pinched hard, picking up pieces of my almost nonexistent flesh and twisting it around" (63). Annie John sees this girl as being better than herself or, at least, as having a better life (58). Instead of hating the girl who inflicts this pain, Annie John is strangely drawn to her as other girls have been drawn to Annie John herself, yet she comes to understand her attraction in some way: "I stopped wondering why all the girls whom I had mistreated and abandoned followed me around with looks of love and adoration on their faces" (63).

In Atwood's Cat's Eye, although Elaine wants to escape the cruelty, she is also irresistibly drawn to Cordelia even though Cordelia "punishes" Elaine continually. As in Sula, the first meeting of the two girls establishes the pattern

for the rest of their relationship. Cordelia is seen by Elaine through a car window. Cordelia is standing with the other girls, and Elaine is cut off from them. When Cordelia speaks to Elaine, it is not as one child speaking to another. Rather, Cordelia assumes an adult, motherly persona from the very beginning by introducing herself and offering to shake hands. She immediately follows this by saying something to Elaine which stops just short of being an insult but is obviously meant to be humiliating:

> "There's dog poop on your shoe," Cordelia says.
>
> I look down. "It's only a rotten apple."
>
> "It's the same color though, isn't it?" Cordelia says (75).

Cordelia then continues by saying something that at least appears to be friendly, something that successfully draws Elaine into a relationship:

> "Not the hard kind, the soft squooshy kind, like peanut butter." This time her voice is confiding, as if she's talking about something intimate that only she and I know about and agree on. She creates a circle of two, takes me in (75).

Atwood's dialogue is masterful here. Not only does Cordelia "take in" Elaine in the sense of intimacy but also in the sense of fooling her, making her believe they will be friends.

Elaine, as Sula and Nel have done, wishes for a girl friend long before she meets Cordelia (29). Since Elaine's family has always moved so much, Elaine has never before had an opportunity to have girl friends. This may be at least part of the reason that Elaine's belief in her friendship with Cordelia never falters no matter how cruel Cordelia is to her: "'You didn't know what a cold wave is?' she says, delighted...'You've never seen a coat tree?'--she says I am her best friend" (55).

Nevertheless, Cordelia also continually punishes Elaine. In some way, however, Cordelia usually manages to make Elaine believe that she and the other girls are being helpful by pointing out Elaine's faults, by teaching her about this women's world of "cold waves" and "twin sets." Elaine keeps repeating to herself, trying to comprehend, what Cordelia and the other girls have obviously told her: "All of this is for my own good, because they are my best friends and they want to help me improve" (122). Obviously, then, these girls have taken over from their mothers in insuring that they themselves and their friends will fit into the mold of proper feminine behavior. It is, in fact, only from her friends that Elaine learns about the female role:

> Their voices are wheedling and false; I can tell they don't mean it, each one thinks her own lady on her own

> page is good. But it's the thing you have to say, so I begin to say it too...I don't have to think about whether I've done these things well, as well as a boy. All I have to do is sit on the floor and cut frying pans out of the Eaton's Catalogue with embroidery scissors, and say I've done it badly...I find this game tiring...(57).

As Mary Anne Ferguson has pointed out, women who rebel against or do not fit into the female role "are perceived as unnatural and pay the price of unhappiness, if not madness or death" (59). Not surprisingly, then, when Elaine fails in this female role playing, the other girls inflict extreme punishment. Since Elaine does not fully understand the female role she is supposed to play, she never fully understands what the other girls expect of her. This leads to both psychological and emotional problems for Elaine. Cordelia continually asks Elaine "what she has to say for herself." Elaine comes to associate herself with the only answer she has: "Nothing" (42, 211). This is a self-association she seems to retain for the rest of her life.

Despite her attachment to Cordelia, Elaine is also obviously afraid of her, and with good reason (164, 198). Cordelia and the other girls inflict grotesque physical punishments on and display intense cruelty toward Elaine. In one incident, for instance, they bury Elaine in a large

hole and pretend she is dead (112). At another time, they throw her hat off of a bridge and leave while she is retrieving it. Elaine then falls through the thin ice under the bridge and narrowly escapes freezing to death (198-201). Although after this incident Elaine comes to the realization that these girls are not really friends of hers, she still feels some need to keep the secret about what really happened on the bridge (205).

Elaine avoids the other girls for some time after this incident but then suddenly returns to them, using against Cordelia the "mean mouth" she has acquired (248, 260). Elaine, then, effectively changes places with Cordelia. It is also at this point that Elaine seems to begin having trouble distinguishing herself from Cordelia:

> Cordelia is afraid of me, in this picture.
>
> I am afraid of Cordelia.
>
> I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia. I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when (239).

This merging of their identities seems to haunt Elaine far into her adult life (7), as indeed Cordelia herself does.

Gilligan discovered in her study that "Adolescent girls invoke images of warfare and talk in the language of warfare or about winning and losing when they describe the inner workings of explosive relationships" (22). The lives

of fictional pre-adolescent girls obviously support this assertion. One of the reasons for this violence may be competition. In Cat's Eye Elaine counts herself especially lucky when she gets an opportunity to be alone with her friend Grace. For instance, she tells us that "Grace is still the desirable one, the one we all want" (100).

This element is also central in Erdrich's The Beet Queen. Mary's and Sita's entire relationship seems to be based on competition. Sita is the only person who feels sympathy for Mary's mother, Adelaide, when she abandons her three children. In fact, Sita believes that Mary ran away from home because she did not appreciate her mother and that Mary was not abandoned at all (28). Her anger at Mary about this situation incites her to great cruelty. The first thing that we hear Sita say to Mary is meant to torment her about her mother's and brother's disappearances:

> "Where's Auntie Adelaide?" she asked.
>
> I did not answer.
>
> "Where's Auntie Adelaide?" she said, again, in a singsong furious voice. "How come you're here? Where'd she go? Where's Karl?"
>
> "I don't know."
>
> I suppose I thought the misery of my answer would quiet Sita, but that was before I knew her.
>
> "How come she left you? Where's Karl?" (18-19).

The story of their first encounter is also related by Sita herself. This view only reinforces our opinion of her as a spoiled brat. Sita is apparently upset because she loved her Aunt Adelaide. In fact, Sita is more like her aunt than she is her own mother, and the same is true of Mary. According to Sita, no one else is able to appreciate Adelaide's style. Sita is also upset about having to share her room and outgrown clothing with Mary (27-28).

The thing that makes Sita the angriest, however, is the loss of her friend Celestine to Mary (34). Sita is desperate when she begins to see what is happening and uses her developing body (the one thing she claims Mary does not have) as a way to try to win Celestine back. (This is one of the many ways in which Sita does actually remind us of her Aunt Adelaide. It is her body which Adelaide used to support herself and her children as a kept woman.) Sita's action has the opposite effect, however, and Celestine returns to Mary. Years later Sita is still angry over what she sees as a betrayal (288).

It is not until the end of the novel that we learn how close Sita and Celestine actually were before Mary's arrival. Celestine describes how she and Sita used to fight and make up, and there is something oddly sexual about these scenes (265). The details Celestine is able to give about Sita's habits--even to the details of her bath (270, 273)--

begin to clarify, if not justify, Sita's seemingly outrageous earlier behavior.

Mary and Sita also compete for the attention of Celestine's brother, Russell, as well as that of Celestine herself (32). Sita, in some small way, eventually wins this competition, although she does not actually want Russell. Throughout their conflicts over others, Mary and Sita never come to like one another but only grow in tolerance of one another (66). Sita's cruel behavior toward Mary, then, is sparked almost entirely by jealousy and competition.

Thus, all of the young girls in the novels examined in this study experience some sort of close relationship with other young girls during this time of pre-adolescence. These relationships can be seen as one girl's merging with another individual in order to replace the relationship with the mother from which she is trying to escape. Many of these relationships are positive and caring and help the girls to form stronger images of themselves as individuals. In these cases the girls seem to have greater success in forming their own individual roles in life. Other relationships, however, are highly detrimental to this sense of self. In these relationships the girls, in attacking or being attacked by another girl with similar "weaknesses," seem to direct or be directed by their peers into the traditional female role, and are allowed no individuality.

Whether positive or negative, the effects of these relationships seem to remain with the girls far into their adult lives.

Chapter III: Relationships With the Self

As the girls in the novels of this study approach puberty, most of them experience dramatic emotional, psychological, and physical changes. While most of these changes are natural occurrences along the path to womanhood, the one most commonly appearing in the novels would seem, at first glance, to be abnormal. That is, many of the girls in these novels experience sudden illnesses which can be neither explained nor cured by doctors. These illnesses usually occur while or shortly after the girls experience a dramatic confrontation with a significant female in their lives. The illness, then, provides a way for the girls to escape from this conflict by regressing to a more child-like state. The prevalence of such illnesses in novels dealing with female pre-adolescence, as well as the way the girls use these illnesses to escape conflict, leads this reader to believe that they are not, strictly, abnormal occurrences. Despite the explanations provided by critics of the individual novels, the illnesses seem to be common physical manifestations of emotional or psychological problems. For the girls in the novels included in this study, illness offers a longed-for reprieve from emotional battles with other women.

Kincaid's Annie John experiences illness after a confrontation with her mother in which Annie John acknowledges their new equality in several ways. First, she lashes out at her mother in a way she has never done before. Annie John's mother is angry at what she sees as Annie John's unladylike behavior: "The word 'slut'...was repeated over and over...As if to save myself, I turned to her and said, 'Well...like mother like daughter'" (102). Two pages later, Annie John tells us how much she and her mother are physically alike. These acknowledgments of their sameness, then, are intertwined with thoughts of separation. When Annie John's mother makes the pronouncement that "'Until this moment, in my whole life I knew without a doubt that, without any exception, I loved you best," she cuts the final emotional tie between herself and her daughter (103). From this time on, Annie John sees her mother as a "big and solid shadow" (107) and begins to make plans to leave home, plans which are, ironically, almost identical to those her mother had made as a girl.

Once this final emotional separation has occurred, Annie John almost immediately becomes ill. The battle, as well as the separation, is instantly forgotten by both mother and daughter, and their relationship falls into its old pattern of closeness as Annie John's mother cares for her. Although Annie John's sickness lasts for three and a

half months, no explanation can be found for it either by the medical doctor or by an obeah woman. Instead, Annie John tells us that "one day, just as mysteriously as my sickness came, so it left" (126). When the sickness ends, so do the friendly feelings between mother and daughter. Annie John disguises the animosity she once again feels for her mother (128), and the two seem to make a truce until Annie John does actually leave home. As Donna Perry expresses it, the mysterious illness "corresponds to the death of her child self" (251). That is, after her illness Annie John enters the adult world and consequently learns to deal with her feelings for her mother in an adult, yet resentful way.

Kingston's narrator also experiences what she calls a "mysterious illness" lasting for eighteen months. During this time Kingston's narrator is cared for entirely by her family and is allowed no outside visitors. Kingston's narrator's illness seems to be brought on not by her turbulent relationship with her mother but by the terrific conflict she has with another Chinese girl, which conflict was discussed in Chapter II. In fact, the narrator herself believes her illness to be punishment for the pain she inflicted upon the other child. Although it is possible that the conflict between Kingston's narrator and her mother may have also contributed to this illness, it is unlikely

since the illness occurs immediately after the incident with the other child. It is also the mother's dominance which cures Kingston's narrator. When her mother says,"'You're ready to get up today. It's time to get up and go to school" (182), Kingston's narrator simply does so. It seems unlikely, then, that the mother's abrupt manner could be both the cause of and the cure for the illness.

Once at school again, Kingston's narrator's attention focuses briefly on the Chinese girl whom she tortured. This time, however, she merely observes that the girl is still the same as she was before the torture incident (182). For Kingston's narrator, then, the illness seems to occur because she cannot deal with the knowledge of the pain she has inflicted upon the other girl. The illness serves both as a punishment and as a means of temporarily removing the narrator from the company of the other little girl. As Veronica Wang notes, however, Kingston's narrator "in her solitude...come[s] to terms with...herself" (30), for Kingston's narrator initially attacked the little girl because she is so much like the hated part of herself. Like Annie John, Kingston's narrator seems to learn a more adult way of handling conflict during the time of her illness.

This is not true for Atwood's Elaine, however. Elaine seems to emerge from her illness with only the knowledge that illness can be used as an escape. For Elaine, then,

the only way to deter conflict is to avoid it completely. Elaine suffers several small illnesses before the more serious final one. The first of these begins during the middle of a confrontation with her friend Cordelia and two other girls (146). After this illness Elaine simply tells us: "I begin to be sick more often...sometimes I'm allowed to stay home. On these days I feel relief, as if I've been running for a long time and have reached a place where I can rest, not forever but for a while" (147). Elaine's sickness, like Kingston's narrator's, keeps her physically away from her friends.

Elaine's final illness, however, almost separates Elaine from her friends permanently. Cordelia and two other girls throw Elaine's hat off of a bridge and leave at some point while she is retrieving it. Elaine then falls through the thin ice under the bridge and narrowly escapes freezing to death (198-201). Although her later illness does have a physical explanation, in some way it seems the culmination of the earlier unexplained illnesses. It is after this final illness that Elaine, like Annie John and Kingston's narrator, deals with the conflict in her life in some way. Jacques LeClaire proclaims that "After a symbolical death of two days in bed she emerges a changed person, knowing that she no longer needs her friends" (77). While this is true to some extent, Elaine does not fully come to terms with the

conflict she has had with her friends. Instead, she buries the conflict and simply avoids the girls for a time. Further, when Elaine does finally return to the girls, it is on very different terms. As was discussed in Chapter II, it is at this point that Elaine and Cordelia seem to change places. That is, Cordelia becomes more passive, and Elaine uses her "mean mouth" against her (248, 260). Therefore, while Elaine's illness does change her relationship with her friends, that relationship changes only insofar as Elaine avoids the conflict instead of dealing directly with it. In the second stage of their relationship, then, it is to be expected that the conflict still exists. Since this conflict is never solved, its memory haunts Elaine well into her adult life.

Elaine also uses another method of avoiding conflict with her friends. She teaches herself to faint in order to escape. She tells us:

> There's a way out of places you want to leave, but can't. Fainting is like stepping sideways, out of your own body, out of time or into another time. When you wake up it's later. Time has gone on without you...Now I can do it almost whenever I want to (182-84).

Not only does fainting remove Elaine from difficult situations, it also provides her with sympathy from her friends. Thus, she can transform her friends' scorn into

pity simply by "stepping sideways." That is, she moves from a traumatic situation to one in which she can rest and be cared for by her tormentors.

Morrison's Pecola has a similar experience. When her parents fight, Pecola lies in her bed wondering why no one loves her. Much as Elaine does by fainting, Pecola tries to make herself disappear by inducing herself into a trance-like state:

> "Please, God," she whispered into the palm of her hand. "Please make me disappear." She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away...Her fingers went...then her arms...Her feet now...The legs all at once...Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard too...Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left (39).

Pecola is unable to make her eyes disappear because they are the essence of who she is. Pecola believes that it is because of her eyes, because they are not beautiful and blue, that she is not loved. Ironically, Pecola's attempts at escape are always foiled, then, by the very thing which makes her life unbearable to her. Thus, Pecola's effort to escape only reinforces her negative opinions of herself.

Many of these negative opinions are brought about by Pecola's ignorance of life and in particular of her own

body. For instance, when Pecola begins to menstruate, she is filled with terror:

> Suddenly Pecola bolted straight up, her eyes wide with terror. A whinnying sound came from her mouth...A brownish-red stain discolored the back of her dress. She kept whinnying, standing with her legs far apart.
>
> Frieda said, "Oh. Lordy! I know. I know what that is!"
>
> "What?" Pecola's fingers went to her mouth.
>
> "That's ministratin'."
>
> "What's that?"
>
> "You know."
>
> "Am I going to die?" she asked.
>
> "Nooooo. You won't die. It just means you can have a baby!"
>
> "What?"

Just as Pecola does not understand that it is impossible for her to obtain blue eyes, she also does not understand what her body is actually capable of doing.

Menstruation, however, is one of the natural changes that the girls experience. It marks their emergence into adulthood, and so brings inclusion for many of the girls. It does so, in fact, for Pecola. This is evident in the other girls' response to Pecola's first menstruation:

> That night, in bed, the three of us lay still. We were

full of awe and respect for Pecola. Lying next to a real person who was really ministratin' was somehow sacred. She was different from us now---grown-up-like (28).

This new acceptance into the world of women is particularly obvious with Atwood's Elaine. Elaine moves from not believing in menstruation and dreading maturity (97) to proud acceptance of it:

> I have grown. Specifically, I've grown breasts. I have periods now, like normal girls; I too am among the knowing, I too can sit out vollyball games and go to the nurse's for aspirin and waddle along the halls with a pad like a flattened rabbit tail wadded between my legs, sopping with liver-colored blood. There are satisfactions in this (240).

The satisfactions Elaine speaks of here are obviously the satisfactions of inclusion.

Annie John and Kingston's narrator both seem, by comparison, to experience this transition while receiving slightly less sympathy from other adult women than they had anticipated. Annie John tells us that:

> the first day I started to menstruate, I felt strange in a new way...my mother...brushed aside my complaints and said that it was all to be expected and I would soon get used to everything (51).

Kingston's narrator is simply told that the bleeding is a natural bodily function and that she should not let it interrupt her work (30-31).

The girls' concepts of menstruation and their reactions to it quite closely parallel their relationships to their mothers at this time. Pecola is without any knowledge of menstruation as she is without any attention and affection from her mother. Annie John and Kingston's narrator seem not to be surprised by their menstruation; rather, they miss the attention of their mothers in this aspect of their lives as they do in other aspects. Elaine seems also to make the easiest transition into the world of women in this manner as she does in nearly all others. Her close yet independent relationship with her mother seems to have benefitted her in this respect.

As the girls approach and enter puberty, they become aware of other physical changes in themselves and in their friends. Thus, they become increasingly concerned with their appearances. Nel (or, at the least, Nel's mother) and Annie John become especially preoccupied with their broadening noses.[1] Nel's mother is constantly reminding Nel

---

[1]Nel is preoccupied with her nose because her mother wants her to look more white (as both Pecola and her mother wish in The Bluest Eye). By comparison, Annie John is aware of the change in her nose precisely because she does not want to mature.

to "pull her nose" and has her wear a clothespin on it to bed (55). Annie John thinks of asking her father to build a set of clamps to wear to bed at night that would keep her nose from growing (27). Annie John also seems to spend a great deal of her time with her friends discussing their breasts:

> On our minds every day were our breasts and their refusal to budge out of our chests. On hearing somewhere that if a boy rubbed your breasts they would quickly swell up, I passed along this news. Since in the world we occupied...boys were banished, we had to make do with ourselves" (50).

This fascination with their developing bodies and games designed either to aid in their growth or simply to show off their bodies recur frequently in the novels in this study. While the girls do seem to be fascinated by their maturation, they also seem to be unsure that they really want it to happen. Atwood's Elaine and her friends "look surreptitiously at the breasts of women on the street, of our teachers; though not of our mothers, that would be too close for comfort" (97). These girls, too, however, participate in maturation games by "playing doctor" and examining the one girl who has begun to develop breasts (176). Further, Erdrich's Sita uses her developing breasts

to try to maintain her friendship with Celestine, as was discussed in Chapter II:

> My breasts were tender. They always hurt. But they were something that Mary didn't have. One by one, I undid the buttons of my blouse. I took it off. My shoulders felt pale and fragile, stiff as wings. I took off my undervest and cupped my breasts in my hands (35).

This flaunting of her newly developed body fails to secure friendship for Sita, however.

As the girls approach and enter puberty, they also become aware of their bodies in a sexual sense. For Annie John, her first encounter that could be termed in any way sexual is very confusing. While examining her newly changed reflection in a store window, Annie John is approached by four boys who begin to tease her. Annie John is confused about the boys' unwarranted teasing but is slightly reassured when she realizes that she knows one of them. The teasing nevertheless makes her feel ashamed in some way, so she quickly dismisses the boys and continues on her way home, meanwhile thinking over the ordeal. When Annie John arrives at home, however, her mother, who has observed the incident, is outraged over Annie John's behavior. It is at this point that the final battle between Annie John and her mother, which leads to Annie John's mysterious illness,

occurs (99-102). Thus, Annie John is confused about the boys' intentions, her own feelings, and her mother's extreme reaction.

Atwood's Elaine and her friends are more curious about sexuality than Annie John seems to be, but there is still quite a bit of confusion evident in their experience:

> Cordelia says that men have carrots between their legs. They aren't really carrots but something worse. They're covered with hair. Seeds come out the end and get into women's stomachs and grow into babies, whether you want it or not...Cordelia's unclear about how the seeds get out or what they're like...she can't say how the carrot gets in, to plant the seeds (98).

Elaine and her friends also investigate their homes for evidence of their parents' sexuality:

> Carol says she's seen a wet spot on the sheet of her mother's twin bed, in the morning, before the bed was made...Carol opens the drawer of her mother's bedside table and we peer in. There's a rubber thing like the top of a mushroom, and a tube of toothpaste that isn't toothpaste. Carol says these things are to keep you from having babies (176).

Sula and Nel are slightly more advanced in their development, but like Elaine and her friends, they have their first two sexual experiences together. These two

experiences, however, are very different. The first incident has definite sexual undertones, but the girls seem to be ignorant of them. This incident occurs while the two girls are lying together playing in the grass:

> they stroked the blades up and down, up and down. Nel found a thick twig and...pulled away its bark until it was stripped to a smooth, creamy innocence. Sula looked about and found one too. When both twigs were undressed Nel moved easily to the next stage and began tearing up rooted grass to make a bare spot of earth... Nel...soon...grew impatient and poked her twig rhythmically and intensely into the earth...(58).

While this incident leaves the girls feeling restless and agitated, they obviously do not recognize its significance.

Curiously, that same year the girls deliberately walk by a crowd of men, watching to see if there will be a reaction from them. Both girls seem hungry for this first taste of sexuality and years later remember "the inchworm smiles, the squatting haunches, the track-rail legs straddling broken chairs. The cream-colored trousers marking with a mere seam the place where the mystery curled" (50). The girls, then, not only instigate but also thoroughly enjoy this incident.

Thus, while the girls experience changes in different degrees, all of the girls in the novels included in this

study experience basically the same emotional, psychological, and physical changes as they approach womanhood. Although the girls do not understand all of the changes through which they are going, they do recognize most of them as steps toward inclusion in the world of women. These changes are so crucial to these preadolescent girls that they constitute in large part the subject of the novels.

Conclusion

As Carol Gilligan proclaims, the problems that preadolescent girls experience are primarily with other women. In fact, these are virtually the only problems of the young girls in the novels included in this study. These problems manifest themselves as problems of separating from their mothers, forming attachments to other young girls, and establishing separate identities. The underlying issue behind these problems, however, seems to be the girls' difficulties in fitting themselves to the "female role."

Annie John's mother is, as far as the reader knows, Annie John's only role model. In her mother's opinion, Annie John does not act properly in her behavior at school, playing marbles on the playground, or with the young boy she meets in town. It is obvious that Annie John, at least in the beginning, wishes to please her mother because of the great love she has for her. Annie John is unable to understand completely her mother's ideas and morals, however, because her mother never seems to explain her own beliefs. Ironically, this is the same problem that Annie John's mother seems to have experienced with her own parents. Annie John, then, like her mother, must necessarily leave her parents and country and their values, which she never fully understands

or succumbs to, in order to discover her own role in life as a woman.

Kingston's narrator, likewise, has problems fitting her mother's and society's conflicting ideas of womanhood. These problems are essentially due to the totally different cultures in which Kingston's narrator and her mother grow up. Kingston's narrator tells us "I...tried to turn myself American-feminine," yet she is always conscious of her mother's example of what is "Chinese-feminine" (11). Since there are no adult Chinese-American women after whom Kingston's narrator can model herself, she, like Annie John, must find that role for herself.

Sula and Nel are presented totally opposite pictures of the female role by their mothers. Although while growing up the girls stray slightly from their mothers' roles, ultimately they adhere to them. It is only as adults that Sula and Nel realize that their mothers' roles should not have been their own. This recognition, however, is gained at the cost of their friendship.

Sula learns that "sex [is] pleasant and frequent" (44) from her mother, who "would fuck practically anything" (43). Therefore, she cannot comprehend the conventional Nel's outrage over Sula's having sex with her (Nel's) husband. Sula believes that they can share Jude as they have shared

everything else in their lives because for Sula, as for her mother, sex does not mean commitment.

Nel, although she longs to "open [her] legs to some cowboy lean hips" (111), has been brought a long way from the Sundown House (17) by her mother. For Nel, sex is the deep connection she felt with Jude in their big bedroom (106-7). Since she cannot tolerate this betrayal by both her husband and her best friend, both relationships end: with her husband permanently, with her friend temporarily.

Both Nel and Sula realize at some point that adhering to their mothers' values costs them some part of themselves. Sula angrily declares that she does not want to marry, does not "want to make somebody else" (92). Yet later, when she meets Ajax, she discovers the desire of possession (131).

Nel accepts her mother's example completely. She fully believes that being a good wife and mother, as for her own mother, will be "the culmination of all she [has] been, thought or done in this world" (79). Although Nel follows the rules set forth by her mother, her happiness becomes marred by another, neglected aspect of her life--her oneness with Sula. It is only after Sula's death that Nel realizes what her relationship with Sula has really been:

> "Sula?" she whispered..."Sula?...All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat.

> "We was girls together," she said as though explaining something. "O Lord, Sula," she cried, "girl, girl, girlgirlgirl." It was a fine cry--loud and long--but it had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow (174).

Nel's mother's plan for her and her daughter's lives includes no provision for connection to another woman outside the family. Therefore, Nel becomes so caught up in her role as the injured wife that it takes her years to see that her true loss has been the loss of Sula. This loss occurs because both women model themselves after the pattern of female behavior exhibited by their mothers.

Pecola also tries to fit her mother's idea of femininity. For Mrs. Breedlove, femininity is associated with beauty, and her standard of beauty is adopted from the white world. Thus, Pecola's search for acceptance becomes a search for beauty until she believes that she has found the bluest eyes.

Mary, Clover, and Ellen have no adult women after whom to model themselves. Therefore, their problems are not with accepting or not accepting the female role. Rather, they must first find mother figures from whom they can learn what this role is like.

Ruthie and Lucille must also first find a mother before they can accept or reject the female role. The appearance of

their Aunt Sylvie provides them with this opportunity. Sylvie, however, has not been able or willing to conform to ideal feminine behavior. Ruthie welcomes the freedom from conventional behavior she finds with her aunt and, without realizing it, begins to model her own life after Sylvie's. Lucille, on the other hand, understands that society finds Sylvie's behavior inappropriate. Lucille so wants to fit in with this society that she aligns herself with the epitome of the female role--the home economics teacher.

Elaine, unlike the other girls in the novels included in this study, does not seem to be urged by her mother into acceptance of any particular female role. Rather, both Elaine's mother and her father seem to be extremely careful to offer Elaine the same choices and opportunities they present to her brother (228). Instead, Elaine's first idea of the female role is presented to her by her girl friends.

When Elaine is with these friends, she is totally surrounded by the idea of what a woman should and should not be. As has been discussed in Chapter II, Elaine's friends feel that they are being helpful by pointing out Elaine's ignorance of the woman's world. They are "wheedling and false" (57) with one another as they have seen their mothers be with other women. They practice self-denial and try to teach Elaine to do so too, while still maintaining control over her through manipulation.

They are also being controlled themselves by the values taught to them. For instance, when Grace takes Elaine along with her to Sunday school, they learn about the expected behavior of women. The girls sing a song which seems to be an established part of the lesson in this all-female class:

I would be true, for there are those who trust me,

I would be pure, for there are those who care,

I would be strong, for there is much to suffer,

I would be brave, for there is much to dare (104).

While these same values may also be taught to boys, they seem to be an especially important part of the education of young girls. The parents of Elaine's friends also work to fit her into the female mold throughout the novel (101,132). Elaine's problems occur primarily because she does not want to fit this mold. Instead, she allies herself with anyone and anything that is "outrageous" and "subversive" to the idea of "tidy paper ladies pasted into scrapbooks" (132-33).

As Gilligan has declared, it is at the time of preadolescence that girls are taught the patterns for female behavior. They must learn to make decisions by excluding either themselves or others, "by being a good woman or being selfish" (9). They must learn to "put aside their own needs" in favor of tending to someone else's (Hancock 188). Perhaps most importantly, they must guide their friends, and later

their own daughters, toward this same behavior in order to reconcile themselves to society's expectations for women.

Those girls and women who choose to step outside the boundaries set forth for them by this society may expect to experience not only the wrath of the society itself but especially that of its women who have accepted the confinement of the female role. Thus, at preadolescence when girls are first confronted with this role, their problems are primarily problems of connection to other women.

The fact that preadolescence is an extremely turbulent period in the lives of women is witnessed by the fact that women novelists of different cultural backgrounds repeatedly return to this subject. Thus, the novels included in this thesis, as well as the discussion of them, have a twofold purpose; they bind women together through the discussion of common experiences, and, as Kaplan demands, they link women's writing to specific sociocultural realities.

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APPENDIX

Atwood, Margaret. Cat's Eye.

This novel traces the life of a Canadian girl, Elaine, from about the age of eight through adulthood. The focus is primarily on her relationship with another young girl, Cordelia, and how this relationship continues to haunt Elaine throughout the rest of her life. At the beginning of this relationship, Cordelia is physically and psychologically abusive toward Elaine. Elaine soon, however, learns to turn this same abuse not only toward herself but also against Cordelia. By the end of their relationship, Elaine has effectively reversed their roles. Although most of the relationship is violent, there is a great deal of identification between the two girls.

Elaine's parents remain in the background during most of the novel. In one scene, however, Elaine's mother seems to have a particular understanding of what is taking place between the two girls. This understanding leads us to believe that Elaine's mother has been in a relationship very much like this herself. Elaine's mother also admits in this scene that she does not know what to do about the situation, which provides some equalization between Elaine and her mother.

Erdrich, Louise. The Beet Queen.

This novel recounts part of the early life of Mary Adare, who is eleven at the beginning of the novel. When Mary's mother abandons her, she goes to live with her aunt, uncle, and cousin Sita. There is great conflict between Mary and Sita throughout their entire lives. Some of the first instances of this involve the girls' competition over another young girl, Celestine, and her brother, Russell. Although Mary develops a close relationship with Celestine as well as with her aunt, she does seem to have a difficult time with relationships due to her mother's abandonment.

Gibbons, Kaye. Ellen Foster.

Ellen is ten at the beginning of her story, which seems to encompass approximately one year of her life. During this year Ellen must grapple with many traumatic events. Early in the novel her mother commits suicide by overdose. Ellen's father refuses to save his wife or to allow Ellen to do so. Ellen sees plainly, then, that her father killed her mother and must come to terms with what she sees as her own part in that murder.

When Ellen's father later attempts to rape her, Ellen begins to search for a new mother and intermittently lives with various relatives, mother figures, and her best friend,

Starletta. Ellen describes her relationship with Starletta as particularly close, but there is evidence that Starletta does not see the relationship in this way. Ellen does, however, move, in some degree, toward overcoming her prejudices toward Blacks through her relationship with Starletta.

Kincaid, Jamaica. Annie John.

Annie John begins her story at the age of ten and continues it well into her teens. Her relationship with her mother is of primary importance. Annie John feels such complete identification with her mother that she interprets the separation process as a rejection. Although she does not realize it at the time, Annie John repeats her mother's actions by leaving her island home in order to get away from her parents.

Annie John also has important relationships with two young girls. One of these is a "good" girl named Gwen of whom Annie John's mother approves. The other is a girl with whom Annie John's mother does not wish her to play. The relationship between Annie John and the "bad" girl encompasses some physical violence.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts.

Kingston's story is told from an adult perspective but actually begins when the character is approximately ten years old. The narrator has difficulty assimilating Chinese and American values and customs. This causes problems primarily with her mother, who adheres to the Chinese way of life. Although the narrator claims to have never had a close relationship with her mother, this is obviously not true. Many pleasant memories of her early life are related throughout the book.

The narrator experiences a lot of self-hatred as she tries to make a place for herself by combining her two cultures. She directs much of this self-hatred toward another little girl of about the same age. She does, however, have a good relationship with her younger sister to whom she seems to feel extremely close.

Morrison, Toni. The Bluest Eye.

This novel is narrated by Claudia, a nine-year-old girl. Claudia and her sister Frieda are the only friends of ten-year-old Pecola, the central character. The novel deals with Pecola's family background and her poor self-image, which is encouraged by her mother. Pecola's one wish is to look white and so to reclaim her mother's attention from the

white children for whom she cares. The climactic scene involves the rape of Pecola by her father, which act results in denial by her mother and mental breakdown in Pecola.

---. Sula.

In this novel, Morrison examines female relationships in depth. The primary focus of the novel is the friendship of Sula and Nel, who are about ten at the beginning of the story. There is such intense identification between these two young girls that they themselves, as well as others, often have trouble differentiating one from the other. This sense of identification is lost because of what Nel sees as an act of betrayal by Sula, although it is regained after Sula's death at the end of the novel.

Both girls also have difficulty in separating from their mothers, but for very different reasons. Sula is forced into a sudden, unwanted separation by her mother, while Nel desires a separation that her mother is not willing to give.

Robinson, Marilynne. Housekeeping.

This novel deals with two young sisters, Ruthie and Lucille, whose lives are filled with loss. Robinson deals with their adjustments to the suicide of their mother and the relatives who care for them thereafter. Both girls long

for their aunt Sylvie, whom they imagine will be like, and so take the place of, their mother. When Sylvie arrives, she is seen to be extremely unconventional. Ruthie becomes attached to her aunt despite this fact and at times seems to confuse her aunt with her mother. Lucille, however, conforms to society's expectations by moving in with a home economics teacher. During the early part of the novel, the girls appear to be very close, and the story ends with an affirmation of family connections.

Sanders, Dori. Clover.

Clover's story begins when she is ten, after the death of her mother some years before and the more recent loss of her father. Clover has been left in the care of her new, white stepmother whom she does not really know. The story includes many recollections by Clover of the life she had with her father and grandfather before their deaths. Clover is now faced with overcoming her racial prejudices in order to accept the mother figure she so desperately wants. She is finally able to do so by joining the two people whom she sees as mother figures, her stepmother and her aunt Everleen. Thus, she also successfully unites Black and white cultures.

VITA

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She worked for three years in restaurant management while attending Cleveland State Community College part-time. In June 1987 she entered the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and received a Bachelor of Arts degree in English in May 1990. At that time she was employed as an assistant manager for a retail linen store.

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