

"She has folded them back": Incorporation and the Maternal Imagination

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i was her
and she was me
and we were
scattered round
like light (Derricotte 20)

When I let it surround me, the embrace is
More mother than baby. How often we don't know
the difference. (Peacock 150)

When my daughter skips in front of a stranger, I am quick to say, "Excuse me," as if she were some long disobedient appendage. This makes sense to me. Her wavy hair is mine and her hands. The voice, though higher. Little hiccups, once pulsing to a rhythm inside me, strangely familiar. Yet she is not my sleep, my plans to study abroad, or a night-out. I wonder what I ever did with money before. A child is a loss of the self, as well as its extension and completion. The one great contradiction of motherhood: painful splitting and profound connection. Where mother ends and child begins seldom feels so clean. We often see this tangled, lovely space in the visual and verbal work of women artists. It is a busy darkness—a violent and tender, a shattered whole.

Mysterious images of this connection emerge in the Romantic period, but become far more pronounced in Modernism. At its most dramatic phase, it is the desperate woman/mother, robbed of her children by war or fever, who desires to fold the baby back into the confines of her body. In Postmodernism, language fuses mother (self) and child (other) into one shared sphere. Tracing the image's transformation leads us into interesting, yet unexamined, spaces of the maternal imagination. It becomes a powerful metaphor for incorporation (later introjection), and it renders a litany of diverse readings,

all plausible and intriguing: it is a desperate attempt to protect the child from a destructive world, a primal desire to clean the nest of failing offspring, a mourning illness, an expression of maternal ambivalence, and a wish to patch the postpartum self back together. No matter how the analysis develops, the metaphor accrues one significant effect: it dismantles constructions of motherhood as a void and passive passageway. In working with this metaphor, women artists often design a boundless, limitless female body, an "unnatural" body, a body that swells, ruptures, extends and recoils.

My decision to title this metaphor "incorporation" means to be precise. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok's *The Shell and The Kernel* define incorporation as the instant process through which the ego consumes an object of love and loss. No longer distinguished, the object lost exists deep within the patient's body and sense of self. The ego's sole dependence on the object lost then expels all desire and drive. Hence, the libido, having no external outlet, draws inward, spurning chaos and pain (113-114). I am intrigued by their language in describing the occasion of incorporation. It is a "secret magic," a "fantasmic mechanism," like "hallucinatory fulfillments" (113). "It is the first instrument of deception," the "vocabulary of dreams" (114). This all implies creative and imaginative faculties, which is why we may experience the incorporation process most profoundly in art and poetry.

The metaphor has roots in Romantic poetry, and this origin provides us with a clear illustration of dominating maternal constructions (especially in relation to lost children and grieving). From here, we may fully understand how women/mother artists' representations of birth and motherhood act in response to these constructions.

The image takes rudimentary form in William Wordsworth's "We are Seven" (1798). The connection between mother and lost children, though not intensely concentrated, serves to unify a shattered family identity.

"You run about, my little Maid,
Your limbs they are alive;
If two are in the church-yard laid,
Then ye are only five."

"Their graves are green, they may be seen,"
The little Maid replied,
"Twelve steps or more from my mother's door,
And they are side by side. (6)

This young girl often distracts from one of the poem's more interesting characters: the off-stage, silent mother. The maid mentions twice the proximity of the graves, implying that the short walk from the mother's door to the gravesite draws them all together. By the twelve steps it takes to trot, the family's identity remains intact: they are seven, instead of five, because the dead lie still beside their mother, as if she were the center: "I dwell near them with my mother" (6). Though unspeaking and unseen, the mother becomes the unifying force of the poem. Just outside her door, the children are not lost in death. And I am reminded of William Faulkner: "The past is never dead. It's not even past" (1.3). Wordsworth's work illustrates precisely that. It is an optimistic haunting, though. Innocence, unadulterated nature, and fragility are never really gone, for the silent mother represents them wholly.

We see a very similar dynamic in Friedrich Rückert's tragic poem series, *Kindertotenlieder* (Children's songs about Death, 1833-34). But, Rückert's work moves the beloved, dead children closer still into the mother's intimate sphere. Of the five pieces Gustav Mahler selected for his orchestrated song cycle in 1901, one section, "When your mother," is dedicated solely to the past child's attachment to the mother. In grief, Rückert's speaker may not see the mother, without also imagining the phantom child trailing behind her.

my first gaze does not fall upon her face,
but rather, upon the place nearer the threshold
where you dear little face would appear
when you used to trot in so happily with her,
my dear little daughter. (VII)

In fact, he does not really see the mother at all. The mother's bodily presence creates the child's image, just as she did in life once. Only now, the beautiful phantom diminishes her. As with Wordsworth, the dead child remains tied to the mother, though no longer distanced by twelve steps. Their spirits orbit and outshine her in the poet's imagination.

In the coda of Mahler's song cycle, the young spirits find shelter and tranquility in the mother's house.

In this storm, in this turbulence,
In this tumult,

They are resting as though in their mother's house
 Unafraid of tempests,
 They are at rest in their mother's house. (VIII)

It is significant that, in an attempt to reconcile this death, the speaker places the children back into the safety of the "mother's house." The mother's nurturing and moral home sits close to God. Contrarily, the father's house signifies structure, dominance, and power. This idealization of the mother's home represents time's dominant image of womanhood and maternity, alternately referred to as the "true cult of womanhood" or the "cult of motherhood." Designation of the mother as the child's one "true" nurse first gained popularity from Rousseau's essentialist novel, *Emile* (1762). "During the 19th century women were seen more and more as domestic beings and the home as the domain over which they exercised authority. Further, the nurturing, training, moral development, and early education of children were now considered a mother's responsibility" (Buettner 15).

There are two qualities in Wordsworth, Rückert, and Mahler that I wish to make clear. One, the mother's contradictory characterization: she is a centerpiece, as if to imply great significance, but she is so roughly developed. We do not experience her suffering, hear her voice, or see her face. Consequently, she becomes merely a passageway, through which the poor children were created. As they came from her, the children are still attached to her bodily presence in the poet's imagination, but this is her sole function: to bear children in life and represent them in death. Secondly, the mothers are surrounded in nostalgic or "natural" imagery. Her home protects fragile spirits from a windy storm, or her door opens onto a green pathway toward the graveyard; she steps in glowing candlelight. These poems are largely about this optimistic or hopeful location. Here, what is lost is restored in the "natural" (faceless) mother.

Women artists and poets of the 19th and 20th century have responded by stripping the mother of natural imagery; her body and her suffering become the landscape. And this body's role in childbirth and maternity: limitless. Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), a German painter, sculptor, and printmaker, recasts the mother and child theme throughout her career. In *Mother with Dead Child* (1903), Kollwitz tightens dramatically the emotional and psychological cord between. This connection is all we are allowed to see; we do not know where the two may be, or what has happened precisely.

According to Stewart Buettner, however, Kollwitz's etching (see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K%C3%A4the_Kollwitz) captures all the disgust and heartache of high infant mortality rates during the 19th and early 20th century. In suffering, the mother and child grow into one another. This is the only location we are meant to concentrate on.

The dark, deeply etched areas between the child's head and the mother's crossed legs and arms fuse together in virtual blackness. The physical distance of Morisot's early scenes has diminished so completely here that Raymond Dobard sees this Kollwitz mother as attempting to 'take back inside her the child to whom she gave birth.' (18)

There are several different approaches that we may take in processing this challenging and vivid portrayal of incorporation. First, the Kollwitz mother's desire to subsume her child's dead body may be a shame-filled (and prolonged) attempt to protect her child from danger. The "maternal instinct" nests, hovers over, and defends from predators. This image represents a mother's guilt in failing to shield her child from danger. But, we have to admit this mother's protective stance appears quite carnivorous. With her head bent deep into the child's abdomen, she crouches herself into a scavenger or beast. Her resemblance to the wild kingdom reminds us that, in failing to produce or keep healthy offspring, the mammal mother has been known to devour the runt, to bear back into her body what is doomed on the outside. In consuming her child, she hides her failure as a mother: from a sick or murdered child, to no child at all. It never happened. This manic act of mourning, as it pertains exclusively to her female patients, is further explained by Julia Kristeva's work on incorporation and "melancholic cannibalism," or fantasies of physically ingesting the object lost. They have a "passion for holding within the mouth (but vagina and anus also lend themselves to this control) the intolerable other that I crave to destroy so as to better possess it alive. Better fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested...than lost" (12). Kristeva argues that this image "manifests the anguish of losing the other through the survival of self, surely a deserted self but not separated from what still and ever nourishes it and becomes transformed into the self-which also resuscitates- through such a devouring" (12). Kristeva's theory grows even more complicated when set in the context of mother with a lost child. Devouring and

resuscitating the child, while simultaneously nourishing the mother's sense of self is a strange and heartbreaking illustration of the mother to child connection.

It must be this dark and hungry incorporation that layers Kollwitz's horrific image with such complexity. If we make a quick comparison to Picasso's mourning mother in *Guernica* (1937, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guernica_\(painting\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guernica_(painting))), it becomes clear that Picasso achieves similar distress and chaos, in part by blurring spatial location, but he may have wanted to avoid the messy birthing-backwards impression.

Though their middle-parts are confounded together in cubism, a dramatic gap exists between the two faces and mouths. Also, we notice how the child's limp feet, arms and neck hang down and away from the mother's clutch. This scene exemplifies both the intimate connection of mother and infant and its traumatic split in death. *Guernica* is about tearing apart, a modern and systematic destruction; seeing the world come to pieces, Picasso painted pieces. Unlike the Romantics, there is no pleasurable haunting, no nostalgic imagery. Kollwitz's work laments the shattered fragments as well, but is profoundly concerned with the maternal desire to draw back in what the world has destroyed, and what she has failed to protect. Her suffering gravitates toward the center- where suffering was first created, where she may stitch the selves together again. Again, Kristeva's work may help to untangle this intricate dynamic.

Yet when his, my son's, joy returns, his smile cleanses
only my eyes. But suffering, his suffering- that I feel
inside; that never remains separate or alien but embraces
me at once without a moment's respite. As if I had
brought not a child but suffering into the world and it,
suffering, refused to leave me, insisted on coming back,
on haunting me, permanently. One does not bear children
in pain, it's pain that one bears: the child is pain's
representative and once delivered moves in for good.
(138)

I am immediately drawn to Kristeva's movement and space here. Once delivered, suffering is forever established within the mother's body, as if birth left an aching cavity there. And it is this space, in trauma and emptiness, that mother and child fuse together in women's artwork. The child's pain is her own, and her pain is the child; they grow into one another. One significant difference between Kristeva and Kollwitz remains, however:

an external disaster and a death inspires Kollwitz's mother to incorporate the child back into the body, while no mortal danger oppresses Kristeva's son. There is no starvation, no bombs from which to protect her son, yet she centers pain (and the child) back inside her "for good." The incorporation metaphor here does not begin with an external and traumatic event, but stems more directly from the sheer violence of childbirth.

The richest place to explore this version of the metaphor now lies in the 20th and 21st century women's poetry on motherhood. The mother/poet imagination continues to explore this internal cave (or womb) and in moving the child back, often creates a tender and entangled impression of wholeness. Like Kristeva, some modern and postmodern women poets need not draw such profound suffering from war or pestilence. Often the trauma that conjoins mother and infant is the brutality of childbirth, the bloody splitting of self, or the endless demands of childrearing. The result of which still complicates and challenges dominating constructions of the maternal identity as passive vessel, negative space, void of individual desire or ambition. The woman poet defies this ideology with an animated passageway that bursts open entirely, extends, and retracts. In a way, the path (often cord or canal) becomes its own character, creating conflict and resolution. When this imagery weaves the child into the mother, and once we may no longer distinguish the two, it becomes impossible to view childbirth or motherhood as a gateway from nothingness. Rather, maternity becomes a powerful, messy, and intricate mending of self and other: a colorful portrayal of the boundlessness of the female imagination and the female body.

In "Mother Delivers Experiment" Leah Souffrant acknowledges how this rich complexity banishes biological or emotional essentialism, and denies easy generalizations of maternal poetry. But she also clarifies how maternal poetics are firmly grounded in the body's physical experience. The woman poet feels inspired to break tight lines and experiment with form, just when pregnancy and childbirth push the woman's bodily limits.

Women's poetry of motherhood frequently takes into account the relationship between the generative female body and the creative female poet, and much of the poetry by mother-poets about motherhood directly acknowledges the ways in which the life of a mother influences the creative process and the poetic product. The body changes, swells,

slackens, slows, and accelerates. If the body is the ground for writing, then pregnancy and childbirth must be intensely transformative. When this awareness infuses poetry acknowledging maternal experience as Subject, the impact is particularly interesting. The poetry often resists traditional generic expectations and limitations while addressing topics previously un- or mis-represented. (26)

The incorporation metaphor may be recognized as one of these "un- or mis-represented" subjects. Dismantling values of motherhood as vacant and void of individuality, the poet creates a new (nearly supernatural) body that cracks, spills, and refills again. This body not only questions scripted maternal identity, though; it becomes an examination of the body's boundaries and limitations. Of course, bringing the child back into the body is physically impossible, so the poet's imagination creates a porous, transformative body—with pain and trauma, the one stable center. And, as Souffrant suggests, the form often reflects this dynamic by its uncontained, often confounding nature.

Mina Loy is considered the first woman poet to write graphically on childbirth, and I wish to mark her work as the first to complicate the mother as a passive passageway ideal. In 1914, she published "Parturition" in *Trend* magazine. Here we may observe how form is used to portray the female body as open, limitless and branching out from pain.

I am the center
Of a circle of pain
Exceeding its boundaries in every direction (i)

Rather than placing labor pain within the female body, Loy prompts us to imagine her speaker inside it. Breaking from it as from a brittle shell. Loy's speaker also distinguishes her being as separate from pain— as existing inside and outside it. Having once breached the circle's border (when the third line exceeds far beyond the first two) Loy continues to corrode the female body's physical and psychological boundaries.

Locate an irritation	without
It is	within
	Within
It is without	
The sensitized area	
Is identical	with the extensity
Of intension (i)	

The lines swing dramatically from the left margin, to the right, and back again, unfettered by punctuation. This creates a heavy divide down the poem's center. The disjointed structure is further elaborated by the prepositions "without" "within." We are meant to pay particular attention to space here, or more precisely, we are meant to be spatially confused. Since English is a right-branching language, with meaning accumulating toward the end of a line, readers may feel comfortable with the word "without" hugging the right margin, while "within" stays close to the left. But Loy moves both words left and right, and consequently, creates meaning in a blurry oscillation. In breaking out and receding back into the "sensitized area," we see the speaker's body as occupying the poem's midsection, the center of all movement. Loy does not present us with a birth narrative in which one living being is removed from the other, and the process completes. This vision is cyclical, an ever-wavering birth. Loy threads this impression throughout the rest of the poem: "Waves the same undulation of living / Death / Life / I am knowing / All about / Unfolding" (ii). These lines, and many others, cast the speaker as a conscious passageway for creation and mortality. She paints the female body as consistently receiving and expelling forces. It would be difficult to define a single moment in which Loy creates an insurmountable barrier or an impassable boundary. And as Souffrant would add, expanding spatial images have to do with the body; "the physicality of space and time is aggressively embodied in the poetry of motherhood" (27).

Sylvia Plath's poetry on motherhood designs a female body parallel to Loy's: spidering out from the center, from pain. But Plath elaborates and complicates further, returning to the images frequently from March of 1962, to one of the last poems composed before her death. It first arises in the only dramatic piece Plath wrote, "Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices." The characters occupy "A Maternity Ward and round about" (176). Here, Plath orchestrates a polyphone of voices to examine the complexity of maternal experience and the female body. In the first voice, we find a calm and joyous new mother: "I cannot help smiling at what it is I know / Leaves and petals attend me. I am ready" (177). This mother is the least ambivalent of the three, but she remains honest about the enormous pain and effort of childbirth. Like Loy, the first voice imagines her body as a cracking circle: "I am a seed about to break" and "I am the center of an atrocity. / What pains must I be mothering?" (179, 180). These images startle

because they challenge our entire understanding of the birthing process (mother's body releases baby through a very small hole). These mothers unfold their bodies entirely. Doubtless, it is a fragile image, as Plath's first voice acknowledges: "It is a terrible thing / To be so open: it is as if my heart / Put on a face and walked into the world" (185). When breaking through the trap of physical pain, the speaker turns inside out, blooms. We imagine the body and the vagina more like a Georgia O'Keeffe painting than we do the dark funnel in Freud's castration theory. Also, such open and transformative imagery prepares us for the hungry hurt and cannibalism that haunts the second voice.

The second voice portrays a woman suffering from multiple miscarriages: "The faces have no features. / They are bald and impossible, like the faces of my children, / Those little sick ones that elude my arms" (178). Her sorrowful soliloquies express physical and emotional emptiness: "Empty schoolrooms, empty churches. O so much emptiness!.. I feel it enter me, cold, alien, like an instrument" (181-82). It is significant that the mother also views her inability to produce a healthy baby as a "deformity" (183). In guilt and bereavement, this voice reflects most heavily upon images of incorporation. She may be likened to the Kollwitz mother in this way; she dreams of melancholic cannibalism, of ingesting/hiding the failed attempts and restoring herself: "I dream of massacres. / I am a garden of black and red agonies. I drink them" (181). A fruitless garden, a war zone; the second voice desperately seeks to mask the destructive nature of her own body. To amplify this violence, the speaker's body is then bound to the earth mother.

I lose life after life. The dark earth drinks them.

She is the vampire of us all. So she supports us,
Fattens us, is kind. Her mouth is red.
I know her. I know her intimately—
Old winter-face, old barren one, old time bomb.
Men have used her meanly. She will eat them.
Eat them, eat them, eat them in the end. (181)

In binding her speaker to the earth, Plath runs the risk of essentialism, but ironically, she uses the natural imagery to illustrate her speaker's rather "unnatural" impulses. This denaturalization actually becomes a powerful critique on maternal construction. The voice and the earth mother share a desire to suck up the dead. Men do not come to dust—

born back peacefully into the land. The earth is a resentful and abused old mother. Having provided once in kindness, men shamefully disgrace her. She devours them. Blood brimming. This imagery defies motherhood and nature's presumed passivity. They aggressively reclaim what they have made and what they have failed to raise. In this way, mourning speaker and earth mother become not just funnels for life, but for death as well. The second voice is astonished and horrified by this power: "The sun is down. / I die. / I make a death" (181). Plath's imagery and bold statements reveal the female body's amazing potential for creation and destruction: splitting seed, blossom, grave.

In two of Plath's later poems, "Nick and the Candlestick" and "Edge" Plath wanders from the blood thirst, but continues to develop the incorporation metaphor, and infuses natural imagery in unnatural spaces. In "Nick and the Candlestick" the speaker is "a miner" and confined to an "earthen womb" (240) or an "Old cave of calcium" (241). This cave alienates the speaker from the world. Void of any comfort, warmth or companionship, the speaker is smothered by this strange and frightening scene: "Wrap me, raggy shawls / Cold homicides." (241). This cave, I believe, represents the physical and psychological space of suffering a mother endures after splitting from her infant. I am again reminded of Kristeva: "One does not bear children in pain, it's pain that one bears: the child is pain's representative and once delivered moves in for good." Plath inspires us to imagine an emptied womb, and when the child, with his candle, moves in a fragile joy imbeds the scene.

O love, how did you get here?
O embryo

Remembering even in sleep,
Your crossed position.
The blood blooms clean

In you, ruby.
The pain you wake is not yours. (241)

His flame, symbolizing life and creation, inspires images of his birth and his attachment to his mother's body. Though comforting, he stirs an ache; he acts as savior and source of suffering. Once there, the alienation dissipates, and it becomes "our cave." They grow complete in tenderness and pain. Plath's mother fully accomplishes and enacts the

Kollwitz mother's desperate longing.

How strange, though, to notice the speaker has not only welcomed the child back into her womb, but that she sits there herself! Initially, I am reminded of Plath's journal entries: "I want to kill myself, to escape from responsibility, to crawl back abjectly into the womb" (60). Plath had long-since attributed mortal and mythical significance to the birth canal. It is a silent space, safe from exposure, rid of uncertainty and imperfections. To crawl back, then, meant not only to die, but to further develop the sense of self, to attain a perfected self. "Nick and the Candlestick" illustrates this womb of refuge and healing. The speaker finds her source of stability and salvation "You are the one / Solid the spaces lean on" (242), and by congealing the figures here, completes and complicates her own identity.

Again using natural imagery and delicate emotion, and Plath enacts the incorporation metaphor in "Edge." Often recognized as the last poem composed before her death in the winter of 1963, "Edge" crafts a beautiful female corpse, completed or "perfected" (272). As in "Nick and the Candlestick," the speaker achieves perfection, in part, by reuniting the children with their mother.

Each dead child coiled, a white serpent,
One at each little

Pitcher of milk, now empty,
She has folded

Them back into her body as petals (272-273)

There are many moments that may remind us of the welcoming and joyful mother in "Three Women." The mother in "Edge" smiles, proud of her body's hard work, though embroidered with fragility and gentleness: "I cannot help smiling at what it is I know / Leaves and petals attend me. I am ready" Both speakers are prepared to face great and irreversible transformations. She is courageous, feminine, mortal. The petals we see with the first voice signal a colorful beginning; the mother in "Edge" folds them back in the end. Curling, coiling the children back into the mother does not harbor the desperate intensity of melancholic cannibalism. It works very much like a sigh: quiet and relieved. Similarly, the first voice swells with a life force, "I am a river of warm milk" (183), while

the empty pitcher here is a subtle cessation. She was the milk. As the mother's body opens in bearing life and pain, she now closes, dries, solidifies with her children in death, like the night flower, like the milk.

Loy and Plath create maternal bodies of boundless capacity, resourceful and transformative bodies. Their work has allowed for women/mother poets of the late 20th and 21st Century to expand upon the incorporation metaphor. In her introduction to the anthology, *Not for Mothers Only* (2007), Catherine Wagner implies that motherhood poetry today often complicates constructions of the mother as a passive passageway or a negative space. She offers Alexander Tsiaras's *From Conception to Birth* as precisely the kind of image women writers are challenging in their portrayal of childbirth, the female body, and maternal identity. In this visual representation,

The baby appears almost to zoom out of the mother downward and toward the viewer, head first; it has pink, fragile-looking skin and flesh and is trailed by the umbilical cord. The mother, however, has no flesh or skin; the off-white bones of the pelvis and lower spine are all we see of her... Nevertheless, its implication that the mother is less person than passageway is disturbing. The baby has the flesh and skin we associate with living personhood; the mother, as conduit, does not... The image aligns with other evidence that we tend to value mothers as a kind of negative space, a container that does and should empty itself out in nurturing. (xiii)

Tsiaras's vision entirely strips the mother of self, her interior being bone, baby, cord, and the dark spaces in between. When contemporary poets now color the culturally vacant contours of the maternal body, they often take a step past the incorporation metaphor, and create what would be more accurately termed as "introjection." Abraham and Torok describe introjection as "the process of including the Unconscious in the ego through objectal contacts...Introjection does not tend toward compensation, but growth. By broadening and enriching the ego, introjection seeks to introduce into it the unconscious, nameless, or repressed libido" (113). Introjection does not require a loss or a traumatic event, nor is it dependent upon the object, as incorporation is defined to be. The contemporary poets I wish to examine here do not dwell on the tragic death of a child or the violence of childbirth. Rather, they explore their swelling, "enriching" identity or ego

in relation to the child (object). These bodies are open enough for a myriad of identities to intersect within: I, mother, he, she, we. The maternal imagination and body encapsulates them all. This entangled connection between woman-mother-child defies the notion that a woman empties herself in childbirth, or contains any empty space whatever. Rather, she is ever brimming with voices, names and desires.

Jean Valentine, publishing motherhood poetry a few years after Plath's *Ariel*, illustrates the self's "growth" most remarkably in "At the Door." Here the speaker's sense of identity swells and floods when seeing her daughter under round lamplight. She is mother, though she is still "I." Then the, "red wellspring of I" (6). This internal red river, surging upward in the speaker's sense of self, creates animal urges inside her, a "Chimpanzee of longing" (6). The "chimpanzee" reference may remind us of Kollwitz's primal mother- crouching desperately over an innocent light. Valentine's speaker imagines her body stretching and expanding over her daughter and the light: "hold your long haunches / wide open: be / ungodly I" (7). Much of Valentine's imagery assumes incorporation; scattering out, wrapping in, and consuming, the speaker envelops the entire scene. In opening and receiving the child back into this wide, elastic body, the speaker restores to "ungodly I." But, there is nothing in the piece to suggest great heartache or suffering on the speaker's part, no violence, only this strange and hungry "longing" when she sees her daughter. She maintains *I*, but she is so much more now. As Abraham and Torok would suggest, this scene illustrates the growing (rather than compensating) process of introjection. When meditating on this object of love, this speaker stretches and sweeps over the scene, both in body and mind. Like the images of incorporation, this mother's body encompasses the entire canvas, expanding out and reeling in.

Alice Notley's "Dear Dark Continent" works in a similar fashion: the speaker's sense of self stretches infinitely.

But isn't it only I in the real
whole long universe? Alone to be
In whole long universe?

But I and this he (and he) makes ghosts of
I and all the *hes* there would be, won't be

because by now I am he, we are I, I am we. (84)

Notley's images appear in opposition. We picture a vast and empty black space, in which the speaker questions and alludes to her isolation there. Then she answers with an array of orbiting pronouns; she is not alone. Her identity is cyclical and infinite. The space remains a "dark continent" though, reminding me again of the darkness at the center of Kollwitz's piece: no distinction whatever between mother and child. In that one place, two are securely bound into one. Far unlike Kollwitz, however, there is no trace of trauma or tragedy here. Notley's speaker is not attempting to compensate or redeem: "We're not the completion of myself. / Not the completion of myself, but myself!" (84). This is not mourning or celebrating the maternal experience. Rather, it is a metaphorical illustration of introjection: an object of love propels the speaker to expand her sense of self.

With one final example, Sharon Harris's "Family Mommy" is a clever and copious catalogue of maternal identities.

dumbest **mother** is me mother is overbearing mother is watching
you mother is just another face in the crowd mother is great mother is
depressed mother is driving me crazy mother is disrespectful mother
is forcibly sedated mother is mine **mom** is survivor mom is punk
rock mom is a gearhead mom is home from the hospital mom is a
lasting tribute mom is still mom (288)

Without pause or punctuation, Harris recreates the often-frantic pace of motherhood. It is never static or stationary, but evolving in each detailed moment. "Mother" is an identity that umbrellas all other identities. Like Notley, Harris's imagination expands and embellishes the maternal self; creating a body that can absorb anything, signify everything.

Together, the incorporation and introjection metaphor denaturalize and dismantle long-established motherhood ideals. How mad the pelican mother seems, to pluck and bleed out for her babies. Breach the boundaries between your feathered breasts, to feed and fill on the inside. Mother is not empty, though no less virtuous for that.

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