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## Re-Envisioning the Mother in Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, Faulkner's *Light in August*, Welty's *The Golden Apples*, and Trethewey's *Native Guard* and Other Poems

Jill Goad

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RE-ENVISIONING THE MOTHER IN MITCHELL'S *GONE WITH THE WIND*,  
FAULKNER'S *LIGHT IN AUGUST*, WELTY'S *THE GOLDEN APPLES*, AND  
TRETHERWEY'S *NATIVE GUARD* AND OTHER POEMS

by

JILL GOAD

Under the Direction of Pearl McHaney, PhD

ABSTRACT

My dissertation will analyze mothers and maternal figures in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, William Faulkner's *Light in August*, Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples*, and Natasha Trethewey's *Native Guard* and other poems according to a feminist psychoanalytic framework that argues for the significance of Freudian castration occurring at birth instead of during a child's early years. I contend that the mother's body may be seen as a site of castration instead of a site of wholeness and plenitude; because the mother embodies traumatic separation or its possibility, the mother-child relationship is marked by lifelong ambivalence. The traumatic symbolic designation of the mother's body has the same repercussions for a relationship between

a maternal or caretaker figure and the children in her charge. My approach to analyzing the pre-Oedipal mother and the consequences of birth entails classifying the mother as a more powerful and complex figure than most current scholarly work on mothers has supposed her to be; further, my analysis of the mother's power in giving birth to selfhood and subjectivity involves contesting Freudian and Freudian-influenced theory, the prevailing psychoanalytic theory that lends the mother little agency. Though psychoanalytic theory is intended to report on the way things are, not the way things should be, theory allied with Freud misrepresents the mother as marginalized and silent. Rereading the southern mother according to feminist revisions of Freud is particularly significant, since southern culture has absorbed and normalized two roles for the middle-class, white southern woman, the belle and the lady, and one role for the black southern woman, the mammy, while often erasing or ignoring women who fall outside of these roles. Rereading the mother, then, can reconfigure her as central to culture and powerful in her creation of selfhood.

INDEX WORDS: Margaret Mitchell, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Natasha Trethewey, Mothers, Castration

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by

JILL GOAD

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2020

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May 2020

## **DEDICATION**

First and foremost, this dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Daniel Van Briesen, whose tireless and unconditional support of every aspect of my academic career has helped push me forward. I am lucky to have such an incredible person in my corner. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful parents, Ray and Brenda Goad, who have cheered me on my whole life. Their pride in my accomplishments means the world to me.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

My dissertation will analyze mothers and maternal figures in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, William Faulkner's *Light in August*, Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples*, and Natasha Trethewey's *Native Guard* and other poems according to a feminist psychoanalytic framework that argues for the significance of Freudian castration occurring at birth instead of during a child's early years. In my work, a mother is defined as a woman who has a relationship to her child: she may have given birth, raised a child, carried a child or any combination of these. I define a maternal figure as a woman who elicits a strong emotional reaction from a child who looks to her to fulfill some role traditionally embodied by the mother such as role model, confidant, or caretaker.

I contend that the mother's body may be seen as a site of castration instead of a site of wholeness and plenitude; because the mother embodies traumatic separation or its possibility, the mother-child relationship is marked by lifelong ambivalence. The traumatic symbolic designation of the mother's body has the same repercussions for a relationship between a maternal or caretaker figure and the children in her charge. My approach to analyzing the pre-Oedipal mother and the consequences of birth entails classifying the mother as a more powerful and complex figure than most current scholarly work on mothers has supposed her to be; further, my analysis of the mother's power in giving birth to selfhood and subjectivity involves contesting Freudian and Freudian-influenced theory, the prevailing psychoanalytic theory that lends the mother little agency. Pre-Oedipal refers to the period in a child's psychosexual development before the onset of the Oedipus complex that is marked by attachment to the mother. Within the Oedipus complex, however, renunciation of the mother is required in order for the child to develop; this renunciation is based on the assumption, according to Adrienne

Rich, “that the two-person mother-child relationship is by nature regressive, circular, [and] unproductive” (197). Reconfiguring castration as birth, which renders separation from the mother originary instead of secondary, dissolves psychoanalytic theory’s necessary link between the father and culture and removes the mother from her place in the margins (Sprenghether 10).

### **Mothers in Southern Literature**

Though psychoanalytic theory is intended to report on the way things are, not the way things should be, theory allied with Freud misrepresents the mother as marginalized and silent. Rereading the southern mother according to feminist revisions of Freud is particularly significant since southern culture has absorbed and normalized two roles for the middle-class, white southern woman, the belle and the lady, while often erasing or ignoring women who fall outside of these roles. In addressing the persistence of the image of the ideal southern woman, Anne Goodwyn Jones defines the belle as “flirtatious but sexually innocent, bright but not deep, beautiful as a statue or painting or porcelain but risky to touch...she entertains but does not challenge her audience” (42). Upon marrying, the belle becomes a lady; no longer flirty and chatty, she embodies morality and manners and submits to the authority of her husband, the church, and God. The lady’s job includes “satisfying her husband, raising his children, meeting the demands of the family’s social position, and sustaining the ideals of the South” (Jones 42). In 1891, Wilbur Fisk Tillett praised native southern women’s purity, neatness, and passivity, noting that their lives were complete upon becoming mothers; in 1899, Laura McAdoo defined southern mothers as women who gave themselves over completely to their children and who delighted in their subservience (Warren and Wolff 2). Nagueyalti Warren and Sally Wolff address the presence of the belle and the lady mother in southern literature while also noting the presence of the “other mother,” the stereotyped mammy (3-5). According to Patricia Hill Collins, the

mammy is faithful and obedient, loving and caring for her white “family” more than her own; although she appears to have authority in the white family, she knows her subordinate place (72-73). If we read the mother according to prevailing psychoanalytic theory, few of these limited definitions of her have changed.

Rereading the mother, then, can reconfigure her as central to culture and powerful in her creation of selfhood. Warren and Wolff acknowledge that stereotypes of the mother characterize her as chaste, passive, and nurturing, while the father is classified as “prototype, exemplar, progenitor, maker of heaven and earth, and god” (1). Both sets of stereotypes demand reappraisal of the “role of mother as life giver” (Warren and Wolff 1). Further, “in the familiar picture of the mother in southern literature,” the mother is seen as an ideal and is trapped by expectations of her as ideal (Warren and Wolff 1). As Paula Eckard argues, what many contemporary novel, short story, and poetry writers are doing and what literary critics should do is “reveal that the maternal is a powerful force that shapes human lives and communities and is a critical determinant in the development of female voice and identity” (10). Eckard acknowledges that “bastions of patriarchal power” that include religion, psychoanalysis, art, and medicine “have objectified the maternal and disregarded female subjectivity” (1). Maternal subjectivity, which includes the experiences of mothers, has largely been absent in written culture. Writers who portray the mother and writers who analyze the mother must render her more than “the terrain on which patriarchy is erected” (Rich 55). However, Eckard notes that there are four major issues that create difficulty with depicting maternal experience. Since motherhood is a patriarchal construction, women see their mothers as victims and martyrs. Feminist writings also show discomfort with the vulnerability, state of dependency, and state of being beyond reason and control that mark motherhood (Eckard 9). Additionally, feminist and non-feminist women alike

experience fear and discomfort with the female body. Finally, feminist theoretical writing is often permeated with fear of maternal power and anger at maternal powerlessness (Eckard 9). Despite feminist theorists' attempts to depict and analyze the mother, they largely fail to see her more than alternately oppressor and oppressed. The limitations on feminist theorists and theorists in general who read the mother can be due in part to the way she has historically been perceived in one of the cornerstones of patriarchal perception, psychoanalytic theory.

### **Current Scholarship on Mothers in Southern Literature**

There is a gap in scholarship about southern mothers that my work proposes to fill by considering the mother's power in relation to her pre-Oedipal role. Book-length studies of mothers in southern fiction include Eckard's *Maternal Body and Voice in Toni Morrison, Bobbie Ann Mason, and Lee Smith*, Ashley Craig Lancaster's *The Angelic Mother and the Predatory Seductress: Poor White Women in Southern Literature of the Great Depression*, and Warren and Wolff's *Southern Mothers: Fact and Fictions in Southern Women's Writing*. Additionally, women in southern literature are analyzed according to varied theoretical perspectives in texts such as Minrose Gwin's *The Feminine and Faulkner: Reading (Beyond) Sexual Difference*, Patricia Yaeger's *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990*, Monica Carol Miller's *Being Ugly: Southern Women Writers and Social Rebellion*, and Betina Entzminger's *The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and the Dark Seductress*. Countless articles and book chapters have addressed the roles of every conceivable maternal figure in southern literature. However, these texts primarily address how southern mothers adhere to or resist cultural prescriptions about appropriate female behavior or how their voices are silenced or raised. Doreen Fowler's *Faulkner: The Return of the Repressed* reads several Faulkner novels using a psychoanalytic framework, but her text stays true to Freudian and

Lacanian theory and thus sees the mother as a figure to be repudiated, a symbolic, spectral Other. Southern literature scholars have analyzed the mother according to general gender theory and according to a strict Freudian theoretical framework, but none have analyzed the mother through a feminist re-envisioning of Freud's Oedipal model. Re-envisioning Freud's Oedipal model means emphasizing the importance of the pre-Oedipal mother during the phase before the Oedipal conflict, when she is pregnant, giving birth, and taking on a complex and reciprocal role during a child's early development.

Freudian theory posits the mother as a "persistent, though suppressed presence," and Freud typically avoided referencing the pre-Oedipal mother as a powerful, present figure in his case studies, even when it was evident that her influence was integral to understanding his patients (Sprengnether 2). Instead of viewing mothers as having a role equal to fathers in childhood development, Freud consistently diminished the strength of the mother by both idealizing her and portraying her as castrated, thus allying her with passivity (Sprengnether 2). Subsequent psychoanalytic theorists who integrated Freudian theory into their conception of the mother did little to elevate her status. Since dominant schools of psychoanalytic theory are, along with Freudian theory, the predominant frameworks used by those analyzing the mother according to psychoanalysis, a new framework is required to lend the mother a voice and agency. The mother needs to be seen in terms of her power and subjectivity without being idealized or rendered a potentially consuming and castrating monster.

### **Freudian and Psychoanalytic Conceptions of the Mother**

Understanding the Freudian theory of castration in the Oedipal model is essential to understanding a feminist revision of the concept. In fact, Freudian theory contributes to our knowledge of the reasons behind theoretical limitations in scholarship focusing on mothers and

maternal theory. As Michelle Boulous Walker argues, interrogating castration reveals societal emphasis on maternal lack and paternal authority (52). Examining castration exposes the gaps in scholarship on the pre-Oedipal mother and shows the potential for further theoretical inquiry.

The castration complex is key in facilitating sexual development in Freud's "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" and "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes." In both essays, Freud shows how the castration complex is manifest in distinct ways for boys and girls, a shattering force for the former and a precursor to the Oedipus complex for the latter. Where the boy's Oedipal development, of which the castration complex is a part, is multifaceted and drawn out, marked by deferral, fear, and narcissism, the girl's Oedipal development, which seems to exist within and as a result of her castration complex, is full of gaps and nonparallel to what the boy experiences; her development is marked by immediate awareness and the desire for compensation of her lack.

To understand the function of the castration complex for either boys or girls, the system with which it is closely involved, the Oedipus complex, must be outlined. In "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex," Freud begins by noting what the Oedipus complex entails for the little boy. First, "[a] child's sexual development advances to a certain phase at which the genital organ [the penis] has already taken over the leading role." This phallic phase occurs with the Oedipus complex and is to be later followed by a latency period. Within the phallic phase, the male child is interested in his genitals and manipulates them. A caregiver, typically a woman, sees this manipulation and threatens to take away his valued part. Often, the woman will tell the boy that a man, his father or a doctor, will be responsible for removing this part, which may be the child's penis or his hand.

This castration threat will eventually but not immediately contribute to the destruction of both phallic genital organization and the Oedipus complex but not by itself. It must become part of a “complex” of fear and knowledge to attain legitimacy. The boy does not, at the outset of receiving this threat, believe that it will be carried out, even though he has previously “lost” two other valued parts of the body with the withdrawal of his mother’s breast and the demands on him to evacuate his bowels. A fresh experience is required to make the boy see the possibility of castration, which comes when the boy sees the female genitals; the castration threat is thus made more real and can be accepted when he sees the absence of a penis in another person.

Acceptance of castration ultimately ends ways of “obtaining satisfaction from the Oedipus complex.” These means of obtaining satisfaction come in two forms: active – the boy could be in the father’s place, taking on the masculine role, and have sex with the mother, which would render the mother a hindrance; or passive – the boy could take the mother’s place and be loved by the father, which would render the mother superfluous. Both means of satisfaction entail loss of the penis, so “the child’s ego turns away from the Oedipus complex.” Caught in the conflict between interest in his penis and “the libidinal cathexis of his parental objects,” the boy – or the boy’s ego -- chooses the former; narcissistic interest in the penis triumphs.

Freud depicts how this turning away from the Oedipus complex happens. First, “object-cathexes are given up and replaced by identifications”; the original love-object, the mother’s breast, has long been withdrawn, and the mother as love-object must be given up to make way for identification with the father or mother as noted above. However, the part of the process that Freud says comes next seems to rely on identification with the father, which would involve wanting to possess the mother sexually. Then, paternal authority “is introjected into the ego to form the nucleus of the super-ego, which takes over the severity of the father and perpetuates



his prohibition against incest, and so secures the ego from the return of the libidinal object-cathexis.” The father’s authority intervenes to push the boy away from the mother, for sex with the mother would equal regression to the “oceanic feeling” and lack of differentiation of infancy and prevent the child from developing. Finally, libidinal trends are “changed into impulses of affection,” which eventually leads to the latency period. What prompts this process is the boy’s ego’s need to pull away from anything that threatens castration and disempowerment.

Though the castration complex in boys eventually leads to the dissolution of their Oedipus complex, for girls, awareness of and belief in castration occurs much more quickly and forces them into the Oedipus complex. Freud argues that for a time, the girl’s clitoris behaves as a penis. In this way, the girl is a “little man.” Though the girl, too, could theoretically manipulate her genitals during this phase, Freud does not acknowledge this occurring, at least not in this essay, nor does he argue that the girl is threatened by a caregiver for her interest in her genitals.

Instead, Freud skips directly to the little girl seeing a boy’s penis for the first time; this sight makes the girl feel as though she has been shortchanged and feel that her lack is the basis for inferiority. For a while, the girl consoles herself that she will obtain a bigger appendage because she does not realize that her lack is a sex characteristic. Thinking she must have been castrated at some point, “the girl accepts castration as an accomplished fact.” If the girl is said to have a castration complex, it is one that she has always lived in and that has framed her existence; her castration complex only becomes “active,” so to speak, when the girl is aware of her lack.

To compensate for lacking a penis, the girl wants a baby. Subsequently, within the Oedipus complex, she takes the mother’s place and wants a baby as a “gift” from her father. Unlike the boy, the girl is not perceived as wanting to identify with the father in this essay. Since

her desire for a baby from her father is never fulfilled, the girl's Oedipus complex as a result of the castration complex can dissolve gradually instead of rupturing like the boy's complex does. The wishes for both a penis and a child stay cathected for the girl's later role.

In "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinctions between the Sexes," Freud returns to the idea that the boy's castration complex is based on deferral. When the boy sees the girl's genital region, awareness of its connection to castration is not immediate: the boy tries to deny what he sees or make it in line with his expectations. This sight is only important when the castration threat takes hold of him. In the future, further reactions stem from this sight – horror at mutilation or contempt for the woman.

When discussing the girl, Freud begins with the phallic phase, something he does not explicitly attribute to the little girl in "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex." The first step in her phallic phase "is not the linking-up of the masturbation with the object-cathexes of the Oedipus complex" – it is the discovery of a little boy's penis and awareness that it is superior to her organ. Penis envy is the result of this knowledge. As Freud states in summation, "She makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it." To develop normally, though, the girl must get over wanting a penis, or later in life, she may engage in odd actions. However, she may instead go through disavowal, denying her castration and believing she has a penis. The girl may then behave as though she is a man. Awareness of castration creates for the girl a sense of inferiority because her narcissism has been wounded; after realizing that lack is universal, the girl feels masculine contempt for women.

Awareness of her castration, the girl's version of a castration complex, which leads to penis-envy, is the start of a series of potential effects. Freud posits penis-envy as the cause of these sometimes lifelong effects, but this penis-envy must stem from the castration complex. For

one, penis-envy may abandon its object but remain as jealousy, particularly of the mother when the girl takes her father as a love-object and wants a baby instead of a penis. Another consequence of penis-envy is “a loosening of the girl’s relation with her mother as love-object.” The mother is held responsible for the girl’s lack; Freud explains this blame as resulting from a girl discovering her lack then becoming jealous of another child who seems to warrant more of the mother’s affection. An additional effect of penis-envy is that girls feel strongly against masturbation, not just because of parental influence. The impulse to masturbate precedes repression at puberty that eliminates much of the girl’s masculine sexuality; repression stems from the girl’s narcissistic humiliation and her knowledge that she is not equal to boys. This elimination must occur for femininity to emerge. Despite the opposition against masturbation, Freud notes that suppressing this urge completely is unsuccessful.

Though both the boy and the girl in Freud’s theory have to push away the mother and repress sexual urges, the castration complex starts the boy on the painful yet productive path to independence, while it encapsulates the girl in awareness of castration, making her progression out of the Oedipus complex more questionable. At the end of “Dissolution,” Freud sums up the differences in the castration complex when either girls or boys are involved. For boys, the castration complex destroys the Oedipus complex, while for girls, the castration complex makes the Oedipus complex possible. Destruction comes about because, for the boy, castration is a threat; castration is carried out with the girl, thus causing effects unique to her. The castration complex “inhibits and limits masculinity and encourages femininity.” Because of this, it would be ideal for the boy if the Oedipus complex did not exist; for the girl, the castration complex preceding the Oedipus complex means that she may always remain in the Oedipus complex even if she is “normal,” deal with it through repression, or experience its slow dissolution.

Ultimately, in addressing the Oedipus complex, “Freud reveals his predilection...for relegating the preoedipal period to a state that is so dim...it cannot properly be examined” (Sprengnether 120). As Sprengnether argues, Freud consistently circles the idea that birth is the first loss, that later acts by the child memorialize the lost mother, but these ideas, which threaten Oedipal masculinity, are never conclusive (121). Because subsequent psychoanalytic theorists also examine psychosexual development in terms of the Oedipal hierarchy, revisions of Freudian theory subordinate the mother to the father. Due to the natures of their theories, according to Sprengnether, they cannot both acknowledge the mother as “carnal origin” and conceive of her as a subject (9).

Jacques Lacan, a revisionist of Freud cited for rendering childhood development as linguistic rather than body-centered, treats the mother in much the same way Freudian theory does, downplaying her role until she seems corporeally nonexistent. Sprengnether points out that Lacan appears to agree that phallogentrism of culture should be disrupted, but he also classifies phallogentrism as inevitable (195). Lacan refers to the pre-Oedipal phase as the imaginary, and in this phase, mother and child exist in an “unbroken mother-child circuit,” a “blissful state of plenitude” (Fowler 7). In the imaginary, the infant is not a subject, and theoretically, the mother being undifferentiated from the infant renders her not a subject. Then, the infant progresses to the mirror phase, where he or she recognizes his or her own image and perceives it as coherent, unified, and whole in contrast to previously experiencing his or her body as fragmented. The image of unity, marking the inception of “I,” is a lie, however, and “introduce[s] a gap between the subject’s understanding of itself...and its underlying state of fluid disintegration,” rendering ego formation founded on an irreparable split (Sprengnether 184). In the mirror phase, the infant may identify with the mother to find an integrated self-image, but the mother is at once during

this phase both outside the child and not outside the child, and she is not essential to the infant's ego formation. The father must then interrupt the mother/child dyad, decreeing the child's separation from the maternal body, and this marks the child being ushered into the symbolic order, the realm of language. Aside from separating mother and child, the father's phallus, "an arbitrary signifier of difference," "reveals the differential basis of signification in language" and "serves as a reminder of absence...of the mother...and of the elusive signified in language" (Sprengnether 196). In effect, the phallus sets in motion both desire and the signifier, which are linked by endless pursuit of what is unattainable and by subjectivity to the law of the father. To access language, both boys and girls must "suffer division from the mother"; in this way, they are "castrated" and never possess "the fullness of being that the phallus elusively promises" (Sprengnether 196-197). Boys and girls ultimately take their positions as male and female in the symbolic order where the phallus is privileged as a signifier and "woman" symbolizes lack itself.

Julia Kristeva, another Freud revisionist, discusses the possibility of the mother having a voice, but her allegiance to Lacan makes her report only on what is wrong with perceptions of the mother without addressing what can be done to change these perceptions. Kristeva does criticize the two discourses that account for becoming a mother: science (it is not concerned with the mother, the subject), and Christian theology (it narrowly defines motherhood as divinity, a tie with God). Further, lay humanism wrongly embraces the cult of the mother: "tenderness, love, and the seat of social conservation" (237). However, Kristeva sets up a certain image of the mother without either advocating or criticizing it: for women, she is a paradise lost and for men, she is a hidden god. Kristeva also argues that a mother's art comes from her giving birth to a subject, but the idea of mother as subject is a delusion.

Object-relations theory, a psychoanalytic theory that also purports to revise Freud, sees the mother distinctly yet tends to essentialize her. Sprengher argues that object-relations theorists prefer the pre-Oedipal mother to be self-sacrificing, never expressing her needs; she must “provide the optimum environment in which the infant can differentiate itself from her” (187). Additionally, the mother in object-relations theory is described only from the perspective of the child as “gratifying or frustrating, sensitive or insensitive,” which denies her complexity (Sprengher 220). According to Juliet Mitchell, an object-relations theorist, in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism*, girl children are more likely to have ambivalence toward their mothers, mixing feelings of love and hate that result from the intensity of the relationship (57). Mitchell also notes that both boys and girls concentrate their earliest attention on the mother but are forced to give it up: the boy gives it up to the father’s superiority and the girl gives it up because of her inferiority (111). Although the baby wants to be the phallus for the mother just as the mother wants the baby to be a substitute for her lack, the baby cannot be the mother’s phallus because the father is already serving that role (Mitchell 397).

Nancy Chodorow, another object-relations theorist, explains that children must gain independence by consciously or unconsciously rejecting the mother (34). Chodorow cites Karen Horney in arguing that the dread of the mother for a little boy stems from her power over satisfying the child’s needs and her tendency to forbid the child’s “instinctual impulses” (34). To cope with dread, men glorify women or disparage them (Chodorow 35). Chodorow feels that mothers repeat the mother-child cycle with their infants by identifying both with their own mothers and with their children, though identification with girl children is stronger for mothers (48). Therefore, mothers help girl children differentiate less, while they are more inclined to push their male children to differentiate (Chodorow 49). For Chodorow, loving the mother equals a

threat to selfhood, because her role as caretaker has made her seem not a separate person from the child. The father, in contrast, has always been separate (71).

Jessica Benjamin, who advocates a psychoanalytic approach of intersubjectivity, is also interested in revising the psychoanalytic view of the mother's function. Her theories open the possibility for a more progressive view of the mother without fully realizing this view. According to Benjamin, the shift in focus in psychoanalysis has turned toward earlier phases of childhood development, thus giving the mother-child dyad an importance that rivals the Oedipal triangle. She argues that recognition between mother and child, essential to development of the subject, creates a paradox: recognition allows the self to realize its agency, but recognition can only come from another whom we recognize as a person. Recognition begins between mother and child when the mother projects her feelings onto her child but also links her newborn's past with his future. Her baby can already distinguish her from others and prefer her to others. The baby comes from the mother yet is unknown to her, which allows her to experience recognition to the fullest; in the first days of her baby's life, the mother's feelings of recognition are strongest. The mother's feelings are not simply love for and closeness with her child, but are complex, ranging from joy, fear, and frustration.

According to Benjamin, with infants not starting life in an undifferentiated unity, theorists need to address not how they become free of the other but how they become known in relation to the other. Inwardly, the subject reacts to the other. Recognition is reflexive, where the other gives a confirming response and the subject finds himself in that response. Intersubjectivity, Benjamin's philosophy, unlike traditional psychoanalysis, is not focused on humans taking in enough from the other to go away. Instead of one subject regulating another, two subjects recognize each other.

Though the mother takes on many roles and is the baby's external reality, she is not usually seen in terms of her subjectivity. According to Benjamin, however, the mother is an object of attachment and later desire for the baby. She should not be seen as an object for her child's demands. The mother should not be a mirror for the child but should be an independent other. If she allows herself to be controlled, she cannot be a viable other for the child. However, if she breaks the child's will, she will obliterate the child. By prescribing a narrow set of rules for the mother, Benjamin is consistent with Sprengher's critique that object-relations theory requires a self-sacrificing mother.

Though advocating an intersubjective view of the mother-child dyad, Benjamin also addresses persistent images of the mother that deny her subjectivity. This vacillation between what the mother is and what she should be can be useful in depicting the mother as a figure about whom there is no clear consensus. Benjamin notes that the mother is portrayed as a desexualized figure, which is a symptom of her general lack of subjectivity. She indicts contemporary feminism's emphasis on female identity gained from the mother, which glosses over the issue of desire and refuses to see the mother as a sexual, desiring figure. Absent of desire, woman is supposed to surrender her will, to surrender her body to childbirth, "to live for another" (Benjamin 89).

The mother's status as desexualized, nurturing parent has consequences, placing her in a dualist system where she represents dependence while the father represents independence. Children see the parents as two options figured symbolically and see the qualities that the parents represent. The child seeks recognition from both but seeks identification with the more exciting parent. Benjamin believes that penis envy is really the female child's wish to identify with the



father, who represents the outside world. If the mother is not posited as a sexual agent, identification with the father for the girl will appear fraudulent.

Benjamin's essay "The Oedipal Riddle" questions the Oedipal mother's lack of subjectivity in the Oedipus complex; her repudiation stems from the father's idealization in his role as liberator. The Oedipus complex has rendered the mother "bad" so fully that this myth is deeply culturally ingrained. The mother's badness begins with her association with primary narcissism and maternal oneness, which the child must progress from by fearing incest. After Oedipus, the mother is outside the child, lost, a love-object and the incest barrier prohibits identification with the mother: "The oedipal resolution is supposed to consolidate the differentiation between self and other – but without recognizing the mother" (165). The child thus desires his father's intervention so the mother and father can have each other and the child can separate from both. This does not mean, though, that the father prompts child development (and that the mother potentially inhibits it), or that development occurs from separation; it can just as easily occur from identification. In this essay, Benjamin engages in a critique of the Freudian Oedipal process and hierarchical construction, yet she proposes an alternate reading that is not fully developed.

Freud's theory of castration as part of the Oedipal complex gives insight into the reasons behind limited theoretical perceptions of the mother. As Madelon Sprengnether states,

we may be genuinely indebted to Freud for illuminating the psychological underpinnings of Western patriarchal society. In this system, it appears that the subordination of women manifests itself in the inability adequately to theorize the position of the preoedipal mother and hence in the psychocultural understanding of femininity as subversion. While this configuration allows of a certain romanticization of the position of subversion, it

does not permit an alteration of the structure as a whole. In psychoanalytic terms, it thus becomes difficult to imagine any significant change of attitude toward the mother as, on the one hand, providing the ground for subjectivity and, on the other, lacking in subjectivity herself. (227)

However, as Sprengnether notes, there is a possibility of seeing the mother as more than a threat to both “mastery in masculine development” and civilization (227). The mother, therefore, must be considered part of civilization instead of excluded from it, and a re-envisioning of the mother must put aside perceptions of her predetermined Oedipal role. In Freudian theory, “the mother remains an unrealized figure, subsumed, on the one hand, into her role as the object of infantile fantasy and nearly effaced, on the other, by the function of the phallus. In her reproductive capacity the mother is deprived of subjectivity and denied access to signification” (Sprengnether 230).

### **Theoretical Framework for the Dissertation**

A feminist revision of Freud’s theory of castration is necessary to render the mother more than an object to repudiate in order for a child to develop normally. Acknowledging that the first, physical separation from the mother during birth constitutes castration subsequently renders the mother a complex figure rather than a prop.

In *The Speculum of the Other Woman*, Luce Irigaray posits separation from material contact of the inside of the mother’s body as traumatic. Eugénie Lemoine-Luccioni’s *The Dividing of Women or Woman’s Lot* also proposes viewing birth as castration. In “Pregnancy and Femininity,” Lemoine-Luccioni argues that once the separation of birth has occurred, the child is “no longer like water in water” and instead “is well and truly brought into the world” (26). Lemoine-Luccioni’s language echoes Lacan’s theories of the imaginary and the symbolic, but in

this case, the child enters “the world,” or the symbolic, upon birth. Later in the chapter, Lemoine-Luccioni calls for a more thorough examination of symbolic castration, sure that “it would be discovered no doubt that castration is represented in and through the female body and that originally it is lack, break, division, separation from the mother” (59). However, Sprengnether’s revision of Freudian theory entails an extended view of the consequences of seeing the mother’s body as a site of splitting. In “Alienating Grace” from *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*, Sprengnether argues that, instead of using Freud’s model of melancholia to describe the construction of the ego, applying his model of mourning to ego construction will indicate that the ego “owes its existence to an originary loss, its very structure predicated on an absence” (228). Thus, the ego appears whole yet “attest[s] to an inner absence...act[ing] as a memorial, a continual reminder of the loss that has brought it into being” (Sprengnether 229).

The loss in question is separation from the mother at birth, a loss that the child cannot process upon its birth; however, later losses in the child’s life will look back at this first great separation and derive meaning from it (Sprengnether 229). Seeing birth as the first great loss lends the Oedipal process and the father diminished importance while putting more focus on the preoedipal mother, a figure long portrayed as spectral in Freud’s work.

If the concept of birth as castration and the first great loss for a child can be explored more closely, then the mother “can no longer represent a simple state of plenitude” (Sprengnether 230) that denies her subjectivity. Sprengnether wants to imagine the mother’s body “as a locus of difference and estrangement, instead of the privileged place of unity and fulfillment she has appeared to represent in aspects of Freud’s writing and in that of his successors” (233). The mother’s re-envisioned body would signal the mourning process and

represent both “the dream of plenitude and the recognition of its impossibility,” giving maternity a “divided image” (Sprengnether 230).

Freud’s theories of the uncanny applied to the theory of birth as castration can show how there is “difference and familiarity on both sides of the mother-infant relationship” (Sprengnether 233). Freud defines the uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar,” and though he never argues for the mother’s body being the site of the uncanny, such a principle can be inferred from the connection he makes between female genitals and estrangement (Sprengnether 231). Seeing the mother’s body as the site of the uncanny, “home and not home, presence and absence, the promise of plenitude and the certainty of loss,” provides a possibility for maternal discourse rather than the Freudian emphasis on childhood discourse, masculine subjectivity, and the formation of culture, from which the mother is excluded (Sprengnether 232). In effect, by giving birth, the mother has prompted the creation of selfhood and has propelled the child into both language and culture; in this schema, the father is not all-powerful. The mother, instead, plays a formative role in her child’s life from birth on and is not simply a shadow figure for which the child longs. The child feels for the mother both a desire to connect with her and a desire to be autonomous from her, and the mother, as castrator, feels the same way for the child.

The mother’s exclusion is a condition of her Freudian designation as a symbol of plenitude, the illogical theory that a mother feels a complete fusion of identity with her child. Such symbiosis exaggerates the extent of the connection between mother and child, infantilizes the mother, and ignores “the inner workings of a mother’s consciousness, . . . the variety of her needs and interests, . . . [and] the multiple trajectories of her desire” (Sprengnether 233). In contrast, theorizing the mother as uncanny dismisses the concept of symbiosis and allows the

mother's body as signifier to prompt ego formation, rather than lending signification to the phallus.

Sprengnether's model of birth as castration could be supplemented by Elizabeth Grosz's reading of the theory of the phantom limb, a phenomenon experienced by amputees, in her chapter "Body Images" in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Mapping the phantom limb onto Sprengnether's theory of childbirth would add to the sense that childbirth is the site of a splitting, a traumatic separation and would provide further explanation of the way mothers and children relate to each other as independent beings with ambivalence.

The phantom limb, which can occur in nearly every part of the body, mostly appears shortly after amputation but can take up to two years to appear. Mapping Grosz's discussion of the phantom limb onto Sprengnether's argument that childbirth can be considered castration could render both mother and child phantom limbs or account for lasting effects of this castration. What makes mapping this theory onto Sprengnether's theory interesting is that what is amputated or removed – the mother from child and the child from mother – is still present.

According to Grosz, the body phantom is not the exact image of the limb removed, but is often distorted: shorter, flatter, light and hollow, impaired in mobility, or unable to perform dexterous acts. This distortion typically occurs some time after the amputation. The simultaneous difference and familiarity on both sides of the mother-child relationship that Sprengnether addresses would account for this distortion; as the child grows, the mother may feel at once that she "knows" the child yet finds the child utterly unfamiliar, and the child may feel the same way about the mother. The mother and child as each other's phantoms would be consistent with Grosz's contention that the phantom is felt to be part of the body and its movements but it also behaves autonomously, outside the subject's control.

The phantom limb may not be the mother and child themselves but images of the other that the mother and child feel are consistently present. In the case of the child, he or she may idealize this phantom mother-image or find it frightening. In the case of the mother, the phantom image of the child may be the child in his or her earlier stages of infancy during a time of dependence. Whether the mother or child would invest more in the image of the other, the phantom, more than the other itself, could be explored. Hypothesizing a phantom image after the castration of childbirth would adhere to Grosz's contention that "[t]he phantom is an expression of nostalgia for the unity and wholeness of the body, its completion" (73). That unity would be the dream of closeness of mother and child in the child's early infancy or dream of closeness present during pregnancy.

### **Chapter Structure**

The dissertation is comprised of four chapters, one for each work I examine. I plan to place the works in order of publication date, with *Gone with the Wind* first, *Light in August* second, *The Golden Apples* third, and *Native Guard* and other poems last. My chapter organization is based on publication date because it creates a logical pattern. Each chapter will apply the psychoanalytic framework I have selected to one or more mothers or maternal figures in the works. By comparing my perceptions of these characters to current critical analyses of them, I will show that the mothers in these works can and should be viewed as central to culture, as powerful, and as the primary force in their children's lives. These mothers are more than threats to subjectivity or symbols of blissful plenitude.

In the *Gone with the Wind* chapter, I analyze Ellen, Mammy, and Melanie, primarily focusing on their relationships with Scarlett. Ellen serves as the angelic, distant mother whose absence is filled by Mammy, the maternal figure Scarlett longs for in times of distress but cannot

achieve identification with. Melanie's relationship with Scarlett is the most complex and enduring, complicated by Scarlett's status as her onetime sister-in-law, longstanding romantic rival, and midwife. I also address Scarlett as a reluctant mother who resists prescribed social norms of mothering. In the *Light in August* chapter, I analyze Lena Grove as more autonomous and shrewder than she is configured in critical perceptions of her as a placid earth mother type. I also address the maternal figures connected to Joe Christmas, Mrs. McEachern, Mrs. Hines, Milly Hines, and Joanna Burden, who, aside from Joanna, have garnered little scholarly attention. The chapter covering *The Golden Apples* examines Snowdie MacLain, Mrs. Morrison, and Katie Rainey in terms of their relationships with their children. Miss Eckhart, who has not given birth to a child, acts as a maternal figure to her students and has a particularly complicated relationship with her star pupil, Virgie Rainey. Finally, the *Native Guard* and other poems chapter focuses on Trethewey's poems that discuss her mother. In poems from *Native Guard* and from other collections, Trethewey seeks to recover her mother's history and in doing so, reveals her speaker's balance between poetic distance from and emotional ambivalence toward her mother.

## **2 MOTHERS IN *GONE WITH THE WIND*: MORE THAN BELLES AND LADIES**

Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* includes four key mothers and maternal figures: Ellen O'Hara, Mammy, Scarlett O'Hara, and Melanie Wilkes. The limited scholarship on Mitchell's novel that addresses maternity has often analyzed these women according to their historical roles or adherence to southern female archetypes. General theoretical oversight of the novel and the women portrayed therein could be attributed to "[the novel's] indebtedness to popular culture and to a sentimental female tradition" despite its "complexity that distinguishes it

from the standard mass-market historical melodrama,” according to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (391). James A. Crank adds that scholars treat *Gone with the Wind* as “a roadside attraction,” approaching it with “curiosity, bemusement...a healthy dose of condescension,” and confusion at the global appeal of “an anachronistic and potentially dangerous novel” (3). Perceived by scholars as a novel of antebellum nostalgia, populated by flat, stereotyped characters, it is often studied as a cultural artifact. Despite a historical lack of critical interest in *Gone with the Wind*, there is rich theoretical ground for rereading the mother in the novel as central to culture and powerful in her creation of selfhood. As Kathryn Stelmach Artuso notes, “the maternalists stand at the helm of this novel” (208), while Madonne Miner sees the novel as “preoccupied with improvident mothers, hungry daughters, and empty houses” (qtd. in Tunc 87), and Tara McPherson argues that the novel’s focus is on “document[ing] one southern daughter’s response to a changing South” (48). Scarlett O’Hara, the focus of the novel, acts as a biological or symbolic child to each mother, and a productive analysis of each woman must consider the implications of these relationships.

Analyzing the mother figures in *Gone with the Wind* according to a feminist psychoanalytic framework arguing for the significance of Freudian castration occurring at birth instead of during a child’s early years means that the mother’s body may be designated a site of castration instead of a site of wholeness and plenitude. Because the mother represents traumatic separation, she and her child have a relationship marked by ambiguity. The traumatic symbolic designation of the mother’s body has the same repercussions for a relationship between a maternal/caretaker figure such as Mammy and the people in her charge. Artuso indicates Margaret Mitchell’s strategy of “unit[ing] the violent separation of death with the traumatic sundering of birth, [thus] dramatiz[es] the manner in which birth and death minimize the bodily



separation between individuals,” which echoes Madelon Sprengnether’s focus on birth as a traumatic splitting (218). Rereading mother figures in *Gone with the Wind* according to a feminist revision of Freud is particularly significant, since the historical roles of belle and lady for white southern women and of mammy for black southern women feature prominently in the novel. Anne Goodwyn Jones defines the belle as “flirtatious but sexually innocent, bright but not deep, beautiful as a statue or painting or porcelain but risky to touch...she entertains but does not challenge her audience” (42). Deborah Barker argues that the belle represents white racial purity and white supremacy (111). Upon marrying, the belle becomes a lady who embodies morality and manners and submits to the authority of her husband, the church, and God. The lady’s job includes “satisfying her husband, raising his children, meeting the demands of the family’s social position, and sustaining the ideals of the South” (Jones 42). Fox-Genovese contends that “to be a lady is to have a public presence, to accept a public responsibility” (398-99) and Betina Entzminger describes the lady as “regally asexual” but expected to “produc[e] a large southern family... illustrating the competing ideals of chastity and sexual capacity” (110), while Diane Roberts labels the lady as “soul, not flesh” (2). Additionally, *Gone with the Wind* features the mammy figure, known for caring about her white “family” above her own and maintaining a certain authority in the white family’s home while knowing her subordinate place as a black woman (Hill Collins 72-73). The mammy of southern ideology is “a symbol of self-sacrificial motherhood, celebrated for denying not only her gender but her race” (Roberts 41). If we read the mother according to prevailing psychoanalytic theory, these limited definitions of her have largely remained. However, as Paula Eckard argues, scholars should “reveal that the maternal is a powerful force that shapes human lives and communities and is a critical determinant in the development of female voice and identity” instead of often ignoring maternal experience by

reading it through the framework of prevailing ideology (10).

The Freudian theory of castration in the Oedipal model contributes to our knowledge of the reasons behind theoretical limitations in mother-centered theory. Examining castration exposes the gaps in scholarship on the pre-Oedipal mother and shows the potential for further theoretical inquiry. In Freudian theory, the castration complex is key in facilitating psychosexual development but manifests in distinct ways for boys and girls. As a boy develops, castration seems possible when he sees female genitals. Since he associates femininity with lack and the mother with the threat of castration, the boy identifies with the authority of the father, leading to repudiation of the mother. In contrast, a developing girl who sees a boy's penis for the first time accepts her castration and lack as a fact. Because she blames her mother for her lack, the girl turns away from her mother as love-object. In effect, what links the boy and girl in their entrance into subjectivity is disavowal of the consuming, castrating, lacking mother.

A feminist revision of Freud's theory of castration is necessary to render the mother a complex figure rather than a prop. Madelon Sprengnether argues that applying Freud's model of mourning to ego construction will indicate that the ego exists due to an originary loss, separation from the mother at birth. Thus, the ego appears whole yet "attest[s] to an inner absence...act[ing] as a...continual reminder of the loss that has brought it into being" (229). Seeing birth as the first great loss, as castration, puts more focus on the preoedipal mother, whose body is re-envisioned "as a locus of difference and estrangement," not "unity and fulfillment" (233). By giving birth, the mother propels the child into both language and culture, prompting selfhood, and the father is not all-powerful. Because the mother is the castrator, the child wants to both connect with her and be autonomous from her; the mother feels the same way about the child.

Scarlett O'Hara, the central character of *Gone with the Wind*, spends the novel

negotiating her role as southern belle, lady, and mother in a rapidly changing society “with the conscious and unconscious conflicts that inform the transition from explosive and tense girlhood to socially-determined womanhood” (Fox-Genovese 394). Monica Carol Miller contends that Scarlett “exemplifies the struggle to preserve the façade of a unified, homogeneous vision of southern womanhood,” ideals that the novel consistently attempts to subvert (47). As a belle, Scarlett is supposed to be pretty and pleasant to attract a husband, and as a lady, Scarlett is supposed to marry someone suitable, view her value in terms of supporting her husband and bearing and raising children, and serve as the moral backbone of a family she is proud and happy to serve. Scarlett’s ambivalent relationship with her mother, Ellen, shapes her shift from a southern belle to a wife, mother, and worker as she both adheres to and resists her mother’s influence and alternates between wanting the qualities her mother offers and wanting Ellen to be something different. Viewing Scarlett’s birth as traumatic separation and castration and Ellen’s body as the site of trauma reveals complex facets of the women’s relationship to each other and Ellen’s formative role in Scarlett’s life. In contrast, Scarlett’s relationship with her father, Gerald, reads as comparatively simplistic: he is the kindly paternal figure whose bluster does not conceal his lack of authority and who is manipulated by his daughter (Artuso 208). For Scarlett, he is more friend than guiding figure in her youth, and after the death of his wife becomes childlike and dependent upon his daughter; never is he the Freudian Oedipal father whose authority compels her development. Only in small moments is Gerald’s influence on Scarlett seen: any time Scarlett is unladylike, her behavior is attributed to her father’s Irishness (Miller 48-49). Although Artuso argues that Ellen is a “hollow totemic figure” and “*tabula rasa* around which idealizing images of womanhood coalesce,” a feminist revision of Freudian theory speaks to her character’s depth (209).

The simultaneous difference and familiarity that Sprengnether attributes to the mother-child relationship is evident between Scarlett and Ellen from Scarlett's youth. Scarlett "knows" her mother to be gentle, selfless, never stirred from "austere placidity," and "a pillar of strength, a fount of wisdom, the one person who knew the answers to everything" (Mitchell 55, 57). Ellen is the person everyone seeks out for support, and as "the epitome of selflessness," she rarely focuses on her needs for food and rest in favor of caring for her neighbors (Tunc 89). However, these qualities are part of a carefully cultivated image Ellen has developed based on internalized societal expectations of her as a southern lady that require her to conceal her individual desire (Cardon 68). Scarlett does not know that Ellen is unhappy and overworked, has no passion for her husband, and has accepted these burdens in life because she believes that is woman's lot. When Ellen dies, she cries out for Phillippe, the cousin she loved and lost in her youth, her outcry the only time Ellen's repressed desires are verbalized. No one who attends Ellen's deathbed, nor her family, know what the name means, a testament to Ellen's lifelong ability to suppress her feelings in service to others. Scarlett does not see that "th[e] renunciation of her own passionate self crippled Ellen's ability to provide nurture" (Fox-Genovese 405). In her youth, Scarlett views her mother only as the calm authority of the O'Hara home, with "a voice never raised in command to a servant or reproof to a child but a voice that was obeyed instantly at Tara" (Mitchell 54). Additionally, Scarlett's familiarity with her mother is based on the comfort and sense of home Ellen provides and that Scarlett strives to return to through her life. The connection between Ellen and Tara or Ellen and the land consistently emerges in the novel: "[Scarlett] loved this land so much, . . . loved it as she loved [Ellen's] face under the lamp at prayer time" (Mitchell 38). When returning to Tara from Atlanta in the middle of the Civil War, "[Scarlett] longed for the sight of Ellen's sweet face" because Ellen's presence had always made

her feel secure and protected (Mitchell 506). However, connecting Ellen to Tara indicates Ellen's uncanniness and the loss upon which Scarlett and Ellen's relationship has been built. In the midst of and after the war, Tara has been irrevocably changed, a symbol of the end of the old social and economic order, and a symbol of the futility of nostalgia and desire. Since Ellen's body is the site of castration upon Scarlett's birth, she represents both safety and the impossibility of achieving it.

Although Ellen is a familiar comfort to Scarlett, she is simultaneously unfamiliar, not only because Scarlett knows nothing of Ellen's impetuous past and stunted passions. Ellen's uncanny status as both known and unknown to her daughter is addressed early in the novel: "To Scarlett, there was something breath-taking about Ellen O'Hara, a miracle that lived in the house with her and awed her and charmed and soothed her" (Mitchell 50). Scarlett's tendency to worship her mother as a holy vessel keeps her mother at a distance; an idol must be appreciated from afar. References to Ellen as an angel abound in the novel when Scarlett reflects on her feelings for her mother. One reference, "Ellen O'Hara was different, and Scarlett regarded her as something holy and apart from all the rest of humankind," precedes a scene of O'Hara family prayer, where Scarlett adores her mother instead of the Virgin Mary (Mitchell 83-84). Scarlett sees Ellen on such a separate plane that "when Ellen intervened with Heaven, Scarlett felt certain that Heaven heard" (Mitchell 96). When typhoid strikes families during the war, Scarlett feels certain that Ellen's holiness will make her immune to any disease, making Ellen's death all the more shattering. Although idol worship of Ellen is a constant for Scarlett, she has occasional misgivings about the mother-daughter relationship: "it would be fun to romp with a mother," Scarlett thinks when interacting with her neighbor, Mrs. Tarleton (Mitchell 120). "Scarlett wanted to respect and adore her mother like an idol and to rumple her hair and tease her too";

Ellen is not averse to offering her daughter comfort such as caring for her in illness and settling disputes among the O'Hara daughters, but her relationship with her husband and children is nonetheless formal (Mitchell 122). Ellen never appears mussed in appearance in front of her family even after attending women in childbirth, rebuffs any reference to animals giving birth on the farm, addresses her husband as Mr., and is considered too delicate in sensibility by her family to be told about illicit topics such as children born out of wedlock or men engaging in drinking and gambling.

Unfamiliarity in the mother-daughter dyad addressed by Sprengnether is present for both Ellen and Scarlett. Fox-Genovese argues, "On the surface, Mitchell affirms Ellen's goodness and Scarlett's love for her. But Mitchell also shows that Scarlett managed to hide much of her impetuous, passionate self from Ellen, that in crucial ways Ellen did not know--perhaps did not want to know--Scarlett" (405). Since Ellen O'Hara stifles the passion and vivacity of her former self, Ellen Robillard, due to societal expectations, she expects her daughters to follow a prescribed pattern of behavior to make them eligible for marriage to successful, genteel men. "Ellen ignored all things contrary to her ideas of propriety and tried to teach Scarlett to do the same," and, as a result, "Scarlett always showed her best face to her mother...for her mother could shame her to tears with a reproachful glance" (Mitchell 82-83, 89). There is no evidence in the novel that Scarlett treats her mother as a confidante, and this lack of intimacy keeps Ellen unaware of her daughter's spirited nature and maintains a sense of estrangement between the two. Despite neither woman knowing the other's most intimate secrets, the two are linked by their melancholic attachments to men who are their lost, and, they believe, only loves.

Consistent with Sprengnether's contention that the mother-daughter relationship involves simultaneous closeness and distance, Ellen and Scarlett have a connection marked with

ambivalence. Also in keeping with Sprengnether's theory, Ellen plays a formative role in Scarlett's life. As a young belle, Scarlett only discusses light and happy topics, makes the men around her feel more intelligent and interesting than she, and refuses to eat in public, all behaviors instilled in her by Ellen. "Instilled" is the key word here, since these behaviors are "studied coquetry" and not comfortable for Scarlett, who is more challenging than docile and often chafes against social expectations (Miller 51). Upon moving into adulthood and even when living away from home as a young widow, Scarlett feels the weight of Ellen's influence and suffers guilt when she deviates from what she believes Ellen expects from her. As Fox-Genovese notes, "Scarlett herself is caught in a war between the socially ordained role into which she is expected to fit and her own natural impulses...she lacks that solid bridge between the two--a strong identity as a woman [and] the acceptance of herself as a woman...would have required a resilient identification with...her mother" (402). When Scarlett refuses to permanently mourn her deceased husband, "A cold qualm of guilt assailed [her] at the thought of Ellen's consternation, should she ever learn of her daughter's scandalous conduct" (Mitchell 274). After reading Ashley's private correspondence to Melanie, "[Scarlett] knew Ellen would rather see her dead than know her guilty of such dishonor" (291). When engaging in unladylike suggestive talk with Rhett Butler, Scarlett questions her integrity that she feels is inextricably bound with her relationship to her mother: "How could she, Ellen's daughter, with her upbringing, have sat there and listened to such debasing words and then made such shameless reply?" (Mitchell 474). Because she views her mother as a sustaining force, Scarlett longs for her presence and guidance during times of extreme stress, particularly Melanie's risky childbirth. Ellen as uncanny, however, provides both the promise of completion and its impossibility. Her presence and the particular qualities she brings to address a crisis remain sadly out of reach for Scarlett, who has

long wanted to be like her mother without sacrificing her desire for fun.

Although Ellen's influence serves as Scarlett's conscience through much of her life, as the Civil War continues and its impact drastically changes her economic status and standing in the social order, Scarlett becomes increasingly unconcerned with living up to Ellen's expectations. In fact, resisting the prescribed behaviors of the southern lady arguably ensures Scarlett's survival and the survival of her family: she kills a Yankee soldier to keep her home and family safe and steals her sister's fiancé to ensure financial stability (Miller 49). This movement away from becoming a southern lady, beginning even in Scarlett's youth, is seemingly inevitable: "All indirect evidence suggests that Scarlett never attained that psychological identification with her mother that would have provided the bedrock for becoming her mother's successor" or sustaining a meaningful relationship as mother or wife (Fox-Genovese 404). However, Scarlett's lack of meaningful and sustained romantic relationships, according to Danielle Barkley, is seemingly fated, a legacy of Ellen's "failed desire" in her youth and Scarlett's desire to return to an idealized past of which her mother was a part (60). Although Scarlett feels her mother's presence through her life, her sentiments toward her mother wildly vary among longing, anger, guilt, and dismissal. These shifting attitudes indicate the power of Ellen's maternal subjectivity and her status as Scarlett's phantom limb.

Scarlett's strong feelings against motherhood are both a departure from Ellen's teachings and image and an effect of the limitations of her mother-daughter connection with Ellen. After giving birth to Wade, Scarlett feels utterly detached from him: "She had not wanted him and she resented his coming and, now that he was here, it did not seem possible that he was hers, a part of her" (Mitchell 185). Scarlett and Wade's birth castration results in her repudiation of her child; in this reversal of the Freudian Oedipal process, the implication is that Scarlett attempts to



achieve subjectivity by turning away from the other person in the mother-child dyad. This attitude never improves, as Scarlett “hardly [thinks] of Wade as a person” as he grows, indicating her seemingly childlike one-sided Oedipal ambivalence (Mitchell 598). At one point, she rails against the dependence of children, forgetting that she once felt that she could not exist without her mother: “Why had God invented children, she thought savagely...useless, crying nuisances they were, always demanding care, always in the way” (Mitchell 558). So blatant is Scarlett’s hands-off approach to motherhood that Rhett rails at her for being neglectful, saying, “a cat’s a better mother than you!” (Mitchell 1318). Instead of blaming her own upbringing for her distaste for children, Scarlett sees her behavior as a product of the stressors of her time: “During the babyhood of each child she had been too busy, too worried with money matters, too sharp and easily vexed, to win either their confidence or affection” (Mitchell 1333-1334). This sentiment implies a constant imbalance in the mother-child relationship, in which Scarlett is the receiver, seeking something from her children despite her giving them little. The same economic problems that alter Scarlett’s relationship with her children push her to speak to the slaves of Tara sharply and dismissively, a contrast to Ellen’s quiet authority that resulted in obedience instead of resistance and resentment.

Aside from her detachment from motherhood, well before Scarlett learns of Ellen’s death, she had begun to shed the southern lady image cultivated largely to please her mother. Scarlett behaves in ways that make her feel guilty but moves ahead with these actions. After her return to Tara in the midst of war, after enduring hunger, loss, violence, and the diminishment of her dignity, Scarlett loses the last qualities her mother wanted her to possess: “All the courtesy, all the gentleness Ellen had striven to instill in her had fallen away from her as quickly as leaves fall from trees in the first chill wind of autumn” (Mitchell 599). To have enough money and food to

survive, Scarlett can no longer be concerned with appearing calm, unruffled, impeccably dressed, and averse to any labor. The rejection of her mother's teachings does not come without pain, much like Scarlett losing a limb or being reborn through trauma; she eventually understands that "nothing her mother had taught her was of any value whatsoever now" in a brutal, disordered world (Mitchell 601). After some time has passed, Scarlett moves from confusion and anger about her mother's values to a fading sense of guilt:

There was no doubt what Ellen would say to a daughter who told lies and engaged in sharp practices. Momentarily, Scarlett cringed as she pictured the look on her mother's face. And then the picture faded, blotted out by an impulse, hard, unscrupulous and greedy, which had been born in the lean days at Tara and was now strengthened by the present uncertainty of life. (Mitchell 924)

These continued feelings of shame at disappointing her mother vary in intensity; in one instance, Scarlett thinks, "for the first time I'm glad she's dead, so she can't see me" (Mitchell 1154). Scarlett never completely repudiates Ellen, which keeps Ellen from being the lacking Freudian mother rejected for the sake of the child's development. Grandma Fontaine says to Scarlett of Ellen, "'But when you lost her, you found you could stand alone, didn't you?'" (Mitchell 995). This could be seen as a classification of Ellen as the Oedipal mother, but the ambivalent connection between mother and daughter and the complex familiarity and distance between the two support the idea that Scarlett and Ellen are separate selves, split by traumatic castration at birth.

Sprengher's theory of birth castration provides a framework for Scarlett's relationship with her mother, Ellen, and her relationship with one of the family's slaves who raised Scarlett from birth, Mammy. According to Cheryl Thurber,

The plantation legend enshrined a picture of a peaceful and idyllic society with mammy waiting there among the memories of childhood. The ideal mammy was presented as someone who loved unconditionally with forgiveness for the past, who was worthy of admiration and adoration, and who at the same time offered strength and shelter from the realities of the adult and modern world. (108)

In *Gone with the Wind*, Mammy follows many of these stereotypical traits, but a feminist psychoanalytic analysis of the connection between Mammy and Scarlett classifies her as part of a complex system of mothering and racial difference. According to Tara McPherson, Mammy “provides the (dark) background against which the (white) image of Scarlett can take shape”; in effect, the slave system that has subjugated Mammy provides a locus of privilege where Scarlett can rebel against the constraints of white southern ladyhood (52). Riché Richardson agrees that Mammy represents the influence of blackness on some aspects of white identity but also acknowledges that Mammy’s relationship with Scarlett unsettles notions of racial hierarchy (54). Within her ambivalent, complex relationship with Scarlett, Mammy appears to have power, but this power serves primarily to support and maintain white femininity in a system that denies Mammy womanhood and personhood (McPherson 55). Deprived of interiority, Mammy is seen through the lens of white fantasy. While Scarlett’s image of Mammy is consistent with her inability to see depth in the mother figures around her, their relationship is impacted by and filtered through a system of racial inequality.

Mammy is first introduced in a way that presents her as Ellen’s maternal equal: “[Scarlett’s] manners had been imposed upon her by her mother’s gentle admonitions and the sterner discipline of her mammy” (Mitchell 4). Mammy as a sterner version of Ellen fits her into a post-castration mother-daughter dyad with Scarlett, complete with simultaneous distance and

familiarity. Mammy's influence on and connection with Scarlett, however, often departs from the type of relationship Ellen and Scarlett have, echoing Philip Weinstein's conviction that the mammy "replaces the defective white mother" (11). Fox-Genovese contends, "Mammy...comes close to providing Scarlett with everything that Ellen could not. Mammy's knowledge of Scarlett and her acceptance of her could have provided the foundations for Scarlett's gender identity" (410). Aside from Mammy's mothering filling gaps left by Ellen, her feelings for the O'Hara family and Scarlett are depicted as more sweeping and intense than those expressed by Ellen, who does not allow herself intensity of feeling because it is not part of the southern lady image. When Mammy is characterized early in the novel, it is as an impassioned mother figure: "Mammy felt she owned the O'Haras, body and soul, and their secrets were her secrets" and "whom Mammy loved, she chastened" (Mitchell 30, 80). She is also a shrewd woman, her eyes "sharper than Ellen's" (Mitchell 83). At the same time, Mammy is consistently depicted as animalistic and dehumanized, an indication of "the complexity and ambiguity of southern racial experiences," wherein blackness both attracts and repels white women (McPherson 58). As part of a larger schemata in southern history, the starkly contrasting portrayals of Mammy as maternal and not human represent "longing for racial union" alongside attempts to "hold black and white apart" (McPherson 59).

If part of reading the mother through Sprengnether's framework involves the mother and child knowing each other, this aspect of the ambivalent maternal relationship is fully present with Mammy. Mammy knows Scarlett well, for Scarlett does not wear the masks of respectability befitting a belle or a lady around Mammy as she does with Ellen. Mammy hears Scarlett complain about prescribed behaviors she must follow, particularly concealing her various appetites, and although she scolds Scarlett, she listens with amusement and

understanding. Scarlett's "self-willed, vain, and obstinate" nature is virtually unknown to her family and friends with only Mammy knowing that Scarlett is more like her father, Gerald, and only superficially resembles her mother, Ellen (Mitchell 82). Unlike Ellen, Mammy "was under no illusions about [Scarlett]" and remains vigilant to ensure that Scarlett's veneer of respectability holds until she is safely married (Mitchell 83).

Scarlett "knowing" Mammy involves seeing her as "a realist more uncompromising than herself" (Mitchell 384). When Scarlett takes actions to save Tara and keep her family from starving, she feels guilt for her actions defying what Ellen would have wished for her daughter. However, she can confide in Mammy, knowing that Mammy's initial dismay will develop into steely determination, "undeterred by conscience" to help Scarlett (Mitchell 384). Even in extreme cases, when Scarlett plans to prostitute herself to Rhett Butler for tax money to save her home or when she uses deceit to take her sister's economically stable fiancé for her own, Mammy is a facilitator: "Scarlett was her baby and what her baby wanted, even though it belonged to another, Mammy was willing to help her obtain" (Mitchell 834). What makes Mammy a comforting presence is her practically unquestioning acceptance of all of Scarlett's qualities and actions. Her comfort also lies in one aspect of her uncanniness: Mammy offers the promise of structure and consistency and that Scarlett can return to the irresponsibility of childhood. However, Mammy's uncanniness, of course, means that these promises are also impossible to fulfill. When Scarlett sees Mammy after extended time apart, she thinks, "Here was something of stability...something of the old life that was unchanging" (Mitchell 575). Scarlett has had to witness pain and death, and Mammy's presence creates a safe harbor, at least until Mammy expresses her helplessness and hopelessness at losing Ellen. When Scarlett returns to Tara footsore and emotionally drained, Mammy makes her feel like a child once more,

washing Scarlett's feet and putting her to bed. This promise of a return to the past is illusory, since the next day, Scarlett has to become mistress of Tara, with every member of the household looking to her to be another Ellen. Nonetheless, as Charlene Register notes, Scarlett being forced to provide for her family should not invite sympathy, since Scarlett is embodying the role of all-encompassing caregiver once occupied by Mammy (167). The difference is that Scarlett is free to take on tasks once considered beneath her while Mammy had no choice; Scarlett will be lauded as an example of southern and American fortitude, as a "realist par excellence," for her willingness to get her hands dirty to help her family while Mammy's prior efforts never received the same recognition (Romine 27).

Although Mammy and Scarlett are familiar to each other, there is still distance on either side of the relationship. Scarlett's beliefs about the inferiority of non-white races, a product of her culture, prevent her from fully identifying with or understanding Mammy. Artuso argues that "Mammy's apparent authority over Scarlett...complicates conventional binaries, even as it naturalizes and obscures the actual lines of power in the service of maintaining the master/slave dialectic" (208). Despite the occasional description of Mammy and Scarlett as practically equals—"Mammy's victories over Scarlett were hard-won"—and the complicated power dynamic between the two, there remains unfamiliarity between Scarlett and Mammy because of this power dynamic (Mitchell 106). Descriptions of Mammy's face dehumanize her and equate her with ignorance; she resembles an elephant or a monkey suffering "uncomprehending sadness" and her gaze is that of a "savage [or] child" (Mitchell 834). Although Scarlett is proud to avoid academic pursuits, descriptions of Mammy posit her as the intellectual inferior of the family she serves, making her a support system and not an aspirational figure. Scarlett needs Mammy to bolster her and remind her of home, but boundaries of race and class keep them distant and

prevent Scarlett's deeper identification with her. Of course, Mammy is Scarlett's mother figure only because she is enslaved, not because she chose her life circumstances.

Despite the lack of mutual and equal identification in Mammy and Scarlett's mother-daughter dyad, Mammy still exerts a formative influence through Scarlett's life. In her youth, Scarlett monitors her behavior to avoid seeing the seemingly omnipresent Mammy "peering disapprovingly" at her (Mitchell 32). Mammy's aims are the same as Ellen's, to make Scarlett into a lady, but her methods are harsher; she watches and reprimands Scarlett consistently, worried that one break in Scarlett's veneer will negatively alter her future. Mammy's approach to Scarlett is unfiltered: she implies that Scarlett is common because of her easy childbirth, refuses to follow orders that would disagree with the deceased Ellen's values, and refers to both Scarlett and her third husband as trashy mules masquerading as majestic horses. Because of the nature of Mammy's mothering, Scarlett responds much differently to it than she does to Ellen's presence or to the mere thought of her mother: "Mammy's words were the ones that made her most angry and brought the greatest hurt" (Mitchell 1177). Ultimately, Ellen is mentioned much more frequently through the novel as an influential force in Scarlett's life, but Mammy is more physically present. Perhaps this is why Scarlett only wants one mother figure at the novel's end when she is bereft after Melanie's death and Rhett's departure: "Suddenly she wanted Mammy desperately, as she had wanted her when she was a little girl, wanted the broad bosom on which to lay her head, the gnarled black hand on her hair. Mammy, the last link with the old days" (Mitchell 1448). For Scarlett, Mammy is the nurturing mother who is bodily present, but she is also appealing because she represents a dissolving social order based on white supremacy that offered women such as Scarlett and Melanie privilege and stability.

Melanie Wilkes, Scarlett's sister-in-law and adherent to southern ladyhood, has much in

common with Ellen, and she is a significant force in Scarlett's life whose influence is realized too late by Scarlett. So central is Melanie to the novel that Mitchell intended her to be the heroine (Haskell 95). Although Melanie is not Scarlett's biological or surrogate mother, she is the consummate nurturing maternal character in the novel, and arguably, Scarlett has moments of mothering Melanie despite jealousy of her. Scott Romine sums up Melanie's character as "a real lady who dwells in fictions" in contrast to Scarlett, "a counterfeit lady who deals in realities," but the women's relationship reveals facets of their personalities beyond their roles in the southern social order (32).

Applying Sprengnether's concept of birth castration to the start of Scarlett and Melanie's relationship presupposes simultaneous familiarity and estrangement on the part of both women. Scarlett assumes that she knows Melanie at one glance, her impressions affected by Melanie's engagement and subsequent marriage to the man Scarlett wants to marry. To Scarlett, Melanie is weak, naïve, and simplistic, with insufficient spirit and personality to attract a husband because Scarlett envies her and refuses to admire or accept her. After Scarlett marries Melanie's brother, quickly becomes his widow and from that point is part of the Hamilton family, she lives with Melanie, whose husband is at war, and their proximity adds to Scarlett's certainty that she knows Melanie fully. In this knowing, Scarlett believes she cannot achieve recognition with Melanie as an equal subject, but the two women are more alike than Scarlett would like to acknowledge. Neither discusses sexuality or anything to do with the body, their inhibitions consistent with southern womanhood, and both desire a return to what they see as a peaceful, ordered past.

Through Scarlett's eyes, Melanie comes across as one-dimensional in her unwavering congeniality and calm to the point of obliviousness; she is "a woman around whom storms might blow without ever ruffling the serene core of her being" (Mitchell 1022). As part of her placid



worldview prioritizing the beauty of her traditions, “Melanie refused to change, refused even to admit that there was any reason to change in a changing world” (Mitchell 1023). Melanie’s sweetness means that “she always saw the best in everyone and remarked kindly upon it,” including Scarlett, whose attempts to undermine Melanie’s marriage go unrebuked and make Scarlett see Melanie as a fool blinded by family loyalty (Mitchell 217). Each time Scarlett behaves in a way that would dishonor Ellen and pushes her further away from being a southern lady, Melanie sees in her behavior ethical motivations, reinforcing Scarlett’s certainty at Melanie’s foolishness. Based on Melanie’s consistent defense of Scarlett no matter how seemingly indefensible her actions, she appears to not truly know her sister-in-law in the same way Ellen remains blind to Scarlett’s faults. However, it could be argued that Melanie does know Scarlett but chooses to highlight her good qualities and uplift her as thanks for Scarlett caring for her when she could barely care for herself. Additionally, in the interest of maintaining her respectability and stability of the family in a time of social, economic, and ideological upheaval, Melanie may choose the optimistic route.

Melanie’s strong similarities to Ellen strengthen the possibility that she, like her southern lady predecessor, refuses to see in Scarlett qualities that do not fit with her sense of propriety. The connection to Ellen is mentioned repeatedly through the novel. Grandma Fontaine says to Scarlett, “Melly puts me in mind of your mother when she was young,” while Rhett refers to Melanie and Ellen as the “two great ladies in Scarlett’s life” (Mitchell 1003). Additionally, Melanie’s convictions of what it means to be a lady echo Ellen’s. Just as Ellen refuses to discuss anything to do with reproduction in specific terms, Melanie is “embarrassed by any mention of her pregnancy” even in front of her women friends (Mitchell 394). She reaches out to those shunned by polite southern society, treating madam Belle Watley as kindly as Ellen treated

neighbors such as Emmie Slattery. To the men and women who know her, Melanie is not “a woman but a legend – the gentle, self-effacing but steel-spined women on whom the South had builded its house in war and to whose proud and loving arms it had returned in defeat”; the idolatry of this statement mirrors the worship Scarlett bestows upon Ellen (Mitchell 1431). According to Entzminger, “it is Melanie’s desire for motherhood – the crowning glory of the southern lady, during which her potential for womanly devotion and self-sacrifice reaches its height – that destroys her,” similar to Ellen’s death as a result of her self-sacrificial care of others (113). Both Melanie and Ellen command respect without raised voices and are seen as safe harbors from the brutality of the world. Tragically for Scarlett, Melanie’s death makes her relive the loss of her mother: “Suddenly it was as if Ellen were lying behind that closed door, leaving the world for a second time” (Mitchell 1413).

Even if Melanie, like Ellen, has a blind spot where Scarlett is concerned, the fault of not knowing the other while certain of knowing the other seems to lie more firmly with Scarlett. Mystified about the connection between Melanie and Ashley, Scarlett cannot fathom that Melanie is an ideal fit for Ashley’s life that he has lived divorced from reality; he says of his wife, “Melanie is the gentlest of dreams and a part of my dreaming” and “she is the only dream I ever had that lived and breathed and did not die in the face of reality” (Mitchell 735, 1415). Scarlett also does not see Melanie as strong, even though many instances indicate otherwise: Melanie taking up a weapon to help Scarlett combat a Union soldier, enduring the uncertainty of her husband’s whereabouts during the Civil War, going without food during the war so that the children can be fed, removing her friends from her home when they treat Scarlett with scorn, and convincing Rhett in the midst of his crippling grief to bury his daughter. Only at the novel’s end does Scarlett realize that she has held simplistic views of Melanie and has allowed her childish

crush on Ashley to make her antagonistic toward the person who has been by her side through every hardship. By the time “[Scarlett] realize[s] that Melanie had always been there beside her with a sword in her hand, unobtrusive as her own shadow, loving her, fighting for her with blind passionate loyalty, fighting Yankees, fire, hunger, poverty, public opinion and even her beloved blood kin,” Melanie is dying (Mitchell 1413).

Melanie as the maternal figure in the mother-daughter dyad with Scarlett plays a crucial role in Scarlett’s development. According to Artuso, “Scarlett’s new birth of independence begins with the birth of Melanie’s child, when she realizes that she will have to accomplish something unaided for the first time in her life” (217). When Melanie first goes into labor, Scarlett is unable to offer sympathy for Melanie’s pain, since Scarlett’s labor was so quick that Mammy found it “scandalous”; in effect, Scarlett cannot forge a connection with someone whose experiences are so unlike hers (Sims 68-69). However, as Melanie grows convinced that she will die, Scarlett refuses to leave her side, embodying the role of midwife that was typically relegated to slaves or was the purview of Ellen, whose angelic bearing allowed her to be privy to reproductive processes while she maintained her ladyhood. Although Scarlett presumably delivers Melanie’s child, this moment is not present in the novel, perhaps a means of maintaining Melanie’s paradoxical image of virgin mother and a means of keeping Scarlett from fully identifying with slave midwives or her own mother as midwife. The former identification is impossible in the racial hierarchy of the Old South and the latter is impossible in Scarlett’s resistance to southern gender norms. Helping Melanie during her difficult birthing marks Scarlett’s transition from belle to woman, and from that point, she takes on the tasks of feeding the members of her household, maintaining Tara, and raising the tax money to save her family home. Melanie simply being herself and only seeing the best in Scarlett imbues Scarlett with the

same guilt and shame prompted by thoughts of Ellen. As Scarlett grows to respect Melanie, she cannot bear the thought of Melanie seeing her worst qualities: “Oh, that was too hard a penance...to have to live out her life remembering Melanie’s face, knowing that Melanie knew all the pettiness, the meanness, the two-faced disloyalty and the hypocrisy that were in her” (Mitchell 1320). At the novel’s end, Scarlett can hardly face Melanie’s death, but it “provides her with an opportunity to relive and rework [the] earlier loss [of her mother]” and “permits her to come to terms with her ambivalent feelings about her mother” (Fox-Genovese 405-406). In a sense, Melanie has to be the mother in a mother-daughter relationship with Scarlett, as she offers the promise of Scarlett achieving psychological peace while withholding this peace through the tragedy of her death.

When reading birth as castration, loss is the precarious foundation for mother-daughter relationships in *Gone with the Wind*, mourning its outcome. Scarlett’s relationships with the mothers in her life all operate according to this sense of loss. With her mother, Ellen, Scarlett is never able to achieve true knowing and understanding, due in part to the women’s prescribed roles in the southern social order. Scarlett’s connection with Mammy, existing within a racial hierarchy that has enslaved Mammy and empowered Scarlett, can never promise mutual recognition of the other as a subject. Melanie, the maternal figure whose influence Scarlett resists the most, is also the person who seemingly knows and accepts Scarlett in ways that positively compel Scarlett’s development. In *Gone with the Wind*, motherhood is one area in need of further exploration to address the complex nature of the relationships among the novel’s central women. Reading mother-child relationships according to Madelon Sprengnether’s theory of castration happening at birth is one way to address the uncanniness and ambivalence of mother-daughter connections and give more attention to the maternal experience.

### 3 “MY, MY. A BODY DOES GET AROUND”: RECONFIGURING THE FREUDIAN MOTHER IN FAULKNER’S *LIGHT IN AUGUST*

William Faulkner’s *Light in August* includes several characters who mother -- Lena Grove, Mrs. Armstid, Miss Atkins, Mrs. McEachern, Joanna Burden, Milly Hines, and Mrs. Hines – and scholarly attention to these characters has been mixed. While thorough case studies on Lena Grove and Joanna Burden exist, other maternal figures in the novel have been discussed only briefly or not at all. Judith Bryant Wittenberg adds that many of these women are viewed exclusively through a male filter, known only as extensions of their husbands, lovers, fathers, or male children, with no consideration of their separate complexity (107). Additionally, scholars’ psychoanalytic focus on mothers and mother figures in *Light in August* is largely focused on Freudian and Lacanian theory. For example, André Bleikasten classifies the novel’s women as “wounded and wounding, castrated and castrating, frail and lethal” (*The Ink of Melancholy* 287), while Doreen Fowler, whose focus is on traditional conceptions of castration, argues that *Light in August* can be read as a series of stories recounting the traumatic ways human subjectivity emerges through Freudian repudiation of the mother (64). Further, Phillip M. Weinstein contends that Faulkner’s mothers give up legitimacy for desire or desire for legitimacy; either way, according to his analysis, the mothers stay within patriarchal narratives and the limited definitions those narratives provide (27). Examining mothers and mother figures in *Light in August* according to a feminist psychoanalytic framework that argues for castration happening at birth provides scholarly attention to less-emphasized characters and a distinct way of seeing thoroughly studied characters.

In Freudian theory of children’s psychosexual development, the mother has no subjectivity, serving mainly as a platform for her children’s development through the Oedipus

complex, of which castration is a part (Sprengnether 230). As a boy grows, he sees the lack of a penis in women as a sign of women's castration and lack; in order to avoid castration and the weakness it connotes, the boy withdraws from his mother. Then the father's authority intervenes to push the boy further away from the mother, for the mother threatens regression to the lack of differentiation of infancy. A girl's awareness of and belief in castration as a fact occurs when she sees a boy's penis for the first time and feels inferior, thinking she must have been castrated at some point. As the girl develops, she takes her father as a love-object, which pushes her away from the mother, whom the little girl sees as responsible for her lack.

Madelon Sprengnether's re-envisioning of Freudian Oedipal theory entails castration occurring at birth instead of later in a child's life, representing an originary loss. As the child grows, he or she will carry that loss; later losses in the child's life will look back at this first great separation and derive meaning from it (Sprengnether 229). As the site of a splitting, the mother's re-envisioned body would signal the mourning process and represent both the dream of completeness and its impossibility; it is "home and not home, presence and absence" (Sprengnether 223). Additionally, applying Freud's concept of the uncanny to birth castration, rendering the mother's body as the site of the uncanny, shows how there is "difference and familiarity on both sides of the mother-infant relationship" (Sprengnether 233). In this re-envisioning of Freudian castration, the mother plays a formative role in her child's life from birth on and is not a specter in the margins or a threat to subjectivity.

Numerous scholarly conversations about *Light in August* and Faulkner's work in general advocate for a more complex view of Faulkner's women characters while not fully realizing that view for all of those characters on a psychoanalytic basis. Diane Roberts' historical analysis of *Light in August*, for example, includes the argument that examining certain types of southern

women such as the belle, lady, or mother “can provide insight into the anxieties and aspirations of the culture” (xii). According to Roberts, Faulkner’s work struggles with “the sentimental ideal of white motherhood” during an era that could not support the dominant image of “such an angelic being” (192); unpacking the concept of this ideal, Roberts notes, is potentially rich theoretical ground. Deborah Clarke, working within a feminist framework, reads women in Faulkner’s work as “both source of and threat to figurative creativity” and as able “to break down rigid boundaries of the self” (“Of Mothers” 57-58). Clarke’s work recognizes the complexity of Faulkner’s mother figures and the ambivalence they elicit, but she does not maintain a deep focus on mothers in *Light in August*. Carolyn Porter views women in all of Faulkner’s work as other but as definitely not silent, an argument that can be more extensively applied to *Light in August* (80).

Another scholarly view of the novel applicable to my feminist psychoanalytic framework of birth castration is William Collins’ contention that the novel is one of missed and failed human connections (24). To supplement that, I argue that the novel concerns mother-centered human connections that are missed, deferred, misunderstood, failed, oversimplified, and occasionally, briefly successful. Applying the concept of female castration at birth to these relationships gives insight into the ambivalence and power embodied by the novel’s mothers. With the exception of Lena Grove and Mrs. Armstid, mother figures in the novel -- Miss Atkins, Mrs. McEachern, Joanna Burden, Mrs. Hines, and Milly Hines -- are largely linked by their direct connections to Joe Christmas, but a thoughtful analysis of these characters should also acknowledge their subjectivity within and outside their relationships with Christmas.

Of all the novel’s women characters, Lena Grove is classified as the most self-aware and aware of the ideologies that shape her culture. Irene Visser, for one, refers to Lena as

transgressive yet mindful of rules of conduct, so she acts accordingly as needed; to get what she wants, Lena asks for help in ways that encourage others to “extend their help freely and graciously” (“Faulkner’s Mendicant Madonna” 41-44). As Mary Joanne Dondlinger says, Lena moves through the public sphere, acting against the patriarchy, yet she maintains her “legitimacy” by behaving like a lady and by saying she is looking for Burch so they can be married (113-115).

Other critics address Lena’s potential as a disrupter of traditional images of women and mothers. Lena’s sincere faith, according to Visser, departs from conventional discourse (“Faulkner’s Mendicant Madonna” 44). Clarke notes that Lena poses a challenge to the male mastery of language; when she gives birth, it is “presented in a language unknown to men” and her seemingly nonsense sounds “mar[k] a prediscursive reality that exposes the vulnerability of discursive reality” (“Gender” 398-99). Jay Watson contends that the birth of Lena’s child goes against the myth of the angelic, desexualized southern mother (92). Before giving birth, Lena refuses to hide from the townspeople of Jefferson, even though it would be customary for an unwed mother to do so (Schreiber 82). Finally, according to Visser, Lena addresses the patriarchal gaze throughout the novel by appearing not to notice it, and her lack of engagement empowers her (“Reading Pleasure” 281).

Numerous scholarly analyses of Lena Grove work within a psychoanalytic framework and although some of these conversations classify Lena as a subversive mother figure, none question the framework itself or the nature of its terminology. Visser portrays Lena as happy and confident despite her circumstances, independent and attuned to others’ needs, never the castrated mother (“Faulkner’s Mendicant Madonna” 38-40); additionally, Lena is not the castrating mother, as her focus is never on controlling another (“Reading Pleasure” 285). Mary



Paniccia Carden sees Lena as “agent of change and renewal” (55), Jeffrey Stayton views Lena as always forward-looking (48), and Harold Hungerford contends that Lena sees the past as unimportant (185). However, in keeping with dominant patriarchal discourse, Bleikasten classifies her as monstrously strange during birth because she makes unearthly sounds and is completely disconnected from her surroundings (*The Ink of Melancholy* 284). Further, Wittenberg argues that Lena is often controlled by male words, including what her unnamed brother, Armstid, Lucas, Byron, and Hightower, among others, say about her (107-108). According to Ralph Watkins, Lena “emit[s] both pollution and danger” because she has had sex out of wedlock and seems unashamed of her digression (14). A fitting feminist psychoanalytic character study of Lena should acknowledge all facets of her relationship with dominant discourse and the intricacies of her connections with others. Lena’s pregnant body, birthing body, and post-childbirth body may be seen as a site of castration instead of a site of wholeness because the mother embodies traumatic separation or its possibility, rendering her neither idealized nor monstrous.

Pregnant Lena Grove, whose journey from Alabama to Jefferson, Mississippi, opens the novel, is immediately characterized as aware of both the power of dominant discourse and her ability to manipulate how she is perceived within that discourse through visual cues. She is and has been a subject on her own, separate from her pregnancy. As a child going to town with her father, she believes that if she walks into town instead of riding in the wagon, the people “she passed on foot would believe that she lived in the town too” (Faulkner 4). Even at an early age, she realizes that walking instead of riding labels the walker as a local, one who belongs. After Lena stays the evening in Armstid’s home and goes to the kitchen the next morning, presumably to have breakfast with Armstid and his wife, Martha, Armstid notices that Lena is ready to

perform when she believes she will see Martha: “her face [is] already fixed in an expression immanent with smiling, with speech, prepared speech” (Faulkner 22). Since Lena is aware that Martha disapproves of her out-of-wedlock pregnancy and journey to find her wayward lover, she wants her body language to be non-threatening and warm. Having a prepared speech also indicates Lena’s awareness of social mores. Despite being pregnant and having no wedding ring, visible signifiers of acting outside dominant ideology, Lena does not linger in people’s minds; Armstid, for example, sees her passing by and completely forgets her minutes later as a result of the placid and nondescript face she presents to those around her. In contrast, Lena takes in Armstid’s wagon in one “allembicing, swift, innocent and profound” (Faulkner 7) glance so she can then walk ahead, sit on the side of the road shoeless, and wait for him to come by and offer her a ride. Lena is also aware of the power of hearing and she perceives sound as making one part of something; for example, when she hears the sounds of an approaching wagon, she feels like a passenger aboard it before she climbs in. Lena also knows that sound gives her the power of the element of surprise over Lucas, since, when she arrives in Jefferson to meet him, “he will hear the wagon, but he wont know” (Faulkner 9). Although Lena is connected strongly to her senses and knows how sights and sounds resound with others, she is more than an earth mother-type in tune with her body.

Lena’s conversations with others address her ability to use and withhold language in impactful ways. Her encounters with Armstid, when coupled with her interactions with her brother, classify her as unruffled and unwilling to respond to instigating comments. This behavior is not a sign of obliviousness or stupidity but instead exhibits her awareness that engaging with people who judge her is counterproductive and futile. Armstid asks Lena pointedly if women have been kind to her, knowing how Lena has likely been judged, and

indicates that it is obvious that she has been left by Lucas. Instead of responding with anger or sadness, Lena remains silent or answers calmly with open, non-controversial statements such as “folks have been kind. They have been right kind” (Faulkner 12). When Armstid asks Lena personal questions that she does not want to answer about Lucas or about her family, she does not directly answer but provides information she is more comfortable discussing. In this way, she can keep some private information to herself while not coming across as rude and putting the hospitality she is enjoying at risk. At some points in his interactions with Lena, Armstid cannot even articulate a thought, especially when he tries to discuss Lena’s impending labor or the possibility Burch will flee from her, and he stops speaking rather than continuing to stutter through delicate topics. Lena, on the other hand, has no such trouble or self-consciousness. As Armstid sees, Lena will unabashedly discuss her situation with anyone, seemingly unafraid of judgment: “telling never bothered her” (Faulkner 101).

When Lena interacts with Martha Armstid, who perceives her with contempt and skepticism, she speaks more than she does with any other character. In outlining her situation, Lena explains to Mrs. Armstid why Lucas had to leave her and why she understands that he did not send for her right away: “He had done got the word about how he might have to leave a long time before [hearing about the pregnancy]...he never wanted to go...but I said for him to...like as not, he already sent me the word and it got lost on the way” (Faulkner 18-19). Although she may come across as sheltered and foolish to the hard-faced farm wife, Lena is behaving shrewdly, performing as the naïve, jilted, yet hopeful young woman, a sympathetic role. Lena reinforces her honesty by making Mrs. Armstid her confidante: she tells the other woman she always felt married to Burch and confesses her lie about being married. Asking Mrs. Armstid’s advice about marriage is another effort Lena makes to ingratiate herself. Lena also claims that

“the Lord will see to that,” referring to being reunited with Lucas, tying her faith not to foolishness but to religious belief, which allies her with “good” women (Faulkner 21). As a result of her conversation with Martha, Lena does not seem particularly surprised when the woman leaves her money.

Lena is labeled as “sheeplike” in the novel, which simplifies her agency, yet her actions through the novel belie this description (Faulkner 6). With seemingly no complaint, she acts as housekeeper, nursemaid, and mother to her brother’s family, yet she behaves outside her prescribed role by sneaking out for sexual liaisons, and she is unabashed when her out-of-wedlock pregnancy is discovered by her brother. Lena’s internalized, wry humor over her situation, which is never articulated out loud, indicates her awareness of what she can and cannot say in a restrictive culture. To say “that’s just my luck” to anyone about a pregnancy resulting from her moral transgressions would reinforce her status as a “bad” woman, but to a reader, her dry observations indicate an intelligence for which characters in the novel give her no credit (Faulkner 6). Lena’s intelligence is seen also through her steadfast insistence to her brother and others that Lucas will send for her and her unflagging persistence on her journey to him; these seemingly naïve behaviors, along with her leaving home through the window as though ashamed, are all part of the role she plays to get along as best she can in various communities. Lena’s performances fool those around her into thinking that she is a little simple and silly, which makes them judge her yet feel charitable toward her. For example, at Varner’s store, Varner believes he has Lena figured out, that she is sitting thinking about Burch, that she is a fool who will settle wherever she can because she has no other choice. In contrast, Lena is only thinking about food at the moment. So much of her complexity is internalized that none of the characters truly knows her.

Watson argues that Lena's childbirth is a "traumatic rupture" (91), and in keeping with the idea of birth as castration, this rupture marks a time of estrangement, embodying both "the dream of plenitude and the recognition of its impossibility" (Sprengnether 230). Although childbirth should presumably have the greatest impact on mother and child, the effects of Lena's childbirth are felt most profoundly by the men around her. For Byron Bunch, as soon as the child cries, "something terrible happen[s] to him"; the "something" is the realization that Lena is a sexual being, which shatters his previous willful ignorance (Faulkner 398). During the birth, Byron is taken aback by the sounds coming from Lena: "it was a moaning wail, loud, with a quality at once passionate and abject, that seemed to be speaking clearly to something in a tongue which he knew was not his tongue nor that of any man" (Faulkner 399). Byron assumes that the first time he sees Lena in bed, there will be a pleasant connection between the two of them, but since this encounter occurs during childbirth, he sees a frightening specter who is focused on herself and does not care that he is in the room. This confronts him with the idea that Lena does not necessarily need or want him, that she can have power and take care of herself without a man. In contrast, Lena's successful birthing seems to rejuvenate the lonely, past-obsessed Reverend Hightower, who returns to his home with vigor and pride, seeing the birth as "luck and life" (Faulkner 406).

For Lena, her child's birth is followed by a varied combination of feelings and actions, both consistent with and departing from the way she was before having the baby. With concerned self-awareness, Lena knows that her strength is not fully returned and fears that Mrs. Hines' confusion about who the baby is may infect her because she is mentally and physically vulnerable. Lena also maintains her self-assuredness and candid nature combined with knowledge of what is considered appropriate for a woman in dominant ideology, which keeps

her just on the boundary of respectable behavior while maintaining her self-respect. She apologizes to Hightower for not asking him to take a seat, but she does not tolerate his implication that she is a bad woman or his demand that she let Byron go. When Hightower calls Byron a good man and haltingly says that Lena will be a good woman, he receives in response a firm “I reckon I know” (Faulkner 411). Lena also flatly informs Hightower that “I have not tried once to hold him” when the minister warns her that she, her baby, and the lingering presence of Lucas Burch will ruin Byron’s life (Faulkner 411). The only time Lena breaks both emotionally and verbally is when she recounts for Hightower that Byron plans on bringing Burch to her after she has turned down Byron’s marriage proposal. For the first time since she has come to Jefferson, Lena is in tears, seemingly hopeless in the face of Hightower’s haranguing and Byron’s departure: “And you worry me about if I said No or not and I already said No and you worry me and worry me and now he is already gone. I will never see him again” (Faulkner 412). However, when Lucas is brought to her, Lena is calm and unemotional even as he is shocked, afraid, and scrambling to make up some lie to cover up his abandonment. Beneath her “grave, winking, unbearable gaze,” she logically ruminates on the workings of Burch’s mind while giving away none of her feelings (Faulkner 429). Maintaining the matter-of-fact humor that has carried her through her life, when Lucas runs from her again, Lena wryly remarks, “now I got to get up again” (Faulkner 432).

Lena is the focus of the novel’s last chapter, her story told by a traveling furniture dealer. In this narrative, Lena, the baby, and Byron are traveling together, but Lena is unmistakably in charge and still able to navigate the balance between being an outsider and someone others are willing to help. As the furniture dealer notes, when Byron talks to Lena about the futility of continuing to pursue Burch and about the possibility of marriage, she “listen[s] quiet as a stone

and pleasant as a stone and just about as nigh to being moved or persuaded” (Faulkner 501). Although she does very little of the talking, it is she the dealer notices and admires, and he seems relatively unconcerned that she is unmarried with a baby. Still comfortable in her independence, Lena dismisses Byron’s sexual overtures, picking him up and putting him out when he comes to her amorously, and she does not worry when his shame drives him to leave her side temporarily. Lena’s refusal to make a legal or sexual commitment to Byron may be due to many factors, but most importantly, it indicates that she is living in the moment and unconcerned with how she or her relationships are labeled. She is occupied mainly with traveling, seeing where she and the baby can go, whether Byron is present or not.

Aside from Lena, Joanna Burden is another maternal character subject to detailed scholarly conversation. Although Joanna has never been pregnant, given birth, or taken care of a child, her complex relationship with Joe Christmas involves mothering, and for a time, she believes she is pregnant when she is instead going through menopause. While the critical assessment of Lena Grove is largely positive, assessment of Joanna Burden includes emphasis on her negative qualities, particularly her vacillating sense of self, and renders her more symbolic than human. As Roberts argues, Lena Grove’s “inarticulate fecundity” is lauded while Joanna Burden’s “protean bisexuality” is destroyed (172). Few critics read Joanna as maternal with the exception of Roberts who notes that before she dies, Joanna becomes Joe’s domineering mother, and since Joe is most violent when people treat him maternally, this shift ensures her doom (181).

As a symbol, Joanna Burden, for Roberts, represents Joe Christmas’ powerlessness, his black and feminine selves, because Joanna is closely allied with the black community and embraces Joe’s blackness and because her masculinity makes him sometimes feel like the

woman in the relationship (178). Roberts also views Joanna as an echo of other characters instead of a fully realized person, her pregnancy tying back to Lena Grove, her prayers to Mrs. McEachern (181). Since Joanna engages in a relationship with the supposedly biracial Joe Christmas and their interactions shift into secrecy, degradation, and violence, Stayton sees her as “a carrier of corruption and death in the Jim Crow South” (53). Duvall classifies Joanna as “another avatar of an avenging God” once she decides that religion is her only salvation and that Joe will accompany her in this endeavor even if she must use deadly force against him (108). Carrie Helms Tippen sees Joanna as complicit in rendering Christmas a symbol as well: the food she provides him “remind[s] him that he is not her racial equal” (63). Additionally, Joanna treats Joe as a flat symbol of blackness and her relationship with and plans for him are intended to rid herself of the curse of black men that is part of her family’s history (Tippen 65).

Extensive scholarly discourse on Joanna addresses her shifting identity, especially gender identity, and these analyses make her appear both castrated and castrating, a typical Freudian mother. For many critics, Joanna is often little more than a foil, antagonist, and double for Joe Christmas, and she does not stand on her own as a fully-fleshed character. Minrose Gwin argues that Joanna’s constant reinvention of herself indicates that her subjectivity is a process, a precarious one at that, and it is not realized (26). According to Melanie Masterson Sherazi, Joanna is manlike, but since she is conditioned by dominant discourse, she attempts to be feminine by making and setting out food for Joe Christmas, a misstep that mocks his “precarious manhood” (490-491). Sherazi further notes that Joanna struggles to masquerade as feminine during the day but expresses her masculinity at night because the darkness gives her freedom to breach boundaries (497). Joanna’s character is best viewed alongside Joe’s in Bleikasten’s work: Just as Joe cannot accept his blackness, Joanna cannot accept her womanhood because for both,



this would mean acknowledging “otherness within self” (“*Light in August: The Closed Society*” 91).

Joanna Burden is unnamed when she is first introduced early in the novel as a woman Joe Christmas ruminates over, casting blame on her for praying over him, referring to her as “too old to be any good any more,” and reflecting unremorsefully about abusing and raping her (Faulkner 106). Unlike Lena, Joanna is initially denied her subjectivity, as readers see only the way Joe classifies her, a body to be judged, used, and punished according to arbitrary rules rooted in masculine discourse. When Joanna re-emerges halfway through the novel, she is characterized as a mystery, virtually uncommunicative with the people in her community and with Joe Christmas. Still unnamed, she is only known to readers as Joanna when she tells Joe her family story later in the novel, and her name is only mentioned once, unlike the other women characters, whose names may be deferred but then mentioned frequently or who are named often. Joanna having no name is an invitation to see her as Joe and her community see her and to deny her selfhood.

Her home is set apart from Jefferson, devoid of visitors, and with Joe, she speaks during the day “with speech that told nothing at all since it didn’t try to” while lying silently with him at night (Faulkner 232). This distance from others is understandable because Joanna’s family identity has rested on outsider status for generations; her obligations to the black community and disconnect from Jefferson were decided for her before she was born, and she has not questioned nor resisted her place in the community, likely out of some sense of duty to her past and her family. Accustomed to a life of self-sufficiency, Joanna seemingly sees no need to tell Christmas about her business and personal connections to black colleges until, a year into their relationship, he thinks to ask her about the large volume of mail she receives. “But it was not that first night [when Christmas broke into her house] nor for many succeeding ones” that Joanna even tells

Christmas how old she is (Faulkner 232). This limited communication makes Joanna appear closed off, but years of living alone preceded by living with a father she barely knew would make personal disclosures feel superfluous.

Joanna's relationship to her family and community, particularly her solitary existence, has shaped her character profoundly, and the complexities of her behavior indicate a depth that, just as in Lena's case, is never fully understood by other characters. Readers are given little about her interactions with her father outside her family story, where Joanna recalls his main legacy to her being his belief in the inescapable curse of the black race. As far as the community is concerned, Joanna only garners their attention when she is murdered and her house is burned, and law enforcement is mainly angry that a black man who has had the audacity to live as a white man has killed her. Joanna's absence is, therefore, more of an attraction than her presence. Before Joanna's murder is discovered but the fire is evident, townsfolk seeing the smoke barely remember her surname, and they joke about the fire: "fifty years ago folks said [the house] out to be burned, and with a little human fat meat to start it good" (Faulkner 49). When Byron Bunch tells Lena about the murder and the fire, he notes that "there are folks in this town will call it a judgment on [Joanna]" because "she claims that [black people] are the same as white folks" (Faulkner 53). Joanna's main visitors in Jefferson are black women, but since she has been taught that white people will always be above black people, she likely never truly knows these women. In effect, the only person who knows Joanna in the slightest and whose connection with her is essential to reading her character is Joe Christmas.

Reading Christmas' first entry into Joanna's home as a reverse birth or return to the womb sets the stage for castration to occur. After learning that Joanna lives alone, Christmas lies in wait for night to come and for Joanna to go to sleep. This scene includes the language of

embodiment and fertility: “on his belly on the dark earth” outside the home, “he could feel the...earth strike, slow and receptive, against him...groin, hip, belly, breast, forearms...in his nostrils the damp rich odor of the dark and fecund earth” (Faulkner 228-229). When Joe decides to enter the house, he walks toward it “quietly...as if that were his natural manner of moving,” and he leisurely looks for an entry point, dismissing the kitchen door in favor of the propped open kitchen window (Faulkner 229). His entrance reads as a return to the lack of differentiation between mother and child occurring in pregnancy as “he seemed to flow into the dark kitchen: a shadow returning without a sound and without locomotion to the allmother of obscurity and darkness” (Faulkner 230). Drawn as if by instinct toward the food in the kitchen, Joe begins eating, which takes him back to his youth in the McEachern home where his hunger was not satisfied. Joe’s sense of safety and nourishment in Joanna’s kitchen, seemingly the first time in many years, or ever, that he has felt this way, represents the time before birth. Even when Joanna enters the kitchen to see a stranger eating her food, Joe’s sense of security is undiminished, and, representing the mother-child dyad, the two simply stare at each other, mirroring each other’s mood. This nonverbalized sameness persists through the early stage of their relationship until castration occurs with Joe and Joanna’s first sexual encounter.

When the two first have sex and he “despoil[s] her virginity,” “there was no feminine vacillation [from her], no coyness of obvious desire and intention to succumb at last. It was as if he struggled physically with another man for an object of no actual value to either, and for which they struggled on principle alone” (Faulkner 234-235). This encounter can be read as castration, as the first “break” between the two that prompts years of uncanniness, conflict, and ambivalence; what Joe breaks is Joanna’s “spiritual privacy” and at that moment, he sees her as both an open horizon and as a combatant (Faulkner 235). The nature of Joe and Joanna’s first

sexual encounter makes Joe question if he knows anything about women because to him, Joanna is a woman in the light and a man in the dark, and her masculine mannerisms result from a need for self-preservation. Although Joe sees Joanna as thinking and moving in the way men traditionally do because of her heritage and environment, there could be many other reasons why she is unyielding when they first have sex. His first encounter with her is as a stranger breaking into her isolated home for food and shelter, and she likely knows that were she to call for help after realizing that Joe feels entitled to her home, food, and body, no one would come. Refusing to simply yield to Joe may be Joanna's only way of exerting power.

Joe's confusion about Joanna manifests in rage and he rapes her in order to make her hate him and "ma[ke] a woman of her at last"; however, Joanna's lack of fear and display of contempt during and after the violent act only compound his confusion and rage (Faulkner 236). Friday notes that Joe uses violence to reaffirm his maleness against the abjection of the feminine. However, Joanna views Joe's pathetic attempt at dominance as an act barely worth acknowledging. When he goes back to her house after the rape and finds the door unlocked, "it was like an insult. It was as though some enemy upon whom he had wreaked his utmost of violence and contumely stood, unscathed and unscarred, and contemplated him with a musing and insufferable contempt" (Faulkner 237). Joanna's inaction and emotionlessness are enough to make her a source of fear for Joe, as he believes she is always watching him, biding her time before she acts; just the idea of her presence makes him sweat. This fear is reminiscent of the way Joe in his childhood feels about the dietician, to whom he attributes a wily watchfulness. He could understand being turned out from the house or understand Joanna shrinking from him after the rape, but her unexpected behavior keeps him in the same limbo he has been in through his life, waiting for something to happen to him. The dynamic between the two shifts only when

Joanna sits waiting for him in her cabin and tells him her life story, which prompts Joe to think “She is like all the rest of them. Whether they are seventeen or fortyseven, when they finally come to surrender completely, it’s going to be in words” (Faulkner 241). He believes that she is “trying to be a woman” and concede to him, for in his mind, language is capitulation (Faulkner 240). For Joanna, who never explains the reason for this meeting with Joe, language may be humanizing, because giving Joe insight into her past connects them beyond being two people in a struggle for power. Perhaps she hopes that she will be treated as a person and not a victim or provider of food and sex if Joe actually knows who she is. Being known may also be a means of completing her sense of self.

Once Joanna begins talking to Joe, their relationship completely changes, and although he marks the next phase in their relationship as one of “hard and manlike surrender” where he feels like a “defeated general,” in Joanna’s perspective, the phase might be classified as a period of sexual experimentation and freedom (Faulkner 256). Despite Joe initially seeing the end of their relationship’s first phase as Joanna’s capitulation, he comes to believe that he is weakened and corrupted by what their relationship turns into, almost as though Joanna is the castrating, abject, suffocating mother. She has made him feel distant from his existence: “*This is not my life. I don’t belong here*” (Faulkner 258). Still rarely seeing each other during the day, the two speak at night of their daily routines, and Joanna embraces the secrecy and game-playing that Joe has come to expect from the women in his life. She leaves him notes to meet her for trysts and hides in various places nude or with ripped clothing; wild and verbal during sex, Joanna encompasses, in Joe’s mind, sin and filth in her penchant for the taboo in language and action. He is bewildered by her apparently split personality, where she goes about her normal routines during the day while playing the role of the nymphomaniac at night; however, Joanna’s behavior simply

indicates that a woman can express and compartmentalize all aspects of her self. While Joe thinks that Joanna is trying on an identity of a woman in love during this period in order to make up for lost years with no romantic partner, his perceptions are not accompanied by sympathy or understanding. Instead, he is shocked at her emotional outbursts, at her jealousy and tears, characterizing her as delusional and mad. Joanna could be viewed instead as a woman whose inexperience with sex and relationships has made way for her to explore who she is as a sexual being later in life. If Joe can justify having rough, sometimes violent sex with her, she should be able to justify bawdy talk and fits of pique. Additionally, Joe classifying Joanna as a corrupting influence is limiting to her subjectivity and takes away his responsibility; to him, his past sins are “clean” in comparison to her filth, and he stays in a relationship with her out of “curiosity, pessimism...sheer inertia” when he could move on (Faulkner 260).

This overtly sexual phase of the relationship moves into a third phase where Joe begins to sell whiskey, an act he hides from Joanna as he hid the rope in the barn from Mrs. McEachern in his youth: “he was doomed to conceal always something from the women who surrounded him” (Faulkner 262). He also travels to Memphis on false pretense, seeing prostitutes instead of conducting business as he tells Joanna, making her earlier moments of jealousy justifiable and not delusional. During this phase, Joanna’s secrecy diminishes, and she instead seems to want to make their relationship “legitimate” according to dominant discourse, where their sexual encounters take place in her bedroom “as though they were married” (Faulkner 263). Mentally, Joanna is in an anguished state, where she feels she needs to be “saved” from her previous sexual exploits but is not ready to leave behind who she had become. Her internal conflict can be seen as a reaction to the restrictive discourse under which she lives that, as reflected in Joe’s perceptions, does not allow a woman to be both an unfettered sexual being and a

businesswoman. When Joanna begins to talk about a child with Joe, it is out of a desire to make her sexuality socially acceptable because its goal is pregnancy. Having a child is also a way for her to have a particular legacy in what she sees as her last childbearing years.

Joanna's desire for a child and belief that she is pregnant push her and Joe apart, a repudiation of the father before the child is even born. Even almost three years into their relationship, Joe continues to misread her, seeing her summons to him as a need for a male figure in her life and her subsequent reluctance to have sex as concern for her unborn child. In contrast, Joanna's intent is to legitimize his life according to dominant ideology just as her movement out of her overtly sexual phase was intended to validate hers. Ultimately, Joanna wants to become his mother/mentor so that Joe can be successful and set for life because she eventually realizes that her "pregnancy" is menopause and that she needs another legacy. Upon hearing of Joanna's plans for him, Joe leaves her home but not her property, apparently unable to permanently break the ties between them yet unable to be the stable man she wants. Lacking a child figure or protégé, Joanna seeks to fill this void with religion.

The last interactions between Joe and Joanna, still marked by misreadings and violence, bring the two to a tragic crescendo. After a period of disconnect, Joe sees a note from Joanna in his cabin, and, wrongly assuming it is an apology, does not read it before going to the house. He is confronted with someone who looks more like Mrs. McEachern than his lover: "he saw a head with hair just beginning to gray drawn gauntly back to a knot as savage and ugly as a wart on a diseased bough...he saw that she wore steelrimmed spectacles which he had never seen before" (Faulkner 275). At this point, for Joe, Joanna is completely the castrating, consuming mother. As she divulges her plans to have Joe take over her business affairs and be fully immersed in the black community, Joe says to her, "You're old. I never noticed that before...you haven't got any

baby...you never had one. There is not anything the matter with you except being old...you are not any good anymore” (Faulkner 277), expressing his belief that women who no longer bleed are dried up (Watson 90). When this confrontation ends with hitting each other and Joanna wishing they were dead, Joe flees again, the only constant in their relationship. Three months after their violent confrontation, Joanna asks Joe to kneel with her for prayer, echoing his traumatic past in the McEachern home. When he resists, she pulls a gun on him, which prompts him to kill her, and he feels relatively justified in doing so, seeing her previous behavior as death-seeking. Stayton characterizes Joe as having “impotent rage” that can only manifest, or become potent, “once...directed at the object of his desire” (52). If that is the case with Joanna, it is uncertain what the object of his desire is – the stern, coldly nurturing and enigmatic woman, the insatiable lover, the disciplining mother, or a combination of all of them.

Other mothers and maternal figures for Joe Christmas, ones who have garnered little to no scholarly attention, include Miss Atkins, Mrs. McEachern, Milly Hines, and Mrs. Hines. Miss Atkins, the dietician at the orphanage that is Joe’s home during his childhood and one of the first mother figures Joe remembers, sets the tone for the way Joe relates to women through his life. As Evelyn Schreiber notes, people repeat behaviors from the past in the present despite the suffering it causes; for Joe, these repeated behaviors, such as violence against and distrust of women and alternating patterns of binge eating and depriving himself of food, connect to his formative experiences with the dietician (74). Joe’s relationship with the dietician coincides with Weinstein’s argument that, “if the male child is meant to resolve his Oedipal crisis by achieving a satisfactory relation of self to other...then Joe is incapable of socialization,” because Miss Atkins not only resists that relation but also destroys it (171). What is birthed from Joe’s increasingly tumultuous and ultimately castrating relationship with Miss Atkins includes Joe



being named as a racial other, seeing women as most inscrutable and emasculating, and understanding the world as framed by injustice and deprivation.

Initially, young Joe sees the dietician as connected to food and eating, a background figure he associates with pinkness and sweets; she is unnamed until Mr. McEachern refers to her as Miss Atkins, implying that she is a platform for development. Disruptive moments in her story, however, keep Miss Atkins from serving the simplistic Freudian mother role. The one associative word that unsettles Joe's barely present perception of her is "surreptitious," connecting Miss Atkins to secrecy surrounding inappropriate acts, and Joe senses that she would possess something harmful to him in excess, which turns out to be the toothpaste he sneaks into her room to eat (Faulkner 120). If, as Bleikasten argues, the toothpaste is mother's milk that Joe has been denied from his birth mother, the seemingly static and peaceful routine of Joe consuming just enough of the toothpaste without Miss Atkins noticing cannot be sustained if he is to continue developing as a subject (*The Ink of Melancholy* 291). This routine is shattered one early afternoon when Joe is caught in the dietician's room when she enters with her lover for a sexual encounter. Joe hides behind the curtain in Miss Atkins' room and eats more of the toothpaste than his stomach can handle, which causes him to vomit and Miss Atkins to be aware of his presence. This subconsciously pushes Joe and Miss Atkins toward castration, where she "births" him by yanking him from behind the curtain, "out of his vomit," and calling him a "nigger bastard" (Faulkner 122). Miss Atkins' "wild and disheveled hair" and hissing voice in this scene are similar to Lena Grove's indecipherable language when she gives birth (Faulkner 122).

After Joe unwittingly catches Miss Atkins in an amorous encounter, she attributes adult power to him, even though he has no idea what he has overheard; her distorted view of Joe

indicates that castration has occurred, bringing with it mis-reading of the other and ambivalence. Miss Atkins believes Joe to be emotionally blackmailing her because she internalizes societal judgment against her sexuality and projects it onto Joe, but instead, the child sees the dietician as an instrument of delayed punishment for his theft of and overindulgence in the toothpaste, so he puts himself in her way in order to get his punishment over with (Duvall 110). So obsessed with Joe as the potential tool of her ruination, of Joe being poised to tell everyone of her sexual behavior, the dietician cannot sleep through her terror and fury, always picturing the “still, grave, inescapable, parchmentcolored face watching her” (Faulkner 123). The two haunt each other as uncanny reminders of aberrant behavior. Miss Atkins and Joe’s encounter three days after the toothpaste incident is marked with misunderstanding: she believes he wants to tell on her for having sex with the doctor, Joe thinks she is referring to telling about the toothpaste, she offers him a bribe, he is shocked and angry at her offer, and she leaves, believing the child still wants to torture her with his knowledge. This meeting exemplifies that “though children can accept adults as adults, adults can never accept children as anything but adults too” (Faulkner 140); Miss Atkins relies on subtlety and innuendo to try to get her point across, but since she is interacting with a child, she should realize that he understands only a simple system of reward and punishment, delivered quickly. When Miss Atkins attempts to bribe Joe with a dollar, he responds with “I dont want no more...I dont never want no more,” referring to the toothpaste, but also referring to the toothpaste as mother’s milk, for he has learned that looking to the mother for sustenance leads to sickness, chaos, and uncertainty (Faulkner 125). Although Joe soon forgets the revulsion, rage, and terror associated with the dietician, particularly after his grandfather kidnaps him from the orphanage, in keeping with the concept of birth castration, all

other losses in his life will look back on this loss. “The vulnerable, assaulted, abandoned self” of Joe is forged in part from Miss Atkins (Jenkins 206).

Mrs. McEachern, who, along with her husband, adopts Joe and raises him to manhood, appears to be completely distinct from Miss Atkins in her mothering, yet Joe carries the complicated attitudes toward food, care, and secrecy forged with Miss Atkins into his relationship with Mrs. McEachern. Within this relationship, a particular pattern emerges in Joe’s involvement with women, mothers in particular: “the closer Joe gets to a female the more he experiences vulnerability and a deadly threat to his selfhood, yet the vulnerability is an expression of the yearning for the female” (Jenkins 190). Readers are first introduced to Mrs. McEachern as a hunched woman with timid posture and a “beaten face,” dressed in all black and appearing “fifteen years older than the rugged and vigorous husband” (Faulkner 147). She is further depicted as “a patient, beaten creature without sex demarcation at all save the neat screw of graying hair and the skirt,” one who, instead of being corrupted by her husband, has been hammered “into an attenuation of dumb hopes and frustrated desires now faint and pale as dead ashes” (Faulkner 165). This characterization links Mrs. McEachern to Joanna Burden, who, in the phase directly preceding her murder, is characterized as sexless and devoid of passion, the product of unfulfilled desires. With barely any physical presence, Mrs. McEachern is characterized as having no immediate access to language or culture, instead serving as “the medium and the vigorous and ruthless husband [as] the control” (Faulkner 148). She never completely enters a room except the kitchen or Joe’s bedroom, remaining on the periphery, and when she infrequently speaks, both her husband and Joe ignore her. When Joe is being punished most harshly by Mr. McEachern, particularly when Joe is deprived of food to force him to learn the catechism, Mrs. McEachern is completely silent, barely watching, moving in the background

completing chores. Mr. McEachern also refers to her as Joe's "fostermother," implying that her status is temporary (Faulkner 164). Initial portrayals of her are reminiscent of Freud's Oedipal mother, a spectral, inconsequential figure subsumed by the authority of the father, but these portrayals belie the complexity of the relationship between her and Joe, which is marked by misunderstanding and deferral.

The castration that occurs between Mrs. McEachern and Joe happens on his first night in the McEachern home, where Mrs. McEachern washes his feet in hot water, puts him to bed, and sits by his bedside while he falls asleep. Arguably, a castration of sorts occurs when Mr. McEachern declares in the orphanage matron's office that he will change Joe Christmas' name to Joe McEachern, but this change is something Joe barely registers. In contrast, of that first encounter with Mrs. McEachern, the narrator says, "It began on that night. He believed that it was to go on for the rest of his life," *it* referring to Mrs. McEachern's (and, perhaps, other women's) clumsy, fumbling attempts to nurture Joe that only confuse him. After that first night, Joe views his interactions with women, his mother in particular, as overwrought, indirect, with none of the impersonal yet reliable system of punishment he has come to expect from men. From an early age, Joe has been aware of and has internalized the disciplinary male gaze (Visser "Reading Pleasure" 279).

Although Mrs. McEachern endeavors to take care of Joe, the castration occurring on that first night and the estrangement it compels complicates her efforts. Any time she seeks to comfort Joe after Mr. McEachern punishes him for perceived immorality, Mrs. McEachern's lifted hand is a "stiff caricature of the softest movement which human hand can make"; she never touches Joe when he is upset or vulnerable (Faulkner 149). Her inability to comfort her child through physical contact could be due to years of living under Mr. McEachern's unsentimental

authority but could also be due to her seeing Joe as increasingly allied with her husband, whose brutal yet consistent behavior Joe prefers. Joe views the interactions between him and his foster father as “natural” brutality, “trivial and innocent” yet imbued with the “evil” of Mrs. McEachern’s kindness that he believes is intended to make him cry, victimize him, and render him weak (Faulkner 168-169). He is contemptuous of her smallest ways of treating him nicely, such as giving him fifty cents when he requests five because to him, relationships are evenly reciprocal, action and reaction, punishment equal to an offense; there is no room in a relationship for going above what is expected from the other. In another instance, when McEachern finds the suit Joe has hidden so he can wear it to town with amorous intent, Mrs. McEachern tries to take credit for its purchase. Again, Joe sees her as violating the natural order of things, interfering in the father-son dyad and delaying, intensifying, or altering the punishment he expects. Joe deals in emotionless viciousness, so he treats her as the Oedipal mother, a figure to repudiate, an object that must be jettisoned because it threatens to consume.

Additionally, Mrs. McEachern’s life appears to consist of performed behavior, wherein she acts in ways expected of a God-fearing wife and mother, but she is too insulated and timid to fully imbue these actions with emotions, making her an inscrutable figure. Mrs. McEachern’s inability to completely express her feelings, rendering her frustratingly enigmatic to Joe, is manifest in several scenes. For example, Mrs. McEachern can hardly look at Joe in emotional moments, including when she tries to speak to him about taking money from her cache. This scene also indicates that Mrs. McEachern feels she knows her son, at least his motives for stealing, but her inability to gaze directly at him shows an ultimate lack of comfort with Joe. Her attempts to speak to Joe are halting and tentative, and Joe perceives her tendency to bring him food in secret to comfort him after he is abused by Mr. McEachern as overwrought instead of

caring. In response to Mrs. McEachern's futile attempts to forge a connection, Joe responds violently and contemptuously (Haselswerdt 209). For example, the first time Mrs. McEachern brings Joe food to comfort him, Joe dumps and flings the plates, shattering them. Mrs. McEachern confides in Joe about the meager savings she keeps in the barn to build a relationship with him separate from the family triad and father-son dyad, but when Joe thinks of telling her secrets, his intent is spite. For example, he wants to tell her he is black as a payback of sorts for her giving him secret food, giving her an emotional burden to confound her in the same way her kindnesses confound him. In another instance, Joe wants to tell his mother about the rope he keeps hidden to sneak out and meet his prostitute lover, but he feels that confiding in Mrs. McEachern is what will make the act a sin because Mrs. McEachern's status to Joe as abject makes everything she encounters dirty and immoral. Joe's final repudiation of Mrs. McEachern occurs after he attacks Mr. McEachern and returns home to take his mother's money before fleeing. When Mrs. McEachern asks Joe about his father's whereabouts, Joe responds by calling her an old woman, the same insult he later hurls at Joanna Burden to irrevocably break their bond and verbalize his contempt of her. Joe also tells his mother that he is taking her money, that she is not giving it to him, a means of establishing control that is undercut by his need for the money, the horse he flees on, and the stick from Mrs. McEachern's garden that he uses to keep the horse galloping. This simultaneous need for the mother and contempt of that need characterizes the uncanny, complicated dynamic between Joe and his mother. From his time with Mrs. McEachern, Joe cements his distrust of women who "mean well," of women who keep secrets (Bleikasten *The Ink of Melancholy* 294).

The main secret that has propelled Joe's life in a particular direction concerns his origins; he has always operated on the assumption that he has black blood, but he knows little else of his

beginnings. After Joe murders Joanna Burden, Mr. and Mrs. Hines reveal themselves as Joe's grandparents, parents of his deceased birth mother, Milly. Milly Hines' story, filtered through the perspectives of Mr. and Mrs. Hines and then told to Reverend Hightower by Byron Bunch, is brief and tragic, her birthing of Joe Christmas unquestionably traumatic. At eighteen, Milly becomes pregnant with Joe, the father a man traveling with the circus; Mr. Hines, also known as Doc, kills him as punishment for the sin of premarital sex and because he is convinced that the man is black, not Mexican as the man proclaims. When Milly goes into labor, Doc refuses to get a doctor to attend to her, seeing her pregnancy as the work of the devil, and he violently keeps his wife from summoning a doctor. As a result, Milly dies in childbirth, and Mrs. Hines is left to care for the infant when Doc leaves town. One day, Doc returns and takes Joe away to the orphanage where he eventually works and where Joe has his formative encounter with the dietician, and Mrs. Hines does not see her grandson again until she visits him in prison. Separation from his mother, Milly, through birth castration, is particularly traumatic for Joe, because his subjectivity and development are dependent on the corpse, an abject object with whom identification is impossible. Joe begins life with the lack or absence that comes from castration at birth and from the literal absence of the mother after birth, making his desire for fulfillment through his life all the more futile.

Mrs. Hines, Joe's grandmother, attempts to fill the role of mother for Joe in his infancy until her grandson is snatched from her by her fanatical husband, an act that represents birth castration; her separation from the child is intensified when Doc tells her that the child is dead. From that point, Mrs. Hines shuts down mentally, living in a state divorced from reality in order to preserve any semblance of sanity. In a sense, castration happens twice for Mrs. Hines and Joe, because Milly birthing Joe makes Mrs. Hines into a mother again, exhausted and working

tirelessly to meet the infant's needs. Mrs. Hines' experience with the traumatic separation of birth does not begin with the death of her daughter but with Milly's birth, which occurs while her husband is in jail on one of his many fighting charges. Therefore, she is alone in her birthing and later, raising of Milly, with Doc Hines interceding in the mother-daughter relationship only when his religious fanaticism and delusions compel him to see Milly as influenced by the devil. In Doc's view, "my wife has bore me a whore": Mrs. Hines is the origin of Milly's moral transgressions, while he is faultless (Faulkner 377). So great is Mrs. Hines' trauma from both separations from Joe and separation from Milly that when Lena gives birth, Mrs. Hines relives the night of Milly's death while birthing Joe, and her face is "peaceful and terrible, as though the peace and the terror had both died long ago and come to live again at the same time" (Faulkner 397). Seeing another child born pulls her out of thirty years of functioning as "an effigy with a mechanical voice" and makes Mrs. Hines feel that she can change the events of the past to ensure her daughter lives and her grandson stays (Faulkner 446). At the very least, the birth of Lena's son compels Mrs. Hines, filled with hope that she can do something to change Joe's future, to go see Joe Christmas and temporarily abandon her decades-long role of guarding and policing her insane husband.

Through their marriage, Doc treats Mrs. Hines as one outside the patriarchal order, unworthy of hearing and understanding God's will, but her traumatic separation from Joe draws her closer to her husband, the instrument of her trauma, because he is the only person she has. To the people in their town, Mr. and Mrs. Hines are alike in their outsider status: "the town look[s] upon them both as being a little touched—lonely, gray in color, a little smaller than most other men and women, as if they belon[g] to a different race, species" (Faulkner 341). As part of a different species, "they might have been two muskoxen strayed from the north pole, or two



homeless and belated beasts from beyond the glacial period” (Faulkner 342). Mr. and Mrs. Hines live in filth and poverty in a black neighborhood and appear to have no income, instead relying on a steady stream of black women bringing them food, ironic considering Doc’s connection of blackness with abomination. Although Doc is a relatively common fixture around town, bragging on his professional accomplishments and proselytizing about the inferiority of the black race, his wife is rarely seen. Only the mention of her grandson’s name in connection to Joanna Burden’s murder draws Mrs. Hines from her home and shocks her sufficiently to finally demand answers from Doc about Joe’s whereabouts all those years ago.

Mrs. Hines’ reunion with Joe in the jail where he is held for Joanna’s murder is her attempt to compensate for his lack stemming from repeated traumatic separation, or castration, he endured from birth onward. However, their conversation, amplifying the ambivalence in the mother-child relationship, serves as the impetus for Joe’s escape from imprisonment and for their final separation occurring with Joe’s violent death. In keeping with the idea that Mrs. Hines is more likely aggravating the trauma at the core of her relationship with Joe rather than healing it, Gavin Stephens says of her conversation with Joe, “I dont think that she knew herself, planned at all what she would say, because it had already been written and worded for her on the night when she bore his mother, and that was now so long ago that that she had learned it beyond all forgetting and then forgot the words” (Faulkner 448). Mrs. Hines’ words, her claim that Joe can escape and find refuge in Reverend Hightower’s inviolable home, are unbelievable, and in his ambivalence toward her, Joe vacillates between believing and not believing in their truth. Acting against his grandmother’s plan, Joe first escapes to a cabin before going to the minister’s house, where he is killed. Despite Mrs. Hines’ hope that he die “decent,” Joe, in an echo of all the

previous traumatic child losses his grandmother has endured, is killed in gunfire and is then literally castrated, giving this separation its finality (Faulkner 445).

Joe Christmas' death in Faulkner's *Light in August* is one of many examples of traumatic separation from mothers or maternal figures occurring in the novel. Throughout the novel, Joe is literally and metaphorically birthed by several women: Milly Hines, Miss Atkins, Mrs. Hines, and Joanna Burden. Interpreting these various births as castration in a feminist reconfiguration of the Freudian Oedipal complex explains the formative influences these women have on Joe and clarifies the origins of his patterns of behavior that center on earlier losses. Outside of illuminating Joe's character and motivations, analyzing birth castration in each mother-child dynamic of which he is a part reveals the complexity of characters analyzed in narrow ways or not at all in scholarly conversations. The mother whose story runs alongside Joe's, Lena Grove, is re-envisioned in the framework of birth castration as shrewder than her placid earth mother exterior implies. Most significantly, a feminist interpretation of castration helps the mothers and maternal figures of *Light in August* defy easy categorization: they promise fulfillment and embody its impossibility and are at once known and inscrutable.

#### 4 “DO I WANT TO *BE* THAT?”: MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN WELTY’S *THE GOLDEN APPLES*

Eudora Welty’s collection of interlocking stories, *The Golden Apples*, has long been studied through the lens of myth and folklore. Two exceptions are Patricia Yeager’s analysis of the gargantuan body in Welty’s work addressed in *Dirt and Desire* and the book-length study of feminist intertextuality in *The Golden Apples* by Rebecca Mark, which is ultimately about the development of sons and daughters. Overall, little scholarly attention has been given to the mothers and maternal figures in the work beyond their function as a platform for their children’s development or their adherence to or denial of prescribed gender roles. However, there is room for further theoretical exploration of Welty’s mothers since *The Golden Apples* “show[s] a maternal world dependent on, corrupted by, and resistant to men’s culture and masculine sexuality” with maternal characters that “defy intelligibility, coherence, and stability” (Peckham 194-195; Draucker 69). Although several women in the story cycle are mothers and mother figures, Snowdie MacLain, Miss Lotte Eckhart, Katie Rainey, and Mrs. Morrison, the work’s most prominent maternal presences, embody both fulfillment and estrangement for the children in their charge, subsequently playing central roles in the ways the children progress or regress. Helen Hurt Tiegreen contends that *The Golden Apples* centers on daughters “struggl[ing] to define [themselves] in the shadow[s] of [their] mother[s],” but the work also arguably explores the opposite, mothers defining themselves in relation to their children (142).

The mother figures in *The Golden Apples* can be analyzed according to a feminist psychoanalytic framework arguing for the significance of Freudian castration occurring at birth instead of during a child’s early years as Madelon Sprengnether theorizes. Such an analysis shows how several women in the story cycle, as Barbara Ladd argues, “embrac[e] the

possibilities rather than the horrors of...transgressions against the Father” (57). Within Sprengher’s revisionist theory, the mother’s body may be designated as a site of castration, embodying the certainty or possibility of traumatic separation. Separation from the mother at birth cannot be initially processed by the child, but later losses in the child’s life will look back at this first great separation and derive meaning from it. In Freud’s theory of child psychosexual development within the Oedipus complex, as children grow, the boy fears castration, removal of the penis, while the girl accepts that she is castrated. For both to develop as subjects, they must, aided by the intervention of the father’s authority, repudiate the mother. In the Oedipal process, the mother is simply a platform for her children’s development, but she signifies nothing. Conversely, viewing birth as castration means that the mother’s body is no longer a site of wholeness once this originary separation occurs, so the mother-child relationship is marked by lifelong ambivalence on both sides. A feminist revision of Freudian castration entails classifying the mother as a more powerful and complex figure than does most current scholarly work on mothers. If castration occurs at birth, the mother, not the father, is the catalyst for her child’s selfhood while maintaining her own subjectivity.

Analyzing the complexity of mothers using a feminist psychoanalytic framework in Welty’s work is particularly appropriate, considering the structure of her short story cycle. According to Ikuko Takeda, “The short-story cycle form surely is an apt medium for Welty to represent the minds of the people in her South, where the relationship between an individual and the community is enormously complicated. In short, the short-story cycle form allows her to portray individuals who have multiple people’s voices in their minds” (167-168). Additionally, in *One Writer’s Beginnings*, Welty discusses her realization that the initially separate stories that she eventually joined in *The Golden Apples* were linked: “These stories were all related (and the

fact was buried in their inceptions) by the strongest ties—identities, kinships, relationships, or affinities already known or remembered or foreshadowed. From story to story, connections between the characters’ lives, through their motives or actions, sometimes their dreams, already existed: there to be found” (99). Takeda’s contention that Welty’s characters hear and internalize a multiplicity of voices relates to the multifaceted and reciprocal influences that mothers or maternal figures and the people they mother have on each other. Welty refers to the intricate ties of relationships known or remembered, speaking to both the complicated mother-child bond and the mitigation of this bond through time, which can amplify a sense of loss and alter memory. Her use of the phrase “buried in their inceptions” indicates that the stories’ bonds function much like those of mothers and children, all tying back to some beginning, some birth, but not easily classified.

The opening story of *The Golden Apples*, “Shower of Gold,” introduces Snowdie MacLain, wife of the perpetually vanishing King MacLain and mother to twin boys. Gentle and physically delicate, she “is associated with purity, tenderness, and quietness” (Fritz-Piggott 28). Even before she gives birth, Snowdie is an ambiguous, complex figure: since she has albinism, she would typically be deemed an outsider in an insular community, but her family’s economic status prompts the community to claim her (Peters 99). She resists their prediction that she will always be an unmarried schoolteacher and commits to an unconventional marriage with the mysterious, pleasure-seeking King MacLain, upending the community’s notions of desire (Peters 98). Although Imola Bulgozdi argues that Snowdie’s joy at being pregnant fully propels her into the feminine, domestic realm and the women’s community in Morgana, Snowdie begins to transform in ways that confuse the women of the town upon the announcement of her pregnancy (165). When she first tells Katie Rainey she is pregnant, Snowdie “look[s] out bold as a

lion...under her [hat] brim,” startling Katie, who consistently connects Snowdie’s tender skin with a mildness of character (Welty 266). As the “elusive object-text” of the story who is read by Katie, the yearning “subject-reader grounded in the community,” Snowdie appears simple to figure out yet unreachable, a woman who elicits confusion, longing, and even envy (Donaldson 499-500). Her story is always filtered through someone else’s memories and perceptions, leaving readers wanting to fill in the gaps. Because of Snowdie’s status as an enigmatic mother figure, it is fitting that she becomes close in a certain sense to the women of the town only upon their deaths; as the Morgana matriarchs age and die, it is Snowdie who cleans and dresses their bodies for family viewing. Ultimately, Snowdie’s intimacy with the women in Morgana occurs when they cannot reciprocate.

As a young married woman, Snowdie is delicate yet lives mostly alone, never having to answer to a man’s authority, and she is secretive about her feelings yet open about her unconventional sex life with her husband, epitomized by an encounter in the woods where her twins are conceived. Snowdie’s pregnancy coincides with the disappearance of King, who leaves nothing but a hat behind and is presumed dead or no longer able to tolerate his marriage. Instead of behaving in a way deemed fitting for an abandoned wife or a widow, Snowdie glows and “settle[s] into her content. Like a little white kitty in a basket, making you wonder if she just mightn’t put up her paw and scratch, if anything was...to come near” (Welty 266). Snowdie as pretty yet defensive as a cat is the locus of familiarity and difference addressed by Sprengnether. She has a sweetness about her and is still part of the Morgana community, but she also seems to feel both empowered by an abject act, sexual activity that has culminated in, effectively, single motherhood, and unconcerned about the common views of the community (Peckham 200-201). Abjection disturbs a community’s sense of order and rules, and a person representing or tainted

by abjection is simultaneously attractive and repellent, a paradoxical classification that fits Snowdie perfectly. As the abject mother, Snowdie is both within and outside her community, legitimized by marriage but de-legitimized by marriage to a scoundrel.

If the mother's body encompasses "the promise of plenitude and the certainty of loss," perhaps Snowdie's demeanor signals an acceptance of the missing husband and father and hope that wholeness of family and future can come without King's mythical presence always looming (Sprengnether 232-233). In fact, because King is the spectral parent, he is unable to create a foundational relationship with his children, leaving Snowdie in the role typically denied women in Freudian theory: the parent children rely on and are influenced by in order to develop. Despite Snowdie's appearance making her look like the ineffective, spectral mother, she is a constant, even stubborn presence; as Katie says of her, "she'll beat [King] yet, balking" (Welty 264). In contrast, when King returns several years after the twins are born, he flees, presumably in shock at the realization that he is a father when he was looking for another tryst with his wife. The boys' high-energy teasing also seems to affect him, something Snowdie long before grew accustomed to.

Snowdie also embodies the uncanniness Sprengnether attributes to the mother when the women of the town feel distant from her yet concerned for her throughout her pregnancy. Unable to understand Snowdie's refusal to wait for her husband any longer and her apparent pleasure at being a mother with no family support system in place, the women "[are] mad at her and protecting her all at once, when [they] [can't] be close to her" (Welty 267). However, what they do not know and never know is that Snowdie hired a detective to look for King, something she confides in Virgie Rainey after Katie's death. Snowdie's emphasis on privacy, particularly when it comes to her desire for a unified family, keeps her emotionally disconnected from the women

in Morgana, who thrive on knowing every detail of others' personal lives. However, as her sons grow older, Snowdie sees any inclination in them toward privacy as a gap to be breached. Just as the Morgana women are with her, Snowdie is prompted by her sons' desire for privacy to treat them protectively even as she wants to dissolve the boundary between them. Snowdie's uncanniness additionally extends from her contradictory attitudes toward King and reticence about these feelings. Although she appears content in her pregnancy and motherhood and resigned toward her husband's absence, she nonetheless runs to try to see King – so fast “the little glass prisms shook in the parlor” -- when he runs away after seeing the twins (Welty 273). After, she begins to push Katie away, possibly out of shame for Katie seeing Snowdie's hope for King's return. Lack of communication about her true feelings is a constant for Snowdie that ultimately influences at least one of her children.

Snowdie plays a central role as mother in “The Whole World Knows,” which takes place when the twins are adults. One twin, Eugene, is presumably in California, but the other, Randall, called Ran, lives in Morgana, while Snowdie has moved to the county seat named for King's family, MacLain. The story opens with Ran wishing he could speak with his father, King, followed immediately by a snippet of a phone conversation with his mother consisting of her pressing him to make a change in his life and to open up to her. Coupling the wish for the father alongside conversation with the mother first gives insight into Ran truly being his mother's son and living through her influence: like Snowdie, he keeps his feelings close and longs for the presence of King, whom he can forgive after being taught by his community that men who abandon their families can be forgiven. Additionally, placing together longing for the father and conversation with the mother indicates Ran's ambivalence toward his mother. Snowdie refers to their physical and emotional separation from each other as being “cut off,” which is the language



of castration (Welty 386). At once, Randall is bound to his mother by regular communication and has been raised by her to repress feelings and grow independent, yet his simultaneous closeness and distance from her is complicated by his desire to talk about his personal life with his absentee parent. Through “The Whole World Knows,” Snowdie’s parts of the conversation with Ran are italicized, indicating that this dialogue is happening over the phone. Use of the italics also gives the conversations a soft, tentative, distant nature, as though the two are practically strangers trying to communicate with so much left unsaid. In contrast, Ran’s internal outcries to King – “Father, I wish I could talk to you, wherever you are right now,” “Father, I wished I could go back,” and “Father! You didn’t listen” – are interspersed in the text with no highlighting, a strategy that makes these thoughts feel more like close, emotional conversations, perhaps even closer than the ones with Snowdie (Welty 375, 378, 379). Ran’s ties with the spectral father thus feel stronger than the regular contact he has had with the present mother, perhaps an indication that Snowdie’s seeming ability to contentedly mother alone has confused and alienated her son as much as it did her community. Additionally, Snowdie being a part of Morgana’s insular, often suffocating community, even when she has moved to MacLain, could be a contributor to Ran’s sense of alienation from her. Morgana’s townsfolk know Ran’s personal information intimately, blurring the line between individual and community, so he would presumably want to establish a boundary between his private life and the probing nature of the community.

In the conversations between Snowdie and Ran, Snowdie’s side of each conversation is much wordier than her son’s, and what she says is probing and almost uncomfortable, eliciting his clipped, emotionally loaded responses. In one instance, Snowdie asks Ran where he has been, and he responds with “Nowhere, Mother,” the capital-M mother both naming Snowdie and

giving her a prominent presence (Welty 375). Although she is likely asking this to see how his day has been, his response has larger implications: physically and mentally, he is aimless in Morgana, his days spent silently regarding a cheating wife, spending time with a naïve country girl, and fantasizing about punishment coming to those who have wronged him. However, Ran never reveals these facets of his life to his mother; for one, she already has a pipeline to Morgana's gossip as a former resident, and for another, he has always been a person apart from Snowdie, a child running amok despite being tied to his maternal side both by naming – he and his twin are named for Snowdie's grandfathers -- and parenting. Ran's simultaneous connection and separateness from his mother is also indicated by her admonition to him in one conversation, "*Son, you're walking around in a dream,*" her reference to him as son reinforcing their bond and her judgment of his dreamlike state tying back to her behavior when she was pregnant and serving as a distancing reprimand (Welty 380).

In another conversation, Snowdie says to Ran, "*Son, I was glad to see you but I noticed that old pistol of your father's in your nice coat pocket, what do you want with that? Not any robbers coming to the Morgana bank that I know of*" (Welty 383). This shows Snowdie's unwillingness to directly tell Ran that she knows carrying a gun, for him, is a desperate, not a practical, decision. Instead of confronting Ran, she tries to dissuade him from carrying the weapon by noting that the gun was abandoned by King, who never wanted it and to whom she knows Ran feels tied. Additionally, Snowdie tries to make the idea of carrying a gun ridiculous, perhaps to diminish Ran's perceived need to have the weapon. In one of the last conversations of "The Whole World Knows," Snowdie says to Ran, "*If you were back under my roof...if Eugene hadn't gone away, too*" without completing the thought (Welty 386). This incomplete idea holds the unspoken statement that her children's lives would have been better and complete had their

small, mother-helmed family stayed together, since, as Snowdie says in one phone conversation with Ran, “*The Lord never meant for us to separate*” (Welty 386). In this case, Snowdie takes on a greater authority, speaking for God in upholding the mother-child bond but also using the patriarchal discourse of religion to establish that authority. By using the word “separate,” Snowdie again employs the language of castration, in this case implying that even the originary split at birth that makes the mother and child separate subjects is somehow wrong, against a larger design. In the story’s final conversation before Ran points a gun at and rapes Maideen, Snowdie, advises her son, “*The whole world knows what she did to you. It’s different from when it’s the man,*” referring to Jinny Stark, Ran’s wife, cheating on him (Welty 390). These last words to her son uphold patriarchal notions of masculinity embodied in Morgana while also emasculating Ran as a known cuckold, summing up why their mother-child bond is so complicated. In a sense, Snowdie castrates Ran, depriving him of power and revealing his lack and weakness by firmly articulating what the townsfolk had been murmuring about. Ran’s violent act could then be seen as a way to regain power and conceal his lack, although impotently brandishing a gun to threaten a young woman simply reinscribes his weakness.

Although Randall’s ambivalent feelings toward Snowdie are fitting in the mother-child relationship, the maternal figure whose elicited ambivalence warrants the most extensive treatment is Miss Lotte Eckhart, pianist and piano teacher in “June Recital.” Miss Eckhart does not ever give birth to or raise a child, but her maternal role comes from teaching neighborhood children piano and from forging a particularly complicated bond with one of those children, Virgie Rainey. Jill Fritz-Piggott addresses Miss Eckhart in terms that echo Sprengnether’s theoretical stance on the mother, saying that Miss Eckhart’s story is about doubling and about unlike elements coming together: beauty and terror, violence and peace (31). Miss Eckhart’s

more mysterious yet seemingly complex relationship with her mother, Mrs. Eckhart, renders Lotte both the mother being pushed away by the identity-seeking artist child (Virgie) and the child trying to express her artistry separate from the suffocating mother, what Brennan Costello calls “dictatorial matriarchy” (88). Ultimately, Miss Eckhart plays a multifaceted role in “the relationship of the female artist to the maternal, [which] is a source of contradiction and collision, for [the artist] may combine the desire for the mother’s unconditional love with...the question, ‘Do I want to *be* that?’” (Hankins 395).

According to the narrator of “June Recital,” “What Miss Eckhart might have told them a long time ago was that there was more than the ear could bear to hear or the eye to see, even in her” (Welty 301). If “them” refers to the community of Morgana, this statement addresses the relationship Miss Eckhart has with them: they take her at face value as an outsider without acknowledging the complexity of her behaviors and experiences, while she resists revealing herself to them. As Suzan Harrison argues, Miss Eckhart’s silence is her way of not letting the town control her, but Morgana still reduces and displaces her (309-310); Miss Eckhart is, as Hankins notes, “insider and outsider, prisoner and outlaw” (398). Emotionally, Miss Eckhart is at once seemingly closed off, but hints of her vulnerability sneak through. For example, when the man she loves dies, she remains stoic until his funeral, where she nearly falls into his grave. She asks Cassie and Virgie after one lesson to stay for dinner, saying, “Please--please” but the girls cheerily decline (Welty 305). Hints of Miss Eckhart’s more passionate, emotional, vulnerable attachment to her art also emerge: during a storm, she plays a song so passionately and violently that something hidden and powerful is released and frightens her students. These emotional expressions, instead of endearing her to others as a means of connecting, render her abject to her community. They feel distaste and fear for Miss Eckhart’s grief, enthusiasm, and anger, which

appears repressed yet unpredictable. In this way, the community relegates Miss Eckhart to the role of Freudian pre-Oedipal mother, the woman whose desire places her outside the realm of civilization and serves as a potentially consuming force.

According to Mark, Miss Eckhart's mother, Mrs. Eckhart, "is her most vulnerable point" (80). During the early days of Miss Eckhart giving piano lessons, her mother is in the background, but, consistent with Sprengnether's classification of the familiarity of the mother-child relationship, Mrs. Eckhart progresses to mimicking her daughter's authoritative mannerisms. Like her daughter, Mrs. Eckhart goes wherever she wants in the house during the lessons and vigilantly keeps time with the students' music. The "brass thimble on [Mrs. Eckhart's] finger" is a time keeper and a disciplinary tool, used in the same way as Miss Eckhart's metronome and fly swatter, respectively (Welty 304). Mrs. Eckhart acts as her daughter's uncanny double when, during one music lesson, she screams, "*danke schoen, danke schoen, danke schoen!*" compelling Miss Eckhart to slap her mother in the mouth (Welty 305). With this scream, Mrs. Eckhart announces the love Miss Eckhart has for her star pupil and daughter-figure, Virgie Rainey, a love that Miss Eckhart keeps relatively quiet except when she uses her native tongue to thank the girl for her musical performance. The scream also targets one of the sources of Miss Eckhart's outsider status, her foreignness, and disturbs the order and sanctity of her lessons, a structure that may be her way of coping and surviving in Morgana. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that Miss Eckhart reacts violently. On another occasion, Mrs. Eckhart destroys a Billiken doll given to her daughter by her daughter's sweetheart, Mr. Sissum; although the doll is a free item that Mr. Sissum got from work, it means enough to Miss Eckhart that she displays it in her home. Billiken dolls, symbols of luck when purchased, are considered even luckier when given as gifts. The destruction of this gift is the destruction of a

symbol showing that, at one time, someone was fond of or even loved Miss Eckhart. Even worse, by ruining the doll, Mrs. Eckhart symbolically ends her daughter's lucky prospects. Although Mrs. Eckhart in her old age may suffer from some mental decline, her screaming and destruction hint at a past where she repressed her daughter's spirit and dismissed Miss Eckhart's passions.

In Cassie Morrison's recollections, Miss Eckhart is characterized as punctual and formidable, "tireless as a spider" (Welty 288). Immediately, her persona resists Freudian classification of the mother figure as insubstantial – the spider reference implies something predatory, entrapping, or, as Draucker notes, dominant (79). As a piano teacher, Miss Eckhart appears forgetful as any child plays but is actually deceptively vigilant, quickly striking a hand with a flyswatter when a child makes a mistake. In opposition to the default for a woman within patriarchal ideology, she is also physically heavy and seems to have no qualms about taking up space or moving as she pleases, since she dwarfs a chair with her seated body, goes into the next room with no explanations while students are in her home, and circles her students as they play. In effect, as Patricia Yeager contends, "if white women have been compelled to inhabit pleasant, undifferentiated, fragile bodies in search of protection[,] Miss Eckhart's gigantism transgresses this role and renders it unstable" (126). When Miss Eckhart holds the June recital for her students, she embraces her status as the authority, dictating what the children wear, what pieces they play, and what flowers decorate her home studio. Although Jeffrey Folks argues that "the social rituals of Morgana are the means by which the group exercises control over the individual," the recital is one occasion where Miss Eckhart can garner any respect earned by her musical expertise and take control denied her in other aspects of life (19). Peter Schmidt compares Miss Eckhart's behavior to that of a soon-to-be bride, which implies that her yearly repetition of the ritual represents a need to get close to the object of her desire, social approbation

(94). This repetition compulsion never leads to the attainment of her desire, or, in Schmidt's terms, the marriage of the bride.

For the Morgana mothers, Miss Eckhart, a large-bodied woman, is a figure of contradiction. Mrs. Stark, one of Morgana's matriarchal leaders, says "what a surprise it [is] for Miss Eckhart, of all people, to turn up with such pretty ankles, which made it the same as if she didn't have them" (Welty 296). Adding to Morgana's community of women both commenting on and undercutting Miss Eckhart's complexity, Mrs. Morrison compares Miss Eckhart's studio to the luring witch's house in *Hansel and Gretel*, implying that the place is both attractive and dangerous and houses an abject, predatory, cannibalistic figure. Because Miss Eckhart is unmarried and, by being called only by her last name, does not invite familiarity; Morgana's women push her away. Mrs. Stark further maligns her by calling her "Miss Do-Daddle," a silly label that renders Miss Eckhart useless and ridiculous (Welty 314). Townsfolk treat her as an uncanny figure because she is a German living in Morgana during and after World War I and because she was raped and serves as a symbol of the terrible act. Her presence represents violence, death, and destruction, and they would prefer that Miss Eckhart move away or hide herself away so they do not have to be reminded of these things. She is also apart from them in language and the foods she eats; her intermittent speaking in German and cooking food with wine and pungent smells are regarded as strange without being exotic. Since Miss Eckhart stays in the town despite the townsfolk's wishes, she resists their efforts to render her abject and forget her rather than deal with their discomfort. In the Miss Eckhart-Morgana community dynamic, their separation is castration, and if the community has "birthed" her, it has shaped her as an outsider and has maintained a relationship predicated on loss: of her dignity, the man she loved, her aspirations, her income.

Miss Eckhart's relationship with her star pupil, Virgie Rainey, is as ambivalent and complicated as that of a mother and child within Sprengnether's framework. The musically gifted Virgie garners most of Miss Eckhart's attention; in one scene, where Virgie gives Miss Eckhart a strongly sweet-smelling magnolia before Cassie Morrison's piano lesson is finished, the distracting smell makes the rest of the time with Cassie perfunctory, as though Virgie, like the scent, has overtaken the room. If Virgie is late to a lesson or misses it completely, this seems to matter little to Miss Eckhart, who responds to Virgie's playing with "*danke schoen*," or thank you, a simple expression that encompasses appreciation, love, and respect, sentiments she may be unable to express otherwise. However, there are also more complicated elements to Miss Eckhart using "*danke schoen*"; for one, it is a sign of her foreignness and outsider status that threatens to taint Virgie, who, though irrepressible, depends on the community for her identity (Peckham 211). When the narrator of "June Recital" asks, "How much might depend on people's being linked together?," the question addresses potential implications of this mother-daughter relationship, where talent, relationships, and future success might all derive meaning from such a bond (Welty 306). Upon hearing Miss Eckhart's way of praising Virgie, Virgie's peers refer to her thereafter as "Virgie Rainey, *danke schoen*," as though she is inextricably bound to Miss Eckhart, who has attempted to "birth" a star musician and true artist, roles Virgie ultimately rejects (Dupuy 519).

Miss Eckhart as a mother figure for Virgie has birthed or has attempted to birth Virgie's selfhood, and in doing so, Miss Eckhart has created a subject with reciprocal influence over her. Cassie notices that Virgie over time escalates in her rudeness and disobedience toward Miss Eckhart, refusing to play piano according to her rules, consistent with the idea that after castration, "mother" and "daughter" are each other's phantom limbs, behaving in distorted,



unexpected ways. Virgie's behavior exhausts rather than encourages Miss Eckhart's spirit (Peckham 211). For example, Virgie decorates Miss Eckhart with clover chains at a community gathering, making a spectacle of the teacher. After Miss Eckhart's sweetheart dies, Virgie cruelly brings up his name during a lesson. Cassie notes, "Anybody could tell that she was doing something to Miss Eckhart. She was turning her from a teacher into something lesser" (Welty 294). Miss Eckhart's diminished authority is evident when she is hesitant to use the fly swatter on Virgie, and, even worse, remains silent when a man (a fellow renter in the house) exposes himself to her piano students and warns the students to keep quiet about the incident, concerned this will cause their parents to discontinue lessons. If the mother-child relationship is ambivalent due to the simultaneous plenitude and loss promised by the mother's presence, perhaps Virgie is drawn to Miss Eckhart's flattery, her sense of structure so different from Virgie's, her promise that Virgie's talent can make her free. On the other hand, Virgie's vibrant, rebellious nature chafes under Miss Eckhart's absolute attention and mapping of her dreams onto Virgie's life. Schmidt further classifies Virgie's rebellion as the result of fear of tapping into her artistic spirit and thus experiencing the same "estrangement and unhappiness" as Miss Eckhart experiences (94). When Virgie eventually stops coming to piano lessons altogether, this marks a further decline in Miss Eckhart's status, where she loses her livelihood and is displaced to the outskirts of Morgana, practically forgotten. Virgie, no longer Miss Eckhart's artist in training, does not seem particularly preoccupied with the end of her lessons, using her skills as a piano player at the movies and then ceasing to play entirely. These outcomes for artist and intended protegee, maternal figure and daughter figure, are consistent with the narrator's contention that "[Miss Eckhart's] love never did anybody any good" (Welty 307). The only tangible gift Miss Eckhart gave Virgie, a butterfly pin with a faulty clasp, represents the flawed nature of that love: Miss

Eckhart can promise Virgie a rebirth as an artist instead of a rebellious young girl, but she cannot promise a consequence-free movement into this role nor a foundation for Virgie to fall back upon should she fail.

Miss Eckhart's story and her relationship with Virgie comprise the bulk of "June Recital," but the person whose memories of the two shape the story, Cassie Morrison, is also affected by her relationship with the piano teacher. Cassie emblemizes Welty's argument that "the events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order"; ultimately, "time...is the continuous thread of revelation" (*One Writer's Beginnings* 68-69). Years after her piano lessons concluded, Cassie can begin to understand Miss Eckhart's attempts to connect with others and the different ways her repressed artistic desires had been revealed. The same understanding eludes Virgie, who vaguely recalls hating her piano teacher, well into adulthood and does not fully emerge until the death of her mother, Katie Rainey.

Although Cassie is not Miss Eckhart's prized pupil, she is her longest running one, the only student left after all the other Morgana mothers pull their children from piano lessons. Cassie remains Miss Eckhart's sole student for a time because Cassie's mother, Mrs. Morrison, feels guilty about disliking the woman. Thus, Cassie's relationship with Miss Eckhart is based on compensation for a lack and on Cassie never measuring up to Virgie Rainey's star power. Despite this lack of mutual recognition between Cassie and Miss Eckhart and lack of acknowledgment of each other as subjects, they are linked by their repressed desires, a contrast to the expressive Virgie. As she grows into adulthood, Cassie becomes much like Miss Eckhart, a woman living a quiet life in service to others, teaching piano (Jarrell 7).

Years after Miss Eckhart has been nearly forgotten by her community, she returns to her former home and music studio, where Virgie Rainey is also present, upstairs in a sexual encounter with a sailor. Miss Eckhart “behave[s] a little like a wind-up toy on wheels,” going into the home as though she had never left, drawn, perhaps, by a long-lost sense of fulfillment memorialized in the place (Welty 281). The long-term impact of the mother-daughter relationship is evident in this scene by the ways Miss Eckhart and Virgie are associated with particular types of artistry and expression. Despite Virgie having discontinued her lessons, she is still connected to music, in Cassie Morrison’s mind, inextricably linked to her signature piece, *Für Elise*; additionally, Virgie is unabashedly engaging in sexual activity. In contrast, Miss Eckhart’s creative and expressive forces are channeled into more destructive pursuits, decorating the house with paper and setting it on fire in order to destroy herself and the last place where she had even a tenuous connection to Morgana. However, Virgie’s sexual behavior is meaningless, rote, without passion, a contrast to Miss Eckhart’s passionate focus on immolation, which echoes Miss Eckhart’s fervent piano playing compared to Virgie’s emotionless piano playing at the local theater. The ways Virgie and Miss Eckhart simultaneously behave in this home, the site of many of their complicated interactions, reflect their prior relationship, where irrepressible Virgie was often blissfully unaware of her teacher/mother and Miss Eckhart, in trying to create, threatened to consume or even destroy with her passion. After both Miss Eckhart and Virgie leave the house, they encounter each other. This meeting, Cassie presumes, should involve some recognition, an acknowledgment of the other, but Virgie simply overtakes and walks past her former teacher. When Cassie reflects on this non-meeting, “What she was certain of was the distance those two had gone, as if all along they had been making a trip...It had changed them. They were deliberately terrible” (Welty 330). Due in large part to the power struggle in their

relationship and the things unsaid between them, Miss Eckhart and Virgie, like many other people, roam lost in relation to each other, exemplifying the sometimes degrading influence of the mother/child dynamic.

Although the relationship between Miss Eckhart and Virgie is marked by a slow degeneration, Virgie is also shaped by her relationship with her mother, Katie Rainey, and their story is the focus of “The Wanderers.” One issue between Virgie and Miss Eckhart is Virgie’s inability to accept recognition from her mother/teacher and to Miss Eckhart as aspirational or as an equal, and the same challenge applies to Katie, her birth mother. While Miss Eckhart is an outsider in Morgana, Katie is part of the community and echoes its often-restrictive values, her voice “complicitous with patriarchy” (Ladd 62). Virgie, never fully within or outside the community, cannot relate to either woman completely. Additionally, Katie thrives on stability in a small town within her domestic sphere; although the Rainey family is poor, she appears content in her consistent schedule milking the cows and her time spent with Morgana women such as Snowdie. Even as she is dying, Katie thinks of her flowers and quilt patterns, the things she feels give her “more than they guessed” (Welty 431). This sense of routine and consistency is anathema to her restless daughter. Through *The Golden Apples*, there are implications that aspects of Katie’s appearance, lifestyle, and behavior, mostly tied to social class, could be embarrassing to her daughter. At the June recital, Katie elicits laughter by wearing the same hat to hear her daughter play that she wears milking cows, and throughout Morgana, she is known as the ice cream lady while Virgie’s father is Old Man Rainey, the buttermilk man; both Raineys are labeled dismissively. Anticipating potential teasing from her classmates about her mother’s occupation, Virgie drinks vanilla extract to smell like an ice cream cone, challenging others to comment on this scent’s link to her mother.

In her young adulthood, Virgie leaves home for a short period. Her return at seventeen begins more than two decades of living with her mother and existing in a mother-daughter relationship based on repression and obligation. Upon Virgie's return, Katie immediately asks her daughter to milk the cows and does not remark on her absence. Going back to her mother's house means that Virgie completely gives up music in favor of farm work and can never cry when she is hurt, for Katie has the only hurts that matter, the loss of her husband and son; "what is left to Virgie is service, subordination, anonymity" (Ladd 62). If, as Sprengnether notes, the mother's body is "a locus of difference and estrangement," Katie represents Virgie's home but is an integral representative of the community whose values leave no room for artistic expression from a rebellious teen turned unconventional woman. As Katie ages and Virgie enters her forties, Katie uses guilt to motivate Virgie to obey, remarking that she is always alone, knowing that this will prompt Virgie to "mind." Although Katie sees Virgie's obedience as a "blessed wonder," on the day she dies, she seems finally but wordlessly to embrace her daughter's rebellious spirit. Seeing Virgie "struggling against a real hard plaid" to make a dress, suggestive of Virgie pushing herself creatively and refusing to take the easy way in her art, Katie longs to be covered in the material (Welty 430). Since she never articulates this, Katie dies with her last words to her daughter a command to keep fanning her.

When Katie dies, so does Virgie's last tie to Morgana, so her mother's passing is necessary to Virgie's liberation and "freedom of movement" (Ladd 63). As soon as Virgie realizes her mother is dead, "a torrent of riches seem[s] to flow over the room, submerging it, loading it with what was over-sweet," indicating that she can soon leave behind her family obligations and the limitations of her community (Welty 432). Katie's funeral is marked with mourners telling Virgie that she does not know what she lost and that her mother was always

more valuable than she, but Virgie pulls away from the Morgana women trying to force her to see her mother's washed and dressed body, indicating that she is highly aware of what she has lost: the willingness to go along with the community ideals expressed by Katie. Before she sells her family's things and leaves Morgana, Virgie takes on one last obligation: to cut the grass in her mother's yard according to her mother's schedule. After, since Virgie "is the onliest one now," she can explore what she wants to do next (Welty 447).

The death of the mother is impactful to another daughter in *The Golden Apples*: Cassie Morrison, who, unlike Virgie, cannot move past her loss and, in fact, is bound more to Morgana because of it. Cassie's mother, Mrs. Morrison, who appears in "June Recital," is characterized as flighty, inconsistent, and longing, with hints of her subjectivity separate from mothering emerging at various points in the story. One conversation between mother and daughter about Miss Eckhart's metronome indicates that the two do not fully know each other and even speak a different language. When Mrs. Morrison refers to a "*dip*" in a song, Cassie is mystified by the use of the word, asking if her mother "could...have played the piano," to which Mrs. Morrison replies, "Child, I could have *sung*" (Welty 293). This conversation is revealing in that Cassie does not understand her mother's vocabulary and does not know enough about her mother's past to know if she had any musical talent. Additionally, Mrs. Morrison reveals that she could have sung but did not, implying that she had a dream that did not come to fruition. Her hand gesture accompanying the statement belies its seriousness: "she threw her hand from her, as though all music might as well now go jump off a bridge" (Welty 293). With the revelation in "The Wanderers" that Mrs. Morrison suddenly commits suicide one day, her gesture takes on a darker tone. In this brief exchange between Cassie and Mrs. Morrison, the two represent lack of familiarity between mother and child that is a consequence of birth castration.

Although Mrs. Morrison appears fully integrated into Morgana's community of wives and mothers, throughout "June Recital," there are hints that her socially prescribed roles leave her creatively unfulfilled, feeling less than a unified subject. She is known only as Mrs. Morrison in "June Recital," calling into question how close she truly is to her community; unlike Snowdie and Katie, but like the outcast Miss Eckhart, Mrs. Morrison is not referred to by first name. Mrs. Morrison has strong outbursts about seemingly innocuous issues, at one point saying passionately, "Oh, I hate that old MacLain house next door to me! I hate having it there all the time. I'm worn out with Miss Snowdie's cross!" (Welty 295). The cross as a symbol of sacrifice and martyrdom hints that Mrs. Morrison is frustrated with Snowdie for apparently symbolizing the long-suffering wife, a narrow role that limits freedom of expression. In contrast, Mrs. Morrison oddly dismisses Mr. Voight's act of exposing himself to a group of children, calling his crime "spontaneous combustion" and teasing Cassie to "live and let live" (Welty 295). The implication is that Mrs. Morrison has more empathy for and more readily identifies with Mr. Voight over Snowdie because he, although perversely and illegally, is acting against societal expectations. Through "June Recital," the narrator mentions repeatedly that Mrs. Morrison does not like Miss Eckhart, perhaps due to Miss Eckhart's refusal to leave Morgana even at the expense of her artistic expression. Mrs. Morrison may also see something of herself in the piano teacher who had to channel her talents into more practical pursuits. Expressing this dislike openly would compromise Mrs. Morrison's reputation in the community as cheery and fun, so she makes snide asides to Cassie about Miss Eckhart. However, Mrs. Morrison's guilt at feeling antagonistic toward Miss Eckhart prompts her to maintain Cassie's piano lessons, using her daughter to maintain her kind image. Mrs. Morrison does not seem particularly concerned with Cassie developing as a piano player, for she is typically late to her daughter's recitals, which

Cassie views as a betrayal. Although Cassie justifies Mrs. Morrison's lateness as an aspect of who she is, perpetual tardiness implies that Mrs. Morrison does not want to see her daughter create when she has been deprived of the opportunity. Deprivation figures in a conversation Mrs. Morrison has with her son, Loch, with whom she discusses a party menu. His response, "Were you hungry, Mama?," is a question about Mrs. Morrison's perpetual condition (Welty 328). Constricted by her roles as wife, mother, and community member, Mrs. Morrison cannot find satisfaction in vicariously enjoying her daughter's musical expression and thus confronts her dissatisfaction in a series of small outbursts.

As the mother separated by her children by castration, Mrs. Morrison is both present and absent to them. Her absences are often literal; Cassie remarks that she "always lost her mother in crowds," although Mrs. Morrison claims that Cassie is the one who "vanishes" and "gets away" (Welty 298). This claim speaks to the presence and absence on both sides of the mother-child dyad but may also hint at Mrs. Morrison's underlying envy of her daughter, who has the ability to "get away" from Morgana and its constrictive community. However, Mrs. Morrison's death keeps Cassie firmly in Morgana, a piano teacher like the despised Miss Eckhart, memorializing the loss of her mother. At Katie Rainey's funeral in "The Wanderers," Cassie stays near Virgie to advise her on the grieving process and offer empathy; Cassie's behavior indicates that the final castration between her and Mrs. Morrison has left her in a compulsive, repetitive state of mourning. Before Katie's service begins, Cassie warns Virgie that the start of the funeral is "the worst," and when Virgie prepares to leave Morgana, Cassie tells her, "You'll never get over it, never!," referring to the death of her mother (Welty 445, 457). Cassie displaces onto Virgie her own inability to accept the loss of her mother, which is most prominently seen in the ornate, expensive angel that decorates Mrs. Morrison's grave and the flowers spelling out Mrs.



Morrison's name in Cassie's yard. These highly visible tributes to Mrs. Morrison may indicate Cassie's guilt at not knowing her mother enough to prevent her suicide and Cassie's desire for the mother manifesting in objects standing in for the maternal presence.

*The Golden Apples* is a short story cycle centered on complicated relationships between mothers and children that may be reciprocal, destabilized, or uneven, all shaping and affecting the subjectivity of the people on both sides of the dyad. In Welty's work, reading mother-child relationships according to Madelon Sprengnether's theory of birth castration gives insight into the ways mothers and daughters try and often fail to identify with, live for and through, and relate to each other. Going beyond simple personality and values differences, the mother-child connections and conflicts in the short story cycle speak to issues within insular communities based on their connection to dominant ideology. In this way, familial relationships are the microcosm of the community.

## 5 “BUT IN DREAMS YOU LIVE”: THE COMPLEXITY OF THE MOTHER IN NATASHA TRETHERWEY’S POETRY

In Natasha Trethewey’s poems, the mother as embodiment of trauma explains not only the complex mother-daughter connection but also this relationship’s connections to broader concerns of the South’s history of racial discrimination and violence. Poems from *Native Guard* and other volumes of Trethewey’s work incorporate the poetic voice of the adult child to approach matrilineal and cultural trauma with ambivalence that includes “immediacy and distance, safety and danger” (Henninger 56-57). A particularly prominent figure in Trethewey’s work is her mother, Gwendolyn, subject to racism for being black and for her interracial marriage to Trethewey’s father, and who was later killed by her abusive second husband. In an interview with Sara Kaplan, Trethewey says of *Native Guard*, “People tend to speak less of the elegiac quality of the book, that the book is about my mother, that everything in it, actually, is a way of making sense of what’s buried” (“Interview: Natasha Trethewey” 73). Poems from *Native Guard* and other works address Gwendolyn’s life and death and Trethewey’s ambivalent feelings when reflecting on their mother-daughter connection. As Giorgia De Cenzo notes, “Trethewey tries to build, in words, a monument to the life of her mother” (21). Ekphrastic poems including those about Gwendolyn, narration of memories that lie outside the ekphrastic frame, and ruminations on her mother’s violent passing are the means for Trethewey to explore the mother-daughter dyad and her mother’s status as “throwaway body” in southern history while recovering her mother’s history. Since, according to Katherine Henninger, “Trethewey chooses to contextualize her experience in...the ongoing condition of being a...daughter,” the complex connection between mother and daughter is worthy of analysis (56).

My analysis of the mother in Trethewey’s poetry uses Madelon Sprengnether’s feminist

psychoanalytic framework that argues for the significance of Freudian castration occurring at birth instead of during a child's early years. In Freudian theory, castration is the point at which the child separates from and disavows the mother in order to identify with the power of the father and develop his or her subjectivity. If castration occurs at birth, the father becomes a background figure and the mother is the powerful figure because she initiates separation from the child. As a result, she becomes a complex, ambivalent figure, paradoxically embodying wholeness and the impossibility of plenitude, her body the site of a traumatic splitting.

In Freudian theory, the mother is not a subject: she signifies nothing (Sprengher 230). Freud addresses castration within the Oedipus complex in a way that renders the mother a prop and platform for her children's development. When a boy sees female genitals and the absence of a penis in someone otherwise like himself, he accepts castration and knows he must repudiate the castrated mother to avoid the same fate. Therefore, the boy seeks identification with the father, who will aid the boy's development, in contrast with the mother, whose weakness will hinder the boy's development. During the boy's development, the original love-object, the mother's breast, has long been withdrawn, so the mother as love-object must be given up. Then the father's authority intervenes to push the boy further away from the mother, for the mother threatens regression to the lack of differentiation of infancy. For a little girl, awareness of and belief in castration occur when she sees a boy's penis for the first time and feel shortchanged and inferior, thinking she must have been castrated at some point. As she develops, the girl takes her father as a love-object, which pushes her away from the mother, whom the little girl sees as responsible for her lack.

Castration happening at birth is a loss, separation from the mother, that the child cannot process at the time. However, as the child develops, he or she will carry "an inner absence" and

later losses in the child's life will look back at this first great separation and derive meaning from it (Sprengnether 229). The mother's re-envisioned body would signal the mourning process and represent both the dream of completeness and its impossibility; it is "home and not home, presence and absence" (Sprengnether 223). Additionally, applying Freud's concept of the uncanny to birth castration, rendering the mother's body as the site of the uncanny, shows how there is "difference and familiarity on both sides of the mother-infant relationship" (Sprengnether 233). In this re-envisioning of Freudian castration, the mother plays a formative role in her child's life from birth on and is not simply a shadow figure for which the child longs.

Although longing is not the only hallmark of the mother-child relationship, it is present in the bridge, an epigraph, between the opening poem and second poem in *Native Guard*, which includes the lines,

I'm going there to meet my mother  
 She said she'd meet me when I come  
 I'm only going over Jordan  
 I'm only going over home. [3]

These lyrics, slightly modified from the original, are from the traditional song "Wayfaring Stranger." The song focuses on a person looking forward to the afterlife, where he or she can reunite with loved ones and leave behind a world of sadness and sickness. If Trethewey's poetic persona is the titular stranger, perhaps she feels lost and not fully seen without her mother. A wayfarer is a traveler, but connotatively, this person is rootless, without a foundation. The song's original lyrics are "I'm going there to *see* [emphasis mine] my mother," which implies distance; although the singer of "Wayfaring Stranger" is going to the afterlife, he or she does not use words that connote contact with the mother in the afterlife. In contrast, Trethewey's use of

“meet” signifies hope that through her words, she can reclaim the mother and connect with her (Turner 105). “Meet” also addresses the impossibilities inherent in the mother-child connection, since Trethewey can re-envision her mother through her poetry but cannot recover the wholeness of the mother-child dyad. Trethewey’s mention in “Shooting Wild” from *Monument* that she “can’t recall [Gwendolyn’s] voice since she’s been dead” further indicates the growing distance between the two; even Trethewey’s memories of her mother can retrieve only so much (line 13). Gwendolyn’s murder making a unified connection impossible intensifies the futility of Trethewey’s desire.

In “My Mother Dreams Another Country,” the speaker depicts the time of wholeness between mother and child, indicating that the maternal influence on a child’s subjectivity begins even before birth. Destiny Birdsong argues that this poem focuses on the ways the mother’s body transfers trauma to her child (99). Preoccupied with imagining the racist names that her biracial child may be called, pregnant Gwendolyn ponders baby names in a nursery decorated with white dolls. While pregnant,

Every day she is flanked by the rituals of superstition,

and there is a name she will learn for this too:

*maternal impression* – the shape, like an unknown

country, marking the back of the newborn’s thigh. (ll. 11-14)

Since Gwendolyn, along with her husband, Trethewey’s father, will later gift Trethewey white dolls and other toys tied to whiteness, the scene of Trethewey’s mother in the nursery hints at the ways dominant ideology will work through her to affect her child later in life. Although Trethewey’s father will play a role in her life, the phrase “maternal” impression gives both credit and blame for the way her child will turn out. Gwendolyn is also advised by her friends to eat,

act, and move in ways that will positively imprint her child, for to worry or eat the wrong food would cause harm. However, they see no issue with Gwendolyn eating dirt, as though, instead of defiling her child, she is making the soil of Mississippi part of her child (“My Mother” ll. 18-19). Much of *Native Guard* addresses the ambivalent feelings Trethewey has for Mississippi, her home and not home, linking the influence of the maternal body to the influence of one’s place of birth. Though considered an old wives’ tale, the superstition of maternal impression is akin to the impact of the mother on the child as soon as the castration of birth occurs. Maternal impression is often an embodied influence and legacy, also addressed in “Early Evening, Frankfort, Kentucky” from *Domestic Work*, where pregnant Gwendolyn’s laughter “ripp[es] down into [Trethewey’s] blood,” giving the unborn daughter a taste of joy (l. 16).

The ekphrastic poem “Mano Prieta” from *Thrall* continues the embodied imprint motif in its depiction of a photograph, taken in 1969, including Trethewey and her parents. The green drapery in the background resembles a rushing current, the force that will eventually separate the family. Trethewey’s father, Eric, sits on a thronelike chair, invoking his status as the head or king of family, while Gwendolyn is positioned differently:

On the chair’s arm  
 my mother looms above me,  
 perched at the edge as though  
 she would fall off. The camera records  
 her single gesture. Perhaps to still me,  
 she presses my arm with a forefinger,  
 makes visible a hypothesis of blood,  
 its empire of words: the imprint

on my body of her lovely dark hand. (ll. 10-18).

Perched, instead of comfortably seated, Gwendolyn appears on the verge of falling off, or separating from the family. Despite her precariousness, Gwendolyn imprints her daughter, who still looks as white as her father, in order to forge a connection between the two; this physical gesture also makes clear to viewers of the photograph that the two are mother and daughter instead of maid and charge. Such misidentification of the relationship between Gwendolyn and Trethewey by the public takes place in *Thrall's* "The Americans" in the section titled "Help, 1968." When Gwendolyn takes her daughter for walks, people believe that the darker-skinned woman is the nurse for the light-skinned, seemingly white child. To the people who see the pair walking, Gwendolyn is "a prop: a black backdrop, / the dark foil in this American story" (ll. 68-69). The appearance of racial difference in mother and daughter makes visible the separation between the two upon the castration of birth and partly explains the ambiguity of this particular relationship, since the two appear to be disconnected and would be treated differently in the racial hierarchy according to their distinct appearances.

"Blond" takes a different approach to the concept of maternal impression. The poem focuses on a picture of Trethewey dressed in a blond wig and tutu, Christmas presents from her mother and father. She, Trethewey's persona, "didn't know to ask, nor that it mattered, / if there'd been a brown version" because it would be years until she knew that black dolls existed and because she had internalized the clichés that blonds had more fun and were preferred by gentlemen (ll. 12-13). It does not matter that there is no brown version of the costume because in her southern community, the black child or woman is not aspirational. In the picture, taken by Gwendolyn, Trethewey is

in the foreground –

my blond wig a shining halo, a newborn likeness  
 to the child that chance, the long odds,  
 might have brought. (“Blond” ll. 22-25)

Gwendolyn as photographer literally takes herself out of the picture, the only figures in the frame Trethewey and her white father. By providing her daughter with the trappings of whiteness and by using the camera to frame an alternate narrative where Trethewey, the child of a white father, is white or can pass, Gwendolyn upholds all that dominant ideology values and imprints this on her daughter. This complicity in the power structure that erases the black mother in favor of the white father is likely due to Gwendolyn being victimized by racism through her life – white southern patriarchy is the only structure she knows.

The theme of maternal imprinting as complicit in upholding dominant ideology is also present in “Southern Gothic.” In childhood, Trethewey comes home from school telling her parents about the racist words aimed at her, “words that take shape / outside of us” (ll. 14-15). Both of her parents are silent, the mother’s lips coldly, tightly closed and the father’s face expressing grief.

Dreaming,  
 I am again the child with too many questions –  
 the endless *why* and *why* and *why*  
 my mother cannot answer, her mouth closed. (“Southern Gothic” ll. 5-8)

In “Southern Gothic,” Trethewey easily reads her father’s reaction, and in “What the Body Can Say,” she reads the body of the statue that she views. In contrast, her mother appears inscrutable and unknowable, likely internalizing her anger and sadness while appearing to advocate for silence in the face of racism. This silence will influence Trethewey in *Native*



*Guard*'s "Southern History," where she does not contest her history teacher arguing that slaves were happy before the Civil War. Although both her mother and father stay silent when hearing of the schoolyard abuse, Trethewey dreams only of her mother's response when, as an adult, she reflects on this time. In "White Lies" from *Domestic Work*, Gwendolyn is again the parent on whom Trethewey's recollections of racial ambivalence center. Trethewey recounts trying to pass as white and suffering subsequent punishment from her mother:

But I paid for it every time  
 Mama found out.  
 She laid her hands on me,  
 then washed out my mouth  
 with Ivory soap. *This*  
*is to purify*, she said,  
*and cleanse your lying tongue.* (ll. 19-25)

From her mother, Trethewey receives both explicit and implicit guidance, a contrast to Gwendolyn's silence in "Southern Gothic." The punishment teaches Trethewey that denial of one's identity is an immoral, impure act. However, that her mother uses white soap to make Trethewey clean again connects whiteness with a particular "rightness," an ideological principle Trethewey internalizes and struggles with throughout her youth. In "Blond," "Southern Gothic," and "White Lies," the mother's influence exceeds the father's, a theme that is evident from the beginning of *Native Guard*.

"The Southern Crescent," the opening poem of *Native Guard*'s first section, begins with sixteen-year-old Gwendolyn's train journey to meet her father for the first time. *California*, her destination, "a word / she can't stop repeating," hints at Freud's concept of the repetition

compulsion, where the person engaging in the same activity again and again seeks to return to an earlier state of pleasure (ll. 11-12). Repetition compulsion may also speak to the core of a person's desire. In Gwendolyn's case, she is seeking a wholeness in her family and the promise of a fresh start, also seen when she repeats "Over and over / she [practices] meeting her father" ("Southern Crescent" ll. 12-13). Gwendolyn holds a picture of her father through the trip, using it to try to find him on the train platform, but he never comes; despite her abandonment, she continues to hold the picture, giving her the power of the gaze over a man who will not grant her that power in person. Although Trethewey knows of the trip only from her mother's telling, she presents this story in present and future tense, giving the story immediacy, connecting mother and daughter with disappointment over the absence of a father. This connection is evident later in the poem, when Gwendolyn and Trethewey take a train trip to see Trethewey's father and the train derails, making this meeting also unfulfilled, binding the two in "the uncertainty / of it all" ("Southern Crescent" ll. 26-27). The poem closes with a third train trip, and in this last journey, Gwendolyn and Trethewey feel the promise and anticipation of traveling where the destination is not to a father. On this journey, the pair embodies Sprengnether's theorized powerful mother-daughter connection that has no reliance on fathers. In the poem's final lines, the speaker says,

I watch  
 each small town pass before my window  
 until the light goes, and the reflection  
 of my mother's face appears, clearer now  
 as evening comes on, dark and certain. ("Southern Crescent" ll. 32-36)

Gwendolyn's clear reflection represents the complexity of the mother and child bond. Her presence contrasts with the poem's absent fathers, but the clarity Trethewey sees is in her

mother's reflection, not her face, which implies that the child does not truly know the mother despite their connection forged in disappointment. In effect, by looking out the window instead of looking at her mother, Trethewey ensures she will not "see" her mother.

The idea that mother and daughter are completely separate subjects, split by castration, who can never fully identify with or understand each other, is also present in "Genus Narcissus." In this poem, only in adult reflection can the speaker analyze how a simple childhood gesture might mean different things to a mother and child and represent their distinct perspectives. Remembering when, as a child, she picked wild daffodils to give to her mother, Trethewey notes that she viewed her harvest as harmless:

So I did –  
 gathering up as many as I could hold,  
 then presenting them, in a jar, to my mother.  
 She put them on the sill, and I sat nearby  
 watching light bend through the glass,  
 day easing into evening, proud of myself  
 for giving my mother some small thing. ("Genus Narcissus" ll. 6-12)

Just as she watches her mother's reflection instead of her actual mother in "The Southern Crescent," in "Genus Narcissus," young Trethewey gazes at the flowers, not the recipient; these are two instances implying a lack of recognition of the mother as a separate, complex person. Trethewey can only assume that Gwendolyn likes the flowers because she displays them, but Trethewey is more focused on the flowers' beauty as a reflection of her status as a good daughter. As an adult telling this story, Trethewey sees that the flowers have disparate symbolic meanings for her and for Gwendolyn: "*Be taken with yourself, / they said to me; Die early, to my*

mother” (“Genus Narcissus” ll. 21-22). To a child, the flowers are a pretty gift, and to the child grown into an adult, a representation of childish self-absorption. When connected to the mother receiving the flowers, however, the flowers symbolize the fleeting nature of beauty and the rapid passing of time. The adult daughter speaker sees an even more sinister message in the flowers: their short life span is an ominous reminder that not everyone has a long life. In addressing this message, Trethewey expresses her guilt at not seeing signs of her mother’s early death, which is one emotional manifestation of her loss, a second, more painful castration.

“Graveyard Blues” depicts Gwendolyn’s funeral and is an extended exploration of the consequences of a permanent mother-child split reinforced at Gwendolyn’s death. When describing the atmosphere of the funeral, Trethewey says, “It rained the whole time we were laying her down; / Rained from church to grave when we put her down. / The suck of mud at our feet was a hollow sound” (ll. 1-3). “Laying her down” and “put her down” indicate a movement away from the mother and the mother’s body but also imply that the “we,” of which Trethewey is a part, has carried Gwendolyn at some point. This may mean that Trethewey served a supportive role in her mother’s life or that she bore a burden related to her mother, perhaps guilt at not being present when her mother died or at not being able to prevent her mother’s death. This guilt also emerges in “Genus Narcissus” and later in *Native Guard* in “Myth.” The hollowness of the mud below mourners’ feet connects to the emptiness of loss that harkens back to the original loss occurring at birth castration. This emptiness occurs after the funeral, too, when the speaker travels home on a road filled with holes. Even though the holes in the road are tied to the loss of the mother in death, Trethewey notes, “the home-going road’s always full of holes” (“Graveyard Blues” l. 11). If “home” is Trethewey’s mother, the relationship has always been predicated on the “inner absence” that Sprengnether references. *Native Guard*’s “After

Your Death” also addresses loss as hollow but complicates this seemingly simple association. In this poem, Trethewey cleans out her mother’s home, emptying her closet and throwing out fruit that her mother will never eat. The jars intended for Gwendolyn’s preserves stay empty, symbolic of a life interrupted. Figs on the trees in her mother’s yard initially appear normal to Trethewey, but when she picks them, one is “half eaten, the other side / already rotting” and another is “taken from the inside: / a swarm of insects hollowing it” (“After” ll. 7-10). Trethewey’s inability to see the corruption in the apparently ripe fruit represents, in part, her inability to see the totality of her mother’s life and its emptying and corrupting forces. Saying she is “too late, / again” is an expression of helplessness that she did not know enough of what her mother suffered to prevent her violent death (“After” l. 10-11). At the poem’s end, the empty fruit bowl symbolizes the coming days that Trethewey will need to fill. Because this final split between mother and child is a culmination of the ways they grow apart over time despite their connections, the emptiness represented by the bowl will be an ongoing condition for Trethewey rather than a temporary space to fill. Time and the hollowness of loss figure strongly in *Monument’s* “Letter to Inmate #271847, Convicted of Murder, 1985”; in this poem, Trethewey refers to herself as a “joyful daughter” until she hears her stepfather’s name, which makes her again a “daughter of sorrow, daughter / of the murdered woman” (ll. 14, 16-17). This change is due to the way “the past interrupts our lives,” entering into a doorway much like a hole in a tree trunk, which serves as a haven and a place to hide but also signals decay (“Letter to Inmate” ll. 17-20). Thus, loss operates in multifaceted ways, sometimes a refuge and sometimes an injurious force.

“Myth” is another poem that uses the motif of emptiness or hollowness to address the mother’s absence, but its particular approach to this motif is less about the traumatic splitting of

birth castration and more about the ambiguity attached to the mother. The poem opens with “I was asleep while you were dying. / It’s as if you slipped through some rift, a hollow / I make between my slumber and my waking” (ll. 1-3). These first lines are imbued with guilt that the speaker did not “know” her mother enough to sense what was happening to her, and this lack of knowing the mother is also addressed by the mother’s positioning between sleeping and waking; she defies categorization. Gwendolyn is, therefore, somewhere between life and death, spectral and insubstantial enough to slip through a rift but embodied enough that Trethewey tries to pull her mother from the dream world “into morning” (“Myth” ll. 7). The repeated line “You’ll be dead again tomorrow” connects to the repetition compulsion of “The Southern Crescent,” and in this case, Trethewey is using the line to draw closer to the trauma of her mother’s death and to the object of her desire, which could be both closure or reconciliation with her mother (“Myth” l. 6). This repetition compulsion is echoed in “Meditation at Decatur Square” in *Monument*, the speaker saying, “she lives in my mind like a book // to which I keep returning even / as the story remains the same,” which adds to the idea of the futility of pursuing one’s desire and the inevitability of one continuing to do so (4 ll. 4-7)

During the funeral in “Graveyard Blues,” the minister calls for a witness and the speaker raises her hand to also bear witness to the fact that her mother had a life, not only a death. The sun coming out after the funeral initially seems to signify a moment of peace. However, the speaker notes that the sun “glared down on me as I turned and walked away -- / My back to my mother, leaving her where she lay” (“Graveyard Blues” ll. 8-9), and the sun’s glaring sounds like a condemnation of Trethewey’s departure, a manifestation of her internalized guilt and sadness. Although the mother-child relationship is predicated on traumatic separation, leaving the cemetery feels like leaving her mother for good, dismissing her by turning away. This turning

away, initiated in “The Southern Crescent” and “Genus Narcissus,” is the final rupture between mother and child. By the poem’s end, Trethewey’s complicated mother-daughter connection is expressed by “I wander now among names of the dead: / My mother’s name, stone pillow for my head” (“Graveyard Blues” ll. 13-14). Anathema to the comfort associated with a child resting against her mother’s body, the gravestone is a cold, hard substitute for Gwendolyn, bearing her name but marking her absence.

“What the Body Can Say” continues the motif of stone standing in for the mother in a scene where Trethewey observes a statue in the pose of grief and relates it to an encounter with Gwendolyn before her death: “But what was my mother saying / that day not long before her death – her face tilted up / at me, her mouth falling open, wordless” (ll. 11-13). The statue’s emotional message is immediately recognizable to Trethewey but in contrast, she cannot understand what her mother’s open mouth means. The speaker relates Gwendolyn’s open mouth to a church parishioner taking communion, an act meant to honor sacrifice, but this observation is punctuated by a question mark to indicate uncertainty. If the mother-child relationship is marked by simultaneous familiarity and unfamiliarity, Trethewey’s inability to read the person closest to her emblemizes this uncanniness. Even seeing something relatable in her mother’s gestures does little to illuminate Gwendolyn’s feelings for Trethewey – her open mouth could be a supplication, an expression of grief, horror, or surprise, something Trethewey cannot grasp. In the poem’s last lines, Trethewey ponders, “my mother wanted / something I still can’t name: what, kneeling, / my face behind my hands, I might ask of God” (“What the Body” ll. 16-18). Saying that she cannot name what her mother wanted is a continuation of the lack of understanding between mother and child but also represents the trauma of birth castration; it, too, cannot be named. “What the Body Can Say” indicates that the body of the mother, both

promising and withholding wholeness, cannot be easily read and interpreted by the child, whose attempts to connect the mother's body to what is familiar ends with confronting the unfamiliar.

In *Native Guard*, Gwendolyn's body, classified often as a corporeal record of violence suffered at the hands of her abusive husband, is present only in Trethewey's recollections. In *Native Guard's* "Photograph: Ice Storm, 1971," the beauty of the described picture of Gwendolyn belies a more violent story. The poem consists of a series of questions: "Why / the tired face of a woman, suffering, / made luminous by the camera's eye?" (ll. 1-3) and

The picture we took that first morning,  
the front yard a beautiful, strange place –  
why on the back has someone made a list  
of our names, the date, the event: nothing  
of what's inside – mother, stepfather's fist? ("Photograph" ll. 11-15)

Gwendolyn is objectified by the gaze of the photographer, her husband and Trethewey's stepfather. She is beautiful through the camera's lens because the photographer controls the visual aspect of the family narrative, but the adult Trethewey understands both the selectivity of the camera and the story behind the photograph that her childhood self may not have. The speaker asking why her suffering mother is beautiful in the picture also gives insight into the ways domestic violence can stay insidiously hidden. This is further addressed in the question about the writing on the back of the photo, which provides a fraction of Gwendolyn's story, rendering her as beautiful and strange as the landscape on that icy day. Through Trethewey's study of the photograph, there is an attempt to recover what the picture and its words leave out, her mother's more extensive story. "Family Portrait" in *Domestic Work* continues with the photographic motif but uses it to explore maternal absence through the phantom limb. When



Trethewey is a child, her parents schedule a family portrait with a local photographer, a man with no legs. After Trethewey's father settles the photographer inside and the family poses for its picture, Trethewey sees the photographer "bother / the space for knees, shins, scratching air" ("Family Portrait" ll. 12-13). The man's phantom limb speaks to the haunting feeling Trethewey feels years later, "itch[ing] for what's not there," her phantom limb, the deceased mother ("Family Portrait" l. 14).

In addition to "Photograph: Ice Storm, 1971" and "What the Body Can Say," Gwendolyn's body as record of violence is also explored in "What Is Evidence." The poem's ambiguous title may refer to what law enforcement counts as evidence of domestic violence sufficient to arrest a perpetrator. It may also refer to what is left of the mother after her death to show that she existed and that there is something to remember her by. The poem's lists of evidence, all worded in the negative, beginning with the word *not*, imply that the items and memories left behind are insufficient in some way.

Not the fleeting bruises she'd cover  
 with makeup, a dark patch as if imprint  
 of a scope she'd pressed her eye too close to,  
 looking for a way out. ("What is Evidence" ll. 1-4)

are part of that insufficient evidence, the bruises symbolizing violence and particularly the violence exerted on a woman seeking freedom. While the picture in "Photograph: Ice Storm, 1971" addresses Gwendolyn's beauty as a fragment of who she is, Trethewey's memories of her mother in "What is Evidence" emphasize that the signs of abuse on Gwendolyn's body are also a fragment of who she is. These partial stories must be read together to begin to see Gwendolyn as a complex subject. The lines of "What Is Evidence" continue to name Gwendolyn's quivering

voice, false teeth, restraining order, and grave marker as not the complete evidence of a life lived. Taken as her whole story, these items focus only on the tragic aspects of her life. An image in the poem of Gwendolyn “leaning / into a pot of bones on the stove” implies that there is a tendency to “lean into” a narrative of the victim that denies her subjectivity beyond the violent thing that happened to her (“What is Evidence” ll. 5-6). “What Is Evidence” ends with “Only the landscape of her body – splintered / clavicle, pierced temporal – her thin bones / settling a bit each day, the way all things do” serving as evidence (ll. 12-14). Separated by dashes, these pieces of evidence are fragmented, parts with no cohesive whole. Consistent with Sprengnether’s contention that the mother’s body is designated as traumatic, the body alone, in the daughter’s view, is the only proof of a life lived through both violence and the passing of time. The traumatized maternal body is configured even more vividly in “Articulation” from *Monument*, which depicts Gwendolyn’s dead body: her shattered ring finger symbolizing the violent end to her marriage, the bullet in her temple ending her last thought (ll. 13-15). Despite these grievous wounds, Trethewey sees saintliness in her mother’s face, perhaps a way to put her mother at a safe distance for grieving or a way to render Gwendolyn’s death less senseless. Compounding the wounded saint image, Trethewey later has a vision of her mother with a hole in the center of her forehead and light pouring through the hole (“Articulation” ll. 17-20). This vision compels Trethewey to “answer [Gwendolyn’s] life / with mine” and “find [her] calling there,” in effect, lending her gift of poetry to retell Gwendolyn’s story (“Articulation” ll. 21-22, 24).

“Cameo” and “Hot Combs” from *Domestic Work* also address how knowledge of Gwendolyn’s suffering puts Trethewey in a position of simultaneous familiarity and unfamiliarity with the mother as she filters her childhood memories through this knowledge. Additionally, the detailed descriptions of the mother’s body speak to Trethewey’s longing for a

maternal presence that will always be unreachable. In “Cameo,” Trethewey remembers, “As a child, I would awaken dark mornings / to peer from beneath the covers and watch / my mother dress” (ll. 1-3). Trethewey knows every physical aspect of her mother, from the way Gwendolyn’s slip “cling[s] / like water to her back” to the way her mother plucks her brows (“Cameo” ll. 6-7). Only in adulthood, though, can Trethewey insert her full awareness of her mother’s suffering to fill the gaps in her memories and understand what she did not previously know about Gwendolyn. Gwendolyn’s act of putting on a necklace becomes darker with the image of “a cameo pressing into the hollow / of her throat, hard enough to bruise,” implying subtle violence (“Cameo” ll. 19-20). “Hot Combs,” the poem that immediately follows “Cameo,” focuses on Trethewey’s memories of Gwendolyn straightening her hair, and, as in “Cameo,” the memory has a vivid physicality, with Trethewey recalling the graceful lines of her mother’s wrist and neck and the sweat on her brow and lips. Similarly to “Photograph: Ice Storm, 1971,” pain makes Gwendolyn beautiful and in the vein of “Cameo,” Trethewey imposes her knowledge of her mother’s abuse on the memory. In this instance, the hot comb singes her brow, “her face [is] made strangely beautiful / as only suffering can do” (“Hot Combs” ll. 13-14). These memory poems expose gaps in mother-daughter familiarity by imposing the daughter’s adult awareness on nostalgic moments and by implying that these moments bring up questions about the mother’s happiness and sense of self.

“Letter” in *Native Guard* also explores the pieces of the mother’s life and fragmented memories of the mother’s life that show how knowing the intricacies of that life will always elude the child. The speaker recalls sending a note to a friend and mistakenly writing the word “errant” in place of “errand.” Errant, which refers to something veering away from what is standard or expected, is connected to Gwendolyn’s sudden and unexpected death. The “t” in

errant prompts Trethewey to think of a flat line and relate this line to death, “the symbol / over the church house door,” and the ashes on her mother’s forehead for Ash Wednesday (“Letter” ll. 10-11). Shapes as metonymic stand-ins for loss are also central to “Transfiguration” in *Monument*, in which the speaker notes that many things are not the shape of loss: a bell, a circle, the sign of the cross, the chalk outline of her mother’s body (ll. 1-7). Instead, loss is seen in the shadow cast by a fig tree; the shadow is the tree’s distorted double (“Transfiguration” ll. 9-10). By tying the flat line of the letter “t” to her mother in “Letter,” Trethewey sees her mainly in terms of her tragic end. The symbol over the church door alludes to Passover and suggests that some people are marked for death, while the reference to Ash Wednesday denotes mourning, mortality, and penance, a complex of feelings that may occur after a tragic death. Mourning naturally follows from most losses along with the sense that life is fragile, while the mourner may feel obligated to offer penance for being unable to prevent the death.

In “Monument” in *Native Guard*, the idea of paying penance is complicated by Trethewey’s grief-driven inaction. She admits to not tending Gwendolyn’s grave, making the location of her mother’s resting place difficult to find. Covered in grass and weeds, the plot is part of a “blurred and waving” landscape that speaks to how ungraspable Gwendolyn’s presence feels; in death, she is the spectral mother (“Monument” l. 10). While Trethewey stands at the gravesite,

At my mother’s grave, ants streamed in  
and out like arteries, a tiny hill rising  
above her untended plot. Bit by bit, red dirt piled up, spread  
like a rash on the grass; I watched a long time  
the ants’ determined work,

how they brought up soil  
of which she will be part,  
and piled it before me. (“Monument” ll. 11-18)

The ants compared to arteries gives them a vital, nourishing function as they bring Trethewey an offering, a part of Gwendolyn’s resting place, and provide a continuous connection between her and Gwendolyn. Despite this small link to her mother, it exists between the living daughter and deceased mother, so Trethewey’s “world / [is] made by displacement,” structured on loss and “reminder[s] of what / I haven’t done” (“Monument” ll. 6-7, 21-22). The mound of dirt is both “a rash on the grass” and “a blister on my heart, / a red and humming swarm” (“Monument” ll. 14, 23-24). A rash connotes allergy or illness and a series of unpleasant things happening, implying that Trethewey’s mourning is unhealthy and ongoing, the blister on her heart representing internalized pain. “Limen” from *Domestic Work*, like “Monument,” explores loss and distance through the filter of natural elements. In this work, the sounds of a woodpecker prompt the speaker to think of “a door knocker / to the cluttered house of memory in which / I can almost see my mother’s face,” Gwendolyn’s hard-to-recall face resembling the blurry landscape of her untended gravesite in “Monument” (“Limen” ll. 4-6). Trethewey can imagine her mother just beyond the catalpa tree, hanging sheets to dry, “each one / a thin white screen between us,” representing the distance between mother and daughter that cannot be breached (“Limen” ll. 9-10).

In a few poems, the distance between Trethewey and Gwendolyn manifests in Trethewey’s ambivalence prompting feelings of anger and resignation. The simultaneous familiarity and lack of familiarity between mother and daughter breed ambivalence, a feeling

strongly present in “Saturday Matinee” from *Domestic Work*. The poem recalls Trethewey’s impressions of the movie *Imitation of Life* and her identification with the biracial girl in the film:

I can see why the mixed girl  
wants her, instead, a mother always smiling  
from a fifties magazine. She doesn’t want  
the run-down mama, her blues—  
dark circles around the eyes,  
that weary step and *hush-baby* tone. (“Saturday” ll. 24-29)

After her mother’s divorce from Eric Trethewey and her second marriage, Trethewey feels she knows Gwendolyn only by the fatigue and sadness that have worn her down. Simultaneously, Trethewey resents and pities her mother and, despite loving her, desires a more simplistic maternal figure unaffected by the weight of abandonment and violence. “Imperatives for Carrying on in the Aftermath,” the prefacing poem of *Monument*, addresses the repressed anger Trethewey has carried in the wake of her mother’s death, a result of people misreading Gwendolyn. In the poem, the speaker reminds herself not to react when people imply that Gwendolyn was weak to stay with a man who abused her and not to cling to the memory of the judicial system permitting her violent stepfather to re-offend. Trethewey recalls a professor telling her to “*unburden [herself] of the death of [her] mother*” and links that to what is in her heart, the conviction that she “*carr[ies] [Gwendolyn’s] corpse on [her] back*” (“Imperatives” ll. 31-32, 40). Trethewey’s understanding of grief as a ponderous, physical burden, a laborious process, is what shapes her mother-centered poems. As she says in “Letter to Inmate #271847, Convicted of Murder, 1985,” “Everywhere I go she is with me – my long-dead mother” (ll. 23-

24) and in “Waterborne” from *Monument* “Do you know what it means // to have a wound that never heals?” (ll. 16-17).

Natasha Trethewey said of her work, “I want to create a public record of people who are often excluded from the public record. I want to inscribe their stories into the larger American story. I want readers who might be unfamiliar with these people, their lives, and their particular circumstances to begin to know something about them, to see in the people that I write about some measure of them, and to, I think, enlarge the community of humanity” (“Inscriptive Restorations” 1025). *Native Guard* delves into the stories of many unmemorialized people whose recovered histories, including those of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Regiment of the Louisiana Native Guards, fill in gaps in southern history. One of the most significant stories, however, is that of Gwendolyn Turnbough, Trethewey’s mother, and the complex connection maintained with her daughter through life and after death. Trethewey’s poetry, an attempt to “meet” her mother again as addressed in the bridge between *Native Guard*’s first and second poems, cannot answer all her questions about the woman she lost traumatically, but they speak to the enduring voice of the mother who needs to be recognized and analyzed. Applying a re-envisioning of the Freudian mother, where castration occurs at birth, to Trethewey’s connection to the mother in *Native Guard* and other poems, recovers that maternal voice while complicating the mother-child relationship. Within this theoretical framework, the mother is the site of the uncanny: both present and absent, offering the promise of fulfillment but eliciting ambivalence, a person known in many ways by her child but a stranger in other ways. While the nature of desire ensures that these conflicting qualities of the mother will never be reconciled, understanding these qualities as the outcome of birth castration ensures they will be read.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This study has addressed mothers and maternal figures in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, William Faulkner's *Light in August*, Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples*, and Natasha Trethewey's *Native Guard* and other poems, reading them through a feminist psychoanalytic lens that argues for Freudian castration occurring at birth instead of later in a child's development. Canonical psychoanalytic theory from Freud, Lacan, and object-relations theorists incorporate an Oedipal hierarchy to explain children's psychosexual development, wherein it is broadly presumed that castration occurs when the father, who represents language and culture, intervenes in the mother-child relationship to ensure the child takes his or her appropriate place in the symbolic order. In the Oedipal process, mothers signify nothing: Freudian theory renders the mother a platform for a child's development and an object to repudiate; Lacanian theory classifies the mother as nonessential to an infant's ego formation, and, as a woman, she represents lack itself; and object-relations theory requires the mother to be self-sacrificing for her infant's sake. Mother as subject does not prevail in these theories. Madelon Sprengnether argues that limited theoretical perceptions of the mother, particularly the pre-Oedipal mother of the phase occurring before the father's intervention, give insight into women's subordination in Western patriarchal society (227). Attitudes toward the mother cannot be changed as long as the Oedipal hierarchy, with the mother on the margins, is upheld in psychoanalytic theory (Sprengnether 227).

Dismantling the Oedipal hierarchy and re-envisioning the mother's role in her children's development while addressing her signification and subjectivity requires a revision of the concept of castration. Birth is the first physical separation of mother and child, and if that originary division constitutes castration, the mother's body becomes, as a site of splitting, "a



locus of difference and estrangement” (Sprengnether 233). Theorizing birth castration renders the mother a complex subject who represents to her child the promise of fulfillment and the impossibility of that fulfillment. This “divided image” of motherhood creates “difference and familiarity on both sides of the mother-infant relationship” that persists as the child develops, prompting ambivalence between mother and child (Sprengnether 230, 233). As each other’s phantom limbs upon birth, the mother and child feel simultaneously that the other is understandable and inscrutable. Arguing that castration occurs at birth makes the mother’s role in the child’s life more formative than in Freudian and Freudian-influenced theory; with the mother propelling her child into selfhood upon birth, the father is reconfigured as less powerful.

Applying the theory of birth castration to these works by Mitchell, Faulkner, Welty, and Trethewey interrogates the stereotypical images of southern women that often persist therein: the belle, the lady, and the mammy. Each type sacrifices her self-interests to another in service to patriarchal ideology: the belle shapes her behavior to please her mother and attract a suitable mate; the lady puts all her energy into supporting and nurturing her husband and children while maintaining an unflappable image; and the mammy puts her white family’s needs above her own. Just as in the case of conceptions of the pre-Oedipal mother, stereotypes of southern women contain characters within strict categories that limit expressions of complexity and desire. Scholarship on mothers and on women in southern literature has called for new ways of reading these characters, and many scholars, such as Paula Eckard, Ashley Craig Lancaster, Nagueyalti Warren, Sally Wolff, Minrose Gwin, Patricia Yaeger, Monica Carol Miller, and Betina Entzminger, have engaged in extensive character studies of these figures. However, only Doreen Fowler has used psychoanalytic theory in her analysis of women and mothers in southern

literature, but her treatment of these characters, particularly in Faulkner's works, stays true to Freudian and Freudian-influenced theory, which resists portraying femininity as subversion.

Analyzing mothers and maternal figures in works by Mitchell, Faulkner, Welty, and Trethewey indicates a need for scholarly re-envisioning of mothers in southern literature no matter the time period, genre, or author. Represented in this study are three works by women and one by a man, a novel that is a cornerstone of pop culture, a canonical novel by one of the twentieth century's most influential writers, a short story cycle, and poetry. The works in this study, published in the twentieth century with the exception of Trethewey, whose work was published in the twenty-first century, focus on time periods from pre-Civil War to the early twenty-first century (2000-2018).

Applying birth castration theory to Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* gives further insight into the subjectivity of Ellen O'Hara, Scarlett O'Hara, Mammy, and Melanie Wilkes, who all appear to fall within the strict category types of southern womanhood. An examination of Ellen O'Hara as the mother whose birthing of Scarlett compels Scarlett's development and establishes ambiguity between the mother and daughter classifies Ellen as an unsuccessful mother despite her appearance as an ideal. Devoid of passion and dedicated to selflessness at her own expense, Ellen is ill-equipped to teach her daughters how to cultivate successful relationships and adapt to a rapidly changing social order. Due in part to Ellen's repressed desires and the face she presents to her family, Scarlett sees her mother as a person to worship from afar, as her conscience, but never as someone to emulate. As a mother, Scarlett appears to completely depart from Ellen's example, but she is more like Ellen than she may acknowledge, since she focuses her energies on most other aspects of her life outside of her children. When read through a feminist psychoanalytic framework, Mammy is the only mother who truly knows Scarlett, but this

knowing cannot be reciprocated since Mammy mothers in a system of white supremacy where her authority over her white family is illusory. Although Scarlett can never base her subjectivity off Mammy, whom she never sees as an equal, she longs for Mammy's presence in a futile effort to reclaim the past. Melanie Wilkes, often serving as a double of Ellen in her service to white southern womanhood, is rendered the most influential of all Scarlett's maternal figures, through her death offering Scarlett the opportunity to work through her earlier mother loss. Before Melanie's death, the birth of her son also births Scarlett as a more capable woman, one who can manage a home and finances with little concern for her prescribed roles.

The existing scholarly conversation on mothers and mother figures in Faulkner's *Light in August* is extensive in its focus on Lena Grove and Joanna Burden, but scholarly assessment is limited to non-existent for Miss Atkins, Mrs. McEachern, Milly Hines, and Mrs. Hines. Analyzing Lena Grove according to the feminist psychoanalytic concept of birth castration addresses gaps in the ways she is commonly read: her placid exterior contradicts a complexity of character where her every public gesture and statement are intended to align her with dominant ideology even as she subtly subverts the system. Joanna Burden, often addressed critically in terms of gender performativity, can be viewed as one of Joe Christmas' maternal figures, and the concept of birth castration applied to their relationship shows how their actions toward each other, frequently misread and intended to make up for loss and lack, take them inevitably to a violent end. Joe's murder of Joanna has a foundation in his fraught relationships with his first mother figure, Miss Atkins, and the mother who adopts him, Mrs. McEachern. Both women's complex subjectivity eludes Joe, who reacts in rage to what he sees as their secretive, indirect, and overwrought behavior. Ultimately, Joe's first castrations occurred upon his birth and his birth mother's death and then when he was taken from his grandmother's care. Although he is

unaware of these losses until well into his adulthood, Joe's violent, compensatory behavior and his final, futile attempt at freedom tie back to these originary traumas.

Welty's *The Golden Apples* exemplifies, when examined through the lens of birth castration, that mothers and children have a profound impact on one another that may or may not be reciprocal and understood. Addressing Snowdie MacLain's pregnancy and birthing in a feminist psychoanalytic framework ties her complicated mother-child relationships to her equally complicated community connections. For Miss Eckhart, mothering is a means of compensating for a lack, her inability to express herself artistically, which links her to the equally repressed Mrs. Morrison. Miss Eckhart's mothering has no impact on the daughter figure she most wants to influence, Virgie Rainey, whose life path is more affected by her sometimes suffocating ties to her birth mother, Katie. For Virgie, Katie's pull keeps her in an insular community and Katie's death gives the rest of Virgie's life possibility. In contrast to Miss Eckhart and Katie Rainey being too present for their daughters or daughter-figures, Mrs. Morrison represents absence, her suicide reifying emotional distance from her children, particularly her daughter, Cassie. As an inadvertent daughter-figure for Miss Eckhart and a daughter to Mrs. Morrison, Cassie symbolizes compulsive memorializing of the lost mother, living her life much as Miss Eckhart once did and making her yard a shrine to Mrs. Morrison.

Trethewey's *Native Guard* and other poems that focus on Trethewey's murdered mother, Gwendolyn, are linked by the daughter longing for the absent mother and constantly returning to the loss of the mother through retelling memories; her repetition compulsion speaks to her desire for wholeness in the mother-daughter dyad. In the feminist psychoanalytic view of birth castration, Trethewey's mother-centered works embody the uncanniness and ambiguity of the mother-child relationship. Trethewey's poetic persona addresses Gwendolyn as a separate,

complex person seeking a sense of self-completion, constrained by racial hierarchies, often inscrutable to Trethewey in her youth. By retelling her mother's stories, Trethewey also addresses her own feelings of guilt, shame, sadness, anger, hollowness, and reconciliation surrounding Gwendolyn's violent end. In order to embody her loss and make it more tangible, Trethewey ruminates on metonymic objects that stand in for the traumatic separation: a statue, the dirt on Gwendolyn's grave, childhood photographs, Gwendolyn's abused body. Through her works, Trethewey addresses ways of working through maternal loss, particularly, retelling the mother's stories from various angles and in different poetic structures in order to piece together pieces of the mother's complicated identity.

Re-envisioning the concept of Freudian castration by theorizing its occurrence at birth and applying this theory to mothers in southern literature opens possibilities in theoretical and literary scholarship. Theoretically, the concept of birth castration brings the mother from the margins of psychoanalytic theory focusing on children's psychosexual development, thus destabilizing the patriarchal ideology that keeps her at the periphery. Additionally, pursuing the idea that mothers compel their children's subjectivity while maintaining their own opens new lines of inquiry in psychoanalytic theory that go beyond proposals in earlier theory that maternal subjectivity is possible. In southern literature scholarship, much work has been done to interrogate stereotypical images of women and mothers such as the belle, lady, and mammy. However, using the reconfiguration of a theory that has long been used to explain the underpinnings of patriarchal ideology to probe gendered roles informed and upheld by that ideology further undermines those roles. Ultimately, birth castration theory can prompt readers to know the mother in her various manifestations while acknowledging that they do not know her at all.

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