Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature

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Chapter Two

Splitting the Feminist Subject

The Archaic Mother and the Semiotic chora

The theory and narratives discussed in this chapter shift our attention from the witch as a fantasmatc therapy of a/the woman in culture towards an archaic mother of the semiotic. This archaic figure is of importance here in the context of feminist identifications with the loss of the semiotic mother rather than the loss of the symbolic phallus. The concept of the archaic mother as a continuous separation has been thoroughly explored in Continental European feminist psychoanalysis, notably by Kristeva, Cixous, Irigaray, and Braidotti, who, consequently, link the division of flesh ("sexual difference") with the division of language, and constitute the theoretic framework of the present discussion.

For Kristeva, psychoanalysis proceeds "to the arrangement of new spaces, gratifying substitutes that repair old deficiencies in the maternal space" ("Women's Time" 862). These deficiencies (or psychoses) converge "on the problematic of space, which innumerable religions of matriarchal (re)appearance attribute to 'woman'" and which Plato, recapitulating in his own system the atomists of antiquity, designated by the aporia of the chora, matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God and, consequently, defying metaphysics" (862). Following Lacan, Kristeva's concept of the symbolic is a domain of position and judgment: It establishes itself after the semiotic, during the process of the subject's self-identification; known as a "mirror stage" (Campbell 32). This identification presents itself in Kristeva's theory as a metaphorical transfer from chaotic forces to the place of significance (the symbolic). As every transfer however it contains instabilities. The instabilities of the symbolic, which fracture the centrality of the established subject, are rooted in "the prohibition placed on the maternal body," the very body that in culture inevitably constitutes a pre-linguistic space, "a chora, a receptacle" (Kristeva, "Stabat" 14), or, as Irigaray describes it, an "intimate place—which does not collect itself...in specified propositions" (Irigaray, Reader 56). Kristeva and Irigaray, delineating the Platonic concept of chora (chora, the receptacle; Plato 52), bring us back to an "invis-
ible, formless being, a mysterious, intelligible but most incomprehensible receptacle of all things" (Irigaray, Reader 56). While the chora's articulation is both uncertain and, in contrast to the symbolic, lacking position and identity, it is the aim of Continental feminist psychoanalysis, as it was of radical feminist politics discussed in the first chapter, to reexamine the semiotic subjectivities that logocentric philosophy has rendered "mysterious" and "incomprehensible" in the context of sexual difference.

Expanding the Lacanian metaphor of the "abyss of the female organ from which all life comes forth" (Kristeva qtd. in Heath 54), Kristeva speaks of an "abyss" that opens up once the umbilical cord has been severed: the separation between the mother and the child that become inaccessibly different from and to each other ("Stabat" 179). In light of the prohibition placed on the maternal body (as described by Kristeva), identifications with the somatic and psychic traces of the archaic mother are types of gender identification related to the inaccessible Lacanian "real." Posited by Butler as "a kind of melancholia in which the sex of the prohibited object is internalized as a prohibition" (Gender Trouble 63), these identifications are yet inescapably the consequence of the symbolic loss of the mother. This mother, as examined by Irigaray, should be carefully given "new life," new form, and the right to pleasure, to jouissance, and to passion. Her right to speech has to be restored, "and sometimes to cries and anger...the sentences that speak the most archaic and most contemporary relationship with the body of the mother" (Bodily Encounter 43). Thus, Continental European feminist thought extends the Freudian notion of the Oedipal mother to include other faces of the mother: the fecund mother (Cixous's central figure) and the fantasmatic (archaic) mother of the semiotic (Irigaray) both playing significant roles in the formation of subjectivity. Coinciding with two of the principal phenomena in psychoanalysis (the return of the repressed and transference), the unconscious formations of subjectivity appear in various forms of repetition (Daughter's Seduction 104). These repetitive patterns, according to Gallop, are affected not so much by the frustration of a particular desire but rather by the lack of its very recognition (104). Also, in Mitchell's analysis, the repression of unrecognized desires, the ones prohibited, transferred, and hence made unconscious, is never successful "for the tabooed desires...and their unsuccessful prohibition would inevitably return as one symptom or another" (21). The master story of these unconscious desires is the Oedipus complex—and its prohibition, which was formulated somewhat later, is the castration complex.

While unveiling the relations between this master story and the feminist emergence of the archaic mother, the Freudian formulations of the unconscious intersect unavoidably with the Derridean "alterity of the unconscious" that "is not...a hidden, virtual, or potential self-presence. It differs from, and defers, itself" (Derrida, Difference 73). The trace of the archaic mother comes precisely as an intersection, and "makes us concerned not with horizons of modified—past or future—presents, but with a 'past' that has never been present, and which never will be, whose future to come will never be a production or a reproduction in the form of presence" (73). This form of the unconscious is linked in my analysis to feminist psychoanalytical
narrative tools that work against the phallocentric assumption that female creativity can have no metaphysical sanction (except the Christian model of the Virgin Mary); in fact, against the very concept of creativity symbolically placed in opposition to female procreation. As Irigaray argues, this "lack of a self-representation to venerate, contemplate, admire or even adore" posits the female subject in the field of "the infinite/unfinished" that permanently transgresses the phallic sphere, the Lacanian sphere of "support" without which "the infinite" collapses into an endless "formlessness, into the archaism of a primitive chaos" ("Limits" 111). Although the "fe/male" is a priori inscribed with/through the phallus, she/he is not entirely there; she/he belongs to it, but not really, she/he plays the game, and acts "as if she were belonging" (Clément and Kristeva 59). While discussing the vulnerabilities, or otherwise, instabilities of the symbolic, I turn in this chapter to trace some tabooed and unrecognized desires as well as their symptoms in relation to the mother within and beyond the symbolic. In calling for recognition of the ways in which prohibited desires constitute the indefinable regions of subjectivity, I invest this subjectivity with Deleuzian and Irigaray's (decisively anti-Lacanian) readings of "becoming-a-woman," in addition to Kristeva's more conservative approach. The question for Deleuze and Irigaray alike is primarily that of the "stolen" body that undergoes fabrications of opposable organisms in the process of constituting oneself as a subject. The split from the "primary loss," crucial in the process of this constitution, forecloses access to the maternal, depriving the specifically female subject of ontological grounds for self-reflectivity. This loss, recognizable through symptoms, resonates with the position referred to by Deleuze as "symptomatology," an art of diagnosis based on the cultural readings of bodily symptoms and their implications of the loss of unity of the subject. The multi-layered Deleuzian vision of "becoming-a-subject," a dynamic entity defying the established modes of representation, opens new identifications within the symbolic (social meaning) and is thus of crucial importance for feminist psychoanalysis. Giving priority to issues of sexuality, desire, and erotic imaginary, Irigaray, and later Braidotti, reinscribe the subject as a "becoming" entity immersed both in relations to power and knowledge and in relations to unacknowledged regions of desire. The latter, involving a quest for alternative female genealogy (see Irigaray) calls for the maternal imaginary, that is, for explorations of images that represent the female experience of proximity to the mother's body.

The impact of psychoanalysis on feminist thought, resulting in a radical deconstruction of the subject position, acknowledges what US (radical) feminism did not take into account: the significance of the very split in subjectivity from the supervision of rational thinking. US-American feminism of the 1960s and 1970s, "monopolized by the quarrel over pornography and prostitution," identifies sexuality with issues of violence and domination, "that is to say negatively," leaving "all issues related to bodies, pleasures, eroticism and the specific ways of knowing of the human flesh hanging nowhere" (Braidotti, Metamorphoses 30). Drawing on Dworkin's and MacKinnon's antisexuality campaigns as "a specific form of internal backlash and a threat against feminism," Gallop and Braidotti attempt to refocus feminist attention
from stigmatized sexuality towards women's capacity for self-determination. The "body," if it continues to speak from the position of "stigma," "cannot be positively associated with sexuality in either the critical or the public discourse" (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 31). Following this theoretical divide, materiality, which becomes fundamental in the Continental discourses of psychoanalysis, has little place in Anglo-American political discourse. In referring thus to the split of the feminist subject, Braidotti identifies it as the "transatlantic disconnection" (*Metamorphoses* 28) that made some stopping on the issues of identity, normativity, and power (Wittig and Butler) and some moving toward psychoanalytical "becoming" (Irigaray, Braidotti). The subject itself, no longer identified with consciousness and ratio, opens a range of inquiries both to the separation between the psychic and the social processes and to the complex task of joining them or putting them in a relation, emerging as central to Butler's political project of recasting agency in the subversive mode of performative repetitions. Yet, Gallop and Braidotti, in their radical opening of the intersections between psychoanalysis and critical social theory, remain critical of Butler's reduction of psychoanalytical insight into "erasure of homosexuality by a gender system which invents (hetero)sexual normativity and imposes it on living bodies" (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 45). This concept of gender, derived as it is from sociological discourse, is foreign to the discourse on sexual difference that emerges from the Lacanian and post-Lacanian framework. As Butler explains retrospectively, "in *Gender Trouble*, I understood the theory of sexual difference to be a theory of heterosexuality. And I also understood French feminism, with the exception of Monique Wittig, to understand cultural intelligibility not only to assume the fundamental difference between masculine and feminine, but to reproduce it" (*Undoing Gender* 208). Today, as Butler has observed, "to assume that gender always and exclusively means the matrix of the 'masculine' and 'feminine' is precisely to miss the critical point that the production of that coherent binary is contingent, that it comes at a cost, and that those permutations of gender which do not fit the binary are as much a part as its most normative instance" (*Undoing Gender* 42). Similarly, in Gallop's comments, "to refuse authority does not challenge the category distinction between authority and castrated other, between 'subject presumed to know' and subject not in command" (*Daughter's Seduction* 21). No doubt, however, the traces of heterosexuality on us all are undeniable, and it is in this sense of "transatlantic divide" that Braidotti (following Irigaray) returns to "sexual difference" as a positive other: "One can clearly choose to disguise this fact, to avoid all the morphological wrappings of sexual difference, such as a penis actually attached to a desiring male body, biblical-style penetration, fecundation of the ovum via penetration of sperm-carrying penis into vagina. One can sing the praises of masquerades and polyvalence, such as lesbian cross-dressers who pump iron: one can choose to emphasize all kinds of prosthetic or technological alternatives, such as women with strap-on dildos and penis-less men, but that will not suffice to erase sexual difference. A mere shift in the empirical referent cannot alter the somatic and psychic traces of sexual otherness" (*Metamorphoses* 46).
Simultaneously, the feminist split in subject positions opens a quest for interconnections between the psychoanalytical theory of desire and the social practices of enforced normativity (prohibitions and exclusions enforced upon the subject). In view of these interconnections, Irigaray's fantasmatic mother emerges from the semiotic and psychic realm of feminine sexuality that, in psychoanalysis, becomes a form of language, a sexual reflector (*speculum*) in which bodies can speak. To ignore this language is to ignore the multiple possibilities of potential expression still trapped in the phallic representation of desire. Feminine sexuality, as multiple, complex, and ex-centric to phallic genitality, disengages thus, to follow both Irigaray and Braidotti, the question of the "embodied subject" from the hold of Lacanian (and Kristeva) psychoanalysis. It brings the little girl's body back into play: a body as an interface of multiple codes (race, sex, class, age) that refuses to separate the discursive dimension from the empirical, material, or historical one (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 25). It also holds the debate about trans/gender in proximity to the presence of real-life women (albeit predominantly of those who occupy Western spaces of culture). Irigaray's political philosophy of the maternal posits the subversion of identity (proposed by Butler) as having sex-specific connotations and consequently requiring sex-specific strategies (rejected by Butler). In the end, what clearly becomes central in this political and conceptual feminist debate is a "task of creating, legitimating, and representing a multi-centred, internally differentiated female feminist subjectivity, without falling into relativism or fragmentation" (Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 26).

Following Irigaray's objective, also Cixous extends the/a mother's biological ability to produce nourishment into the agency of a feminine voice. It is through the mother's own milk that she can regain her ability to speak against the historical silence: "Voice: milk that could go on forever. Found again. The lost mother/bitter-lost. Eternity: is voice mixed with milk" (Cixous and Clément 93). In an attempt to work out a "deconstruction" of the mother entangled in the Western logos, Cixous proclaims an *écriture feminine*, which, as she declares, "will not let itself think except through subjects that break automatic functions, border runners never subjugated by any authority" (Cixous and Clément 91-92). Defining a feminine practice of writing is as impossible a task as defining the semiotic chora "with an impossibility that will continue; for this practice will never be able to be theorized, enclosed, coded" (92). Although the latter does not mean that *écriture feminine* does not exist, it does imply that "it will always exceed the discourse governing the phallocentric system," and in positing the mother "beyond" the symbolic function, it will takes place somewhere other than in the territories subordinated to philosophical theoretical domination (92). Thus, Cixous's rebellious conflation of the semiotic and the feminine is as likely to lead to madness as to recovery, and emerges, in Wittig's, and later Butler's, analysis of the semiotic, as an ineffective subversion of phallogocentric culture. Rejecting the ontological difference between the sexes as heterosexual and capitalist, both Wittig and Butler (following Rubin) posit gender as an activity without substance, rendering "sexual difference" a fundamentally political enterprise reproducing compulsory
heterosexuality. Gender, in this performative mode, becomes a process by which women are marked off as the female sex, and men are conflated with the universal, but both remain subjugated to the institution, in Foucault's sense of the term, and to sexual normativity in Rich's sense. Thus, Butler takes her leave from psychoanalytical theories of sexual difference, in particular the transformative power of the semiotic in subverting the representational economy of phallogocentrism. As commented by Butler, the "multiple drives that characterize the semiotic constitute a prediscursive libidinal economy which occasionally makes itself known in language, but which maintains an ontological status prior to language itself" (Gender Trouble 80).

It is this peculiar location beyond the symbolic that plays a crucial role in establishing the Continental feminist subjectivity of the semiotic, and I explore it in detail in the subsequent parts of this chapter. At this stage, I address several French feminist positions that will continue to frame my discussion of subjectivity in relation to the Freudian/Lacanian unconscious.

Evaluating the historical and psychoanalytical concepts of interpretation, Cixous's, Irigaray's, and early Wittig's positions refer to the concept of linguistic oppression, "a confusing static for the oppressed, which makes them lose sight of the material cause of their oppression and plunges them into a kind of a-historic vacuum" (Wittig, Straight Mind 22). Contrary to Irigaray, however, who sees the subject position as structurally masculine, Wittig believes that women can enter into the subject position, repossess it, and redefine it for their own purposes. In her The Straight Mind, Wittig argues against Cixous's ambiguous view of giving birth to a text, which is "delivered" from the body (Cixous's Souffles). Addressing Lacan, and his "blind" followers, Irigaray meets here with Wittig's position: "You refuse to admit that the unconscious—your concept of the unconscious—did not spring fully armed from Freud's head, that it was not produced ex nihilo at the end of the nineteenth century, emerging suddenly to reimpose its truth on the whole of history" ("Poverty" 80). Both Irigaray and Wittig reject explicitly psychoanalytic "science" as the sanctioned object of "theoretical qualifications" while believing that the "singularity" of psychoanalysis "stemmed from the fact that it can never be complete," that it has to remain "interminable." In fact, it can only take place without subordinating itself to the analyst mastery over the analysand ("Poverty" 83). If desire is always "particular," as Irigaray inquires, how "can you force analytic material into a lexicon or a syntax, with schemata, graphs and mathemes which have nothing to do with this particular analysis" (84)? Wittig, however, encourages women to use language to express their own meanings, without falling into the deconstructive complexities of Irigaray's and Cixous's écriture feminine. Rather in her quest for an alternative symbolic, Wittig argues against the interpretation of the unconscious as an instrument in the hands of a master and his revelation. As a way out of the enslaving cultural vacuum, Wittig asserts the unconscious as an alternative awareness of a presymbolic space activated in the literary process. In Les Guérillères, she writes: "you say there are no words to describe it, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent" (89). The archaic mother, for
Irigaray, and Wittig and Cixous for that matter, represents such an invention in response to the failure of memory (and consciousness), and as a locus of repressed female desire she becomes central to "everything" which "must be (re-)invented to avoid the vacuum" ("Volume" 56). Clearly, this psychoanalytical identification with the archaic mother works to consolidate feminist collective identity as that of cultural un/belonging. In tracing this un/belonging of the presymbolic mother, both Continental and Anglo-American responses to psychoanalysis accentuate the inadequacies of a symbolic translation (transference) of the maternal experience from the semiotic "mystery," a presymbolic knowledge, into conscious processes of naming. Traces of the archaic mother investigated in the narratives to follow clearly resonate with sexual difference, or more specifically "with a certain binary misreading of sexual difference, the opposition phallic/castrated" (Gallop, *Daughter's Seduction* 124).

Drawing our attention to the Lacanian preference for metaphor, and his subsequent repression of metonymy, Irigaray and Gallop compare "the latency of metonymy" to the "hiddenness of the female genitalia," concluding that while a metaphor consists of supplanting one signifier with another, "a metonymic interpretation supplies a whole context of associations. Perhaps this metonymic interpretation might be called feminine reading" (*Daughter's Seduction* 129). This feminine reading (or writing) would thus be a response to "sexual difference" that, both in Lacan's theories and in Irigaray's post-Lacanian critique, "is not a simple binary that retains the metaphysics of substance as its foundation" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 27). If the masculine subject is a construction produced by the law that prohibits incest and forces an infinite displacement of a heterosexual desire, the feminine is never a mark of the subject. Rather, the feminine is a symbolic signification of lack, "a set of differentiating linguistic rules that effectively create sexual difference" (27). The witch as an archaic figure, or the Freudian/Lacanian *unconscious* that comes to represent her, converges theoretically with Lacan's configuration of hysteria and the language of the *unconscious* as a signifier of "something quite other than what it says" (Lacan, *Ecrits* 155).

Precisely this "other" constitutes an important and complex fantasy of gender that can be broken down into a number of subconsciously present figures: a monstrous womb, vampire, hysterical, possessed body, femme fatale, witch, oracle, castrating mother. Of a particular importance is the phrase "monstrous-feminine," as coined by Creed, and emphasizing the importance of gender in the construction of monstrosity. For Creed, expanding Kristeva's psychoanalytical inquiries, the numerous figures of the "monstrous-feminine" have been obscured between abjection and horror on the one hand, and fetish and fantasy on the other. Hellenistic culture provides an important insight into this complex fantasy. Significant for the following analysis is the distinction between the domesticated wife and mother (Penelope) and the untamed monstrous forces (Scylla and Charybdis), the female devouring whirlpools, threatening both to masculine and feminine identities. This split, to follow Creed, has a number of consequences for psychoanalytically based theories of sexual difference: "On the one hand, those images which define woman as monstrous in relation to her reproductive functions work to reinforce the phallocentric notion that female sexual-
ity is abject. On the other hand, the notion of the monstrous-feminine challenges the view that femininity, by definition, constitutes passivity. Furthermore, the fantasy of the castrating mother undermines Freud's theories that woman terrifies because she is castrated and that it is the father who alone represents the agent of castration within the family" (Creed 151).

Following Creed's differentiation, it becomes clear that the archetypes of the archaic mother of the semiotic and the phallic (fetishized) mother are quite distinct: the archaic mother represents a terrifying fantasy of sexual difference, while the phallic mother is a comforting fantasy of sexual sameness (8). Ultimately, the archaic mother falls into an alternating, and therefore ambiguous, fantasy of a castrating/castrated woman, persistently represented in the mythology either as "the tamed, domesticated, passive woman or else the savage, destructive, aggressive woman" (Creed 116). On the contrary, the phallic (fetishized) woman is designed to deny the existence of these castrating/castrated feminine images, reminding us of the delusional character of the child's wish to be the mother's Phallus, marking the subject's capacity to distinguish between fantasy and reality. Likewise, the distinction between the maternal figure of the pre-Oedipal semiotic and the Oedipal mother as object of sexual jealousy and desire has been obscured. As Madelon Sprengnether notes in *The Spectral Mother* (1990), the archaic mother emerges in patriarchal culture as a "shadowy" figure, a figure of subversion, a threat to masculine identity. Never a major theme in Freudian drama of the father-son relationship, the archaic mother has a ghostlike function: "Like the spirit of the mournful and unmourned Jocasta, she haunts the house of Oedipus" (5). According to Sprengnether, this "spectral" appearance of the archaic mother relates to "spectacle," "speculation," and "suspicion," "while its immediate source is the Latin *spectrum*, meaning, simply, an appearance" (5). All these connotations explain and consolidate the symbolic unrepresentability of the semiotic "mother": "In English a specter is a ghost, a phantom, any object of fear or dread. Freud's representations of the preoedipal mother evoke all of these associations. She is the object of his fascinated and horrified gaze, at the same time that she elicits a desire to possess and to know. In her disappearing act, she evades and frustrates his attempts at grand theory at the same time that she lures him, like a fata morgana, into the mists of metapsychology" (5).

The archaic mother thus collapses in the symbolic order into Creed's figure of the monstrous-feminine, that is, into "the pre-symbolic or dyadic mother, the mother who is thought to possess a phallus" (Creed 21). As a trace of abjection and horror, as well as of an ambiguous comfort, this archaic mother has been silenced (somewhat comparable with the Lacanian "real" to which there is no access in language), and, in reference to Irigaray's standpoint, it is this silence that perpetuates the most primitive phallocentric fantasies and projections of a woman. As feminist psychoanalysis suggests, her maternal body has not been marked by "symbolic castration" but by "the real incision" evoked by the cutting of the umbilical cord, deferred and perpetuated by the cultural presence of the scar, the navel. The umbilical cord, cut and eliminated, represents desire for the anoedipal space (an alternative antidualistic
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figuration of intersubjectivity; see Deleuze and Guattari). The loss of the cord refers to the "real" loss of the mother, Irigaray's extension of the Oedipus story. Her figure of the passionate Clytemnestra, who "certainly does not obey the image of the virgin-mother that has been held up to us for centuries, will go as far as a crime passionnel: she will kill her husband" (Irigaray, Bodily Encounter 36): "Why?...out of jealousy, out of fear perhaps, and because she has been unsatisfied and frustrated for so long. She also kills him because he sacrificed their daughter to conflicts between men, a motive that is often forgotten by the tragedians. But the new order demands that she in her turn must be killed by her son, inspired by the oracle of Apollo, the beloved son of Zeus: God, the Father. Orestes kills his mother because the rule of the God-Father and his appropriation of the archaic powers of mother-earth require it. He kills his mother and goes mad as a result, as does his sister Electra. Electra, the daughter, will remain mad. The matricidal son must be saved from madness to establish the patriarchal order" (36). In this order, the figure of archaic mother fuses into that of the Furies: the chthonic, subaltern female forces, the remnants of the maternal who inflict "temporary" madness on Orestes, and, like the ghost of his mother, pursue him in vengeance, haunt him wherever he goes. "They are women in revolt, rising up like revolutionary hysterics against the patriarchal power in the process of being established" (37). On the one hand, thus, the mother's entry into the Law of the Father appears as an incorrect, inaccurate entry marked by the mother's separation and dispossession from culture. The denigration of the patriarchal mother (ascribed to her reproductive functions), is furthermore "endorsed by her," since she "teaches the infant to abhor what she herself comes to represent within the signifying practices of the symbolic" (Creed 165). And, in connecting with the abject as an invisible and culturally discarded umbilical cord, the mother connects with the obscene bodily displacement and a demarcation between the intimate womb/placenta (Irigaray's and Kristeva's chora) and the externalized body inscribed with the name of the Father.

Linking this unrepresentability of the semiotic chora with the intimacy of the umbilical cord leads us to the psychoanalytical concept of the navel as cultural category for analysis of the archaic mother. As explored by Bronfen, the navel appears as "the enmeshment between connection, incision, bondage, and negation, that is, the bond constructed over naught" (Bronfen 19). The enmeshment both conceals and discloses the existence of the mother, since the "knotting occurs over a wound, both shielding and constructing a site within which are the remains of the traumatic impact" (19) of separation. The human body, always already the knotted subject, appears thus as "a resilient trace of bondage, vulnerability, and incision" (8); however, to speak of the knotted subject is not only to emphasize "that the subject is split and multiple but how this multiplicity offers a new means of integration" (9). To follow this possibility in the subsequent analysis of the narratives, I employ the witch figure as a particularly resilient trace of the enmeshment converging with Bronfen's psychoanalytical reading of the omphalos, Irigaray's placenta, and Kristeva's chora: all three present a theoretical confrontation of the old subject within the new subjectivities. Central to my investigation is the hysteric strategy of self-representation and
self-performance of the witch: her negotiation between what has been split in culture: the *phallus* and the *omphalos*, "the maternal emblem, commemorating the now invisible umbilical cord" (Bronfen 19). As represented in all the narratives selected for discussion in this chapter, the witch of the semiotic chora is a fantasmatric creature of the womb with no other place in the symbolic order but that of un/belonging. I designate her as *om-phalic*, that is, providing a traumatic passage, a type of umbilical cord connecting to the symbolic: Trauma, "not capturable through representation or, indeed, recollection" often renders memory incomplete, "known through the gap that disrupts all efforts at narrative reconstruction" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 153). The symbolic, attractive and indispensable because of its linguistic potentialities, will be thus reached through "the imaginary," or as Gallop has put it, "by knowingly being in the imaginary" (*Daughter's Seduction* 60). Upon scrutiny of the semiotic functions in the language of the narratives, I will also argue that phallocentric discourse does not employ/enslave the witch in the same way as it employs/enslaves the mother who has entered the symbolic. The witch as a trace of the archaic mother may in fact provide a therapeutic treatment for the "real incision" and the cultural denigration of the mother who, according to Irigaray, is "in danger of being reduced to a fiction" ("Limits" 107). Marking the possibility of the mother's rebirth and re-evaluation, the "archaic witch" clearly manifests a desire to connect the semiotic chora with the symbolic. Consequently, the witch comes to represent "the imaginary and the unconscious" in a way that the patriarchal (castrated) mother in her "empty gestures of an enforced everydayness" (107) does not. The psychoanalytical value of the witch draws thus on the limits of the woman in culture, and, in delineating these limits, on the mother in particular. While recalling the phallocentric construct of the witch as a specific trace of the unencumbered woman, the witch will come to represent a ghost of the repressed, uncanny absence of the archaic (rather than phallic) mother. It is precisely the archaic absence, the mourning for the archaic Thing (Kristeva, *Black Sun* 41) that links the witch with the return of what has been eliminated or repressed: the fear of slipping back into the abyss of the semiotic fantasy, of losing ourselves on the way. Here, in agreement with Kristeva's readings of Freud, the term *heimlich* signifies friendly, familiar, and intimate, as well as concealed, deceitful, and malicious; hence the positive term is already marked with its own negation. At the same time, what these narratives also express is our passionate desire of such a frightening return. They serve as examples of positing the witch as disturbing (sick, mad, obsessed, maniacal), and through all this a figure who embarks on new processes of responding to the unfitting model of the Oedipus complex, which, as Irigaray has argued, "states the law of the non-return of the daughter to the mother" and "cuts her off from her beginnings, her conception, her genesis, her birth, her childhood" ("Limits" 105).

The symbolic beginning of language lies thus in the negation of loss. Signs are arbitrary because language begins with a negation of loss that turns into a denial and becomes internalized as the subject enters the symbolic patterns of signification. The contingency of the witch, her scattering across culturally forbidden spaces, the
leakage of fluids across her bodily boundaries, and her transgression of the norms of such leakage (Purkiss 81) are central in delineating the ways to trace that irretrievable loss back. The following narrative makes her a symbol of that lost un/belonging, and therefore a desirable maternal space as an effective means of overcoming the primordial alienation. These "critical" or "clinical" narrative encounters, to use Deleuze's notions, are possible by the peculiar nature of symptomatology: unlike "etiology, or the search for causes" and "therapeutics, or the search for and application of a treatment" that are integral components of medical approach, symptomatology occupies a "sort of neutral point, a limit that is premedical or sub-medical...located almost outside medicine...where artists and philosophers and doctors and patients come together" ("Mysticism" 132-34). This space, called sometimes art and sometimes literature, harks back to the imprint of the archaic loss as the very condition of being that haunts us from the inception of subjectivity.

Politicizing Locations of the Hysterical Body

Angela Carter (1940-1991), seen as both representative of and distinct from late 1970s and 1980s feminist writers, has often been criticized for her reactionary style and a language trapped in "conservative sexism" (Jordan 128). Belonging among the most controversial and original British texts, her writings indeed resist conventional encapsulation. There is no doubt that "The Lady of the House of Love" (1975) and "The Scarlet House" (1977), the two short stories to be discussed here, are far from being straightforward in sending their message. However, I agree with Merja Makinen that often it is the critics, and not Carter, "who cannot see beyond the sexist binary opposition" (23). To follow Makinen's inquiry as to whether reactionary forms can be rewritten, I propose an analogous question: Can the fantasy of the castrated/castrating woman be rewritten for the reason of "becoming"? Can she stop speaking as a "hysteric" and transgress the symbolic structures that have kept her half-wild, half-tamed, half-imaginary? In the two stories chosen for discussion here, Carter repeatedly returns to the image of castrated woman, "addressing it as ideological issue, as narrative device, as image" (Wyatt 59). In Creed's vein, she works both with and against this fantasy, disrupting the inherent but artificial opposition between the castrated and castrating vagina. The stories are of interest here precisely in this context: as powerful, although not immediately obvious, revisions of this image.

Both the figure of a female vampire in "The Lady of the House of Love," and Madame Schreck in "The Scarlet House" serve as prototypes of the castrated/castrating woman who produces death instead of life. Her barren womb (alluding to her suspended reproductive function) clearly associates with the tomb and opens several questions pertaining to the denigration of female autonomy in culture. This prototype, proposed in my analysis as an "archaic mother," is no longer of a female but of an apocalyptic, abysmal sex, infinitively poised between the woman and the monster. As with all other cultural attributes of the nonconforming female body, it is defined in terms of hysterical sexuality. Arguing that this sexuality is never expressed in a vacuum, Carter sees sexual expression as bound to the "metaphysics" of
Chapter Two

A reader of Foucault, she formulates her interpretation of power structures and places them in the context of partly abused and partly romanticized female sexuality. Her aim is to demystify the hysterical locations of female sexuality by disrupting the prohibitions placed on the body, a strategy deriving from the conviction that "where there is a desire, the power relation is already present" (Foucault, *History* 83). Following this premise, Carter recognizes the agency of sanctions that appropriately channel and sublimate sex into a "negative relation" with power: "rejection, exclusion, refusal, blockage, concealment, mask....Where sex and pleasure are concerned, power can 'do' nothing but say no to them" (*History* 83). In producing absences and gaps about sexuality, power "overlooks elements, introduces discontinuities, separates what is joined, and marks off boundaries" (83).

In this vein, Carter's compelling returns to desire and sexuality have a clearly defined transgressive and therefore political purpose. The critical (feminist) task for Carter is to understand not only how the category of female desire has been historically and socially determined, restrained, and repressed but also how it interacts with the very structures of power. As in Butler's theory, female desire "takes on the meaning of 'repressed' to the extent that the law constitutes its contextualizing frame." The law identifies this "repressed desire" as such, "circulates the term, and, in effect, carves out the discursive space for the self-conscious and linguistically elaborated experience called 'repressed desire'" (*Gender Trouble* 65). Carter proposes, then, to emancipate the repressed through textual psychoanalysis, through repeated returns to various interrelated prototypes of nonconformity (*vagina castrata*, *femme fatale*, bitch/witch, whore, etc.). Associated in my analysis with the biblical abyss as "a female place of difference" (Pippin 68), it is in particular *vagina castrata* that offers an insight into Carter's textual practice.

As examined by Pippin, the abyss in the Apocalypse represents Otherness, disorder, and chaos; it is "a bottomless pit," "the interior of the earth, a place of exile, the original flood waters under the earth, chaos, the primordial goddess, the source of the universe, the underworld" (68). In *Apocalyptic Bodies*, Pippin analyses the fifteenth-century depiction (in the *Hours of Catherine of Cleves*) of the mouth of the abyss, which can signify both female pleasures (castration desires) and their annihilation. Of all these associations, the abyss-as-chaos and the underlying phallogocentric desire to control and rationalize its "disordered" forces are especially important for Carter as defining female sexuality. However, for both Pippin and Carter, "to locate oneself at/in the pit means to be in a place that is no place, no ground, no bottom, no context" (Pippin 65), that is, somewhere outside of the symbolic order. The female abyss can serve here as a reminiscence of the semiotic chora, a trace of the archaic mother, "both a part of earth and a part of the body, the female sexual organs" (70). Simultaneously, the biblical abyss is a metaphor of eternal punishment, "a prison-house for evil monsters" (67-68), a womblike torture chamber, or, as Creed observes with reference to soulless bodies, "a collapse of the boundaries between human and animal" (10). To pause at Creed's analysis, the "bodies without souls" (the vampires), the "living corpses" (the zombies), the "corpse-eaters" (the ghouls), and
the robots and androids are "creatures, whose bodies signify a collapse of the boundaries between human and animal, and the witch (one of her many crimes was that she used corpses for her rites of magic) also belongs to this category" (Creed 10). As a container of these categories, the abyss holds vampires, monsters, phantoms, and witches, all of whom project abjection and horror and simultaneously fascinate by their ambiguous status: "The abyss is the black hole in space; what happens when one entered the abyss is still only speculation. Is the abyss where eroticism and death are linked?...As a 'rupture within discourse' the abyss is a hysterical place, when the veil or lid is taken off. Or is it a place of jouissance?" (Pippin 74). Such imagery of the abyss as a hysterical mouth with teeth is intrinsic to Carter's exploration of sexuality. "If conditions of power are to persist, they must be reiterated: the subject is precisely the site of such reiteration, a repetition that is never merely mechanical" (Butler, *Psychic Life* 16). Carter's exploration, like Butler's, undermines the Freudian elevation of the father as representing the agent of castration within the family. In "The Lady of the House of Love," Carter's rewriting of the Dracula story, the father and son are long gone and dead, and we are faced with an alienated girl as the only "legitimate" agent of castration. Defined in terms of her paternal license to kill, the vampire (queen) does kill but with a hesitance, and out of somewhat "indoctrinated" obedience. If Stoker's Dracula has been inscribed with the uncontrollable, monstrous paradigm of the Other, and has as such challenged the most sacred phallocentric values (heterosexuality, masculinity, whiteness, or marriage [see Levy]), Carter's figure of the vampire surpasses all these challenges by her monstrous gender transgression. "With the hectic, unhealthy beauty of a consumptive" ("The Lady" 202), she seduces as a female, penetrates as a male, and drains as a vampire, transforming thus into a different species, an abyssal fantasy of the other sex: the uncanny, the unsettling, and the supernatural. Carter's queen, as if Butler's melancholic drug queen in reverse, demonstrates precisely how femininity becomes an ideal that everyone always only imitates. In Butler's mode of mimetic incorporation of gender, Carter's queen, apparently female, succumbs thus into gender mourning.

Following in this respect Braidotti's observation that mourning has acquired a quasi-religious quality in psychoanalysis, Carter is far from idealizing the vampire's condition. Ultimately, the vampire, as a monstrous-feminine, is both sarcastically underscored and potentially liberating. She seems to be mute (or has nothing to say), because as a phallocentric fantasy/fetish she represents "the Other of any conceivable Western theoretical locus of speech" (Felman 9). Moreover, her sexuality is suspended in a vacuum of bodily indisposition: she "has no mouth with which to kiss, no hands with which to caress, only the fangs and talons of a beast of prey" ("The Lady" 206). Following this suspension of sexuality, her monstrosity is displaced, forced into a cultural formula that is incongruent with her particular existence. In Stoker's novel, Dracula lures, consumes, and pollutes in the name of forbidden pleasure (in order to transcend his unfulfilled sexual desires). In Carter's text, the queen lures and consumes without dedication, as if continuing Nosferatu's "tradition" by lack of other choices. Thus, in performing her vampire's duties, the queen
is a "drained hysteric," void of all desires except the one to overcome her nature: "In her dream, she would like to be human; but she does not know if that is possible. . . . She loathes the food she eats; she would have liked to take the rabbits home with her, feed them on lettuce, pet them and make them a nest in her red-and-black chinoiserie escritoire, but hunger always overcomes her. She sinks her teeth into the neck where an artery throbs with fear, she will drop the deflated skin from which she has extracted all the nourishment with a small cry of both pain and disgust" ("The Lady" 197-98). Owing to her alienated degeneration, the desires and needs of the vampire represent different patterns of perversity. Rather than a figure of jouissance, she is a psychopathological failure, Dracula's hysterical mimesis, a "cave full of echoes" and "a system of repetitions" (195). Repetition, specifically, is of importance here since it harks back to all the frustrations of unrecognized desire that the queen has buried in her readings of Tarot. She indeed is perverse, but not because of her vampire's nature, rather, precisely because of its lack. Her nightly rites (darkness, blood, oral sadism, bodily wounds, and violations of the law) are of no particular meaning to her since she does not take pleasure but simulates her fate. "The carnival air of her white dress emphasized her unreality, like a sad columbine who lost her way in the wood a long time" (204). This internal landscape suggests an entrapment in someone else's fate from which she cannot extricate herself. And so, the plot she enacts is short and cruel: When she leads her ignorant victims to her bedroom she ratifies the fantasy of orgasmic pleasure. Her victims "can scarcely believe their luck" (204). The pleasure, coming as a result of its internalized prohibition, climaxes in her violent mouth and subsequently causes death. It is in that double role of the castrated and castrating vagina that the queen's sexuality experiences an internal split, a break indicating suspension of meaning and hence suspension of pleasure. Thus, Carter's queen, although powerful through her castrating potential, is a wounded fantasy of gender: displaced, afflicted and consumed by her own contaminating and consuming nature, which makes her effectively "lifeless" in culture. She is "like a doll, or, more, like a great ingenious piece of clockwork...inadequately powered by some slow energy of which she was not in control; as if she had been wound up years ago, when she was born, and now the mechanism was inexorably running down" (204).

This lifelessness speaks to some of the key issues raised by Carter as pertaining to suppressed human sexuality and its running against the fascination and liberating power of sadomasochistic fantasy. Although representing different concepts, the unheimlich (uncanny) desire and the feeling of abjection (as its result) are brought together in Carter's story in a form of eating disorder that destabilizes identity. The queen has the hysterical body of a dispossessed and indisposed little girl (very much in the sense of a Deleuzian process of becoming). She is weak, "shivered all the time, a starveling chill, a malarial agitation of the bones...sixteen or seventeen years old, no more" (202). She endures a hysterical indecisiveness that suspends her Nosferatu identity between the repressed familiarity of the unheimlich that was once heimisch, familiar: "the prefix 'un'...is the token of repression" (Creed 54) and the abjektion (repulsion) of her own inability to control her cravings. The moment in which these
two concepts converge has been captured by Creed: "abjection is not something of which the subject can ever feel free—it is always there, beckoning the self to take up the place of abjection, the place where meaning collapses. The subject, constructed in/through language, through a desire for meaning, is also spoken by the abject, the place of meaninglessness—thus, the subject is instantly beset by abjection which fascinates desire but which must be repelled for fear of self-annihilation. A crucial point is that abjection is always ambiguous" (10).

In representing this ambiguous desire of self-annihilation, the queen's devouring lips call into mind the entrance to the abyss in Pippin's analysis, and suspend her pleasure in a pain produced by disconnection from the repressed (uncanny) maternal territory. As such, the queen provides an important model for the culturally suspended, but sexually and subconsciously fascinating, archaic mother. She can be castrated (disconnected), but her mouth—as the abyss—is dangerous: "her extraordinarily fleshy mouth, a mouth with wide, full, prominent lips of a vibrant purplish-crimson" (Pippin 202), the morbid mouth of a whore. The disconnected/disconnecting lips converge thus with the abysmal mouth: a hole that leads to the abject leftover after the cut of the umbilical cord. Both are tropes for nourishment, for a connection with the Kristevan "ab-jetted" mother, a relation that has been broken, removed, and sealed. What seems crucial in Carter's story is that the queen represents the deficiency and asymmetrical incompleteness of female sexuality and this incompleteness, according to Carter, has to be reformulated, reinvented. However, the story does not provide us with any explicit reformulations, since the castrating queen insists on her own castration and nothing seems to prevent her from choosing this self-destructive path. The queen's longing for a "savior" (who would bring an end to her melancholic tomb/womb existence) converges with the actual arrival of a young man, who, as a Freudian type of hero, descends into the world of the female uncanny. Coming from the world of the living, this patriarchal figure signifies all that the queen is not: light, life, destruction of the tomb...the stake/phallus, and enforcement of the law (Creed 71). Carter, in particular, draws our attention to his logocentric applications of reason that are of little use when he sees the queen in "a hooped-skirted dress of white...fifty or sixty years out of fashion but once, obviously, intended for a wedding" ("The Lady" 202). In her elusive presence, the rational subject encounters the unconscious that seeks to negate "the repressive predominance of 'logos'" (Felman 8), but in Carter's text, comes out as a pathetic failure. The rational abilities presented by the hero are crucial to the queen's fate, since he will recognize her hysterical condition and, inadvertently, erase her contradictory existence. Although there is no room in her drama for this intervention, the queen breaks the set of rituals of the House of Nosferatu, and indeed through an inadvertent improvisation, hurts her finger with the broken glass. In inflicting this very concrete physical wound (a discharge of blood) on her body, Carter's queen initiates a deconstruction of her own vampirism, a "dismembering" that leads to a transformation into a human. "Her painted ancestors turn away their eyes and grind their fangs. How can she bear the pain of becoming human?" ("The Lady" 207). This initiation into the human order
represents a momentary fulfillment of the queen's long-suppressed desire to overcome her "nature." But does her dying monstrosity redefine the myth of "castrated woman," that despite local variations, continually "states that women are terrifying because they have teeth in their vaginas, and that the women must be tamed or the teeth somehow removed or softened—usually by a hero figure—before intercourse can safely take place" (Creed 2)? Can she break away from the logic of polar oppositions? Ironically, what Carter depicts in her story is both what we are long familiar with (the phallocentric taming of the uncontrollable forces of the phallic woman) and what comes as a dismantling of that very belief. The phallocentric presumption that he/the doctor figure can actually deliver the cure is demystified by Carter (the doctor virtually erases her heroine), and finally rejected as no option for solving the identity dilemma. Breaking into death, soon after becoming human, the vampire transforms into a dark purple rose, a pretentious gift to the "savior," and a literal trace of her castrated condition. Her death, and especially its transitory character, leaves many questions unanswered. Both unpredictable and inevitable, it clearly has two sides: the political (Carter's demystification of the phallocentric entrapment), and the psychoanalytical (as a liberating act of "return" to the Freudian unconscious through the uncanny). In both cases, the presence of erasure (her death) is important insofar as it acknowledges the inadequacy and provisional status of the archetype employed. Alluding to Freudian endeavors to categorize female sexuality through the unconscious, Carter comes close to Felman's perception of Freud as an important though inadequate and eventually helpless analyst. In softening the medicalization of the vampire's body (removing her castrating organs), there is no promise of a cure. Instead, the queen's newly attained humanity is devastating: it is a failure resulting from "theoretical blindness to the woman's actual difference" (Felman 9). By demonstrating this failure to recognize the complexity of (female) sexuality, Carter draws on the psychoanalytical (and perhaps feminist) failure to remove female desires (sexuality) from the "symmetrical conception of otherness" (Felman 9). The queen's erasure is most certainly an ironical act, since it can never be accomplished, and she will remain present/absent both in the form of an (archaic) trace and in the form of explicit bodily frustration. Hence, following Felman's "new type of theoretical reasoning" (Felman 9), Carter's philosophy both rests upon and reasserts the importance of different logic that would account for the actual difference.

While "The Lady of the House of Love" examines the subversive and non-compatible zones of castrating/castrated desire, "The Scarlet House" explores multiple female castrations, blurring individual bodies into a plural, repetitive oppression. In this story, Carter's imagery of the Freudian unconscious is far more elaborate, as it illustrates her attempt to consider it in relation to knowledge and power and to the organization of gender and its function and structure. In its indication of subconscious processes at work, the story unfolds as if dispersed throughout the deck of Tarot cards. Its elements, speaking in the name of the unconscious, could be restored once all the cards are laid out. But the narrator is a wounded fortune-teller, devoid of memory and unable to reveal the details. The "ambiguous unconscious, sometimes
an ensemble of repressed libidinal drives, sometimes the face of language as Other, is never anything that could count as a social agent" (Fraser, *Justice Interruptus* 159). In addressing the plural quality of the repressed drives, Carter opens the story with the imagery of a "bordello" and renders it a metaphor of confinement, a prison of enslavement and hysteria. Representing the structures of the *unconscious*, the Scarlet House imitates a violated, abused, and erased memory, recognizable through marginal moments such as slips of the tongue and other odd disclosures. There, women (kidnapped, raped, and drugged) are kept under restraint. The house "em-bodies" female sacrifice and "annihilation" ("Scarlet House" 421), a monstrous accumulation of indistinguishable female bodies: a bordello and an asylum "built of white concrete...very much like a hospital, a large terminal ward" (418). The master of the house, the Magician of the Tarot (also known as the Count), is "dedicated to the obliteration of memory" (419), to the erasure of women's (personal) memories and lives. As a possessor/professor of the phallus, he represents an omnipotent psychopathic analyst who lives out the fantasy of female fragmentation: "Dedicated as he is to the dissolution of forms, he intends to erode my sense of being by equipping me with a multiplicity of beings, so that I confound myself with my own profusion of pasts, presents and futures" ("Scarlet House" 423). The Count, whose character is embedded in Lacanian theory, recognizes "him/self" as a totalized concept and impersonates the Mirror (Stage), the entrance to the symbolic: "He has methodology. He is a scientist, in his way" (424). The structures of his house, once entered, engulf the captured women and force them into a physical and cultural displacement designated in the story as chaos: "Preparing chaos with the aid of a Tarot pack" (417), the Count/Magician "sits in a hall hung with embroideries depicting all the hierarchy of hell, a place, he claims, not unlike the Scarlet House...Chaos [a type of return to the 'real'] is coming, says the Count, and giggles" (417). In denigrating "feminine" identity, he follows one particular formula in Freudian argument that there is no libido other than masculine: "There is no woman but excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words, and it has to be said that if there is one thing about which women themselves are complaining at the moment; it's well and truly that—it's just that they don't know what they are saying, which is all the difference between them and me. Meaning what? Other than that a whole field, which is hardly negligible, is thereby ignored. This is the field of all those beings who take on the status of the woman—if, indeed, this being takes on anything whatsoever of her fate" (Lacan qtd. in Rose 27).

Thus, returning to Lacan's central question (who is speaking: I or the language?), Carter questions the illusions structuring the authority of the psychoanalytic critic, and her approach parallels in many aspects the theoretical discussions of Wittig's, Irigaray's, and Baym's rejection of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Exposing the cartography of the power relations that define fantasy while correcting and structuralizing female *unconscious*, Carter puts into question the very representation of the fantasy, of the imaginary constitution of the sociosymbolic world. Subjectivity as a socially mediated process encounters here the loss of the maternal in which specific
memories take on the characteristics of formless, intangible, semiotic space—shad-ows of culture. Like Lacan's laws in Baym's interpretation, the Count's laws are un-breakable, as he seems to be a far less "forgiving" father than Freud (287). To follow Baym, Lacan's "deployment of the castration complex as the basis of the model for the symbolic order into which children—boys—are initiated, takes one particularly 'sexist' element in Freud's rich system (which contains many ungendered insights) and makes it the whole story" (287). This observation is particularly relevant to Carter's story, since it directly alludes to Lacan's pronunciation condemning women to silence: "Lacan's ideas of women belong neither to his realms of the real nor the symbolic, but to his imaginary. Both Freud and Lacan make haste to correct the fantasies of others that their own prevail. Not truth, but power, is the issue" (Baym 287). Carter's story reveals a similar practice of identifying woman with sexuality as a target of power and of structures normalizing what Freudian woman should be, or possibly want to be. Normalized sexuality is, "therefore strictly an ordering, one which the hysteri refuses" (Mitchell and Rose 28). This practice, in Carter's story, has long been in effect, and it continues: "Soon everywhere will be like the Scarlet House" ("Scarlet House" 417), a "well-locked (whore) house [maison bien close]" that Irigaray defined as "a matrix coiled back on/in its interiority [that] is not women's. Except sometimes in their maternal phallicism, or their impotent mimicry" ("Volume" 63). Also in Expletives Deleted, Carter elaborates on this thought: "my life has been most significantly shaped by my gender...I spent a good many years being told what I ought to think, and how I ought to behave, and how I ought to write, even, because I was a woman and men thought they had the right to tell me how to feel, but then I stopped listening to them and tried to figure it out for myself but they didn't stop talking, oh, dear no. So I started answering back" (4).

The practices of Carter's bordello seem to go hand in hand with the Law of the Father and its phallogocentric institutions, delineated in the story as implementing totalitarian persecution, prohibition, and finally extermination of female desire. The Count is the only authority—the persecutor, the interrogator, the monarch. Again, Carter alludes to a Foucauldian belief that "at the bottom, despite the differenc-es in epochs and objectives, the representation of power has remained" the same (Foucault, History 88). This might indicate that there is nothing inherently subver-sive or even transformative at stake in Carter's erotic depictions of multiple sexual pleasures. In fact, the erotic fascination with power, violence, and sadomasochistic scenarios underpinning Carter's narrative presents itself as a point of contention in the assessment of violence in the sexual representation of the female subject. If "in political thought and analysis, we still have not cut off the head of the king" (History 88), then equally a distinction must be made between the authoritarian violence and the transgressive potential of erotic sadomasochism and violence. A distinction that, as Carter suggests, is often difficult to maintain: "When they play the Tarot Game, Madame Schreck sits on a small throne. They bring down the Count's special book, the book in black ink on purple paper that he keeps hanging from a twisted beam in his private apartments; they open it up and spread it out on her open lap, to mimic
her sex, which is also a forbidden book" ("Scarlet House" 424). To follow this Tarot imagery, the Count's crucible is reinforced by the presence of the phallic woman, Madame Schreck (German for "horror"), who confirms the illusion of "a comforting fantasy of sexual sameness" (Creed 8): "Madame Schreck waited to greet me in the scarlet splendour of her satin dress that laid open to the view of her breasts and the unimaginable wound of her sex" ("Scarlet House" 421). Trapped in ideological/political and imaginary terms, the cruelty inflicted by this fantasized woman serves its specific patriarchal purpose. It is in and during the cruelty performances, carefully arranged and supervised by Madame Schreck, that the women disappear; their "disembodied voices rustle like dead leaves" as they "stretch out hands to touch one another, lightly, to lay a finger on one another's mouths to assure [them]selves a voice issues from that aperture" (425). Most certainly, reminiscent of Morgner's patriarchal carnival of witches (as analyzed in the first chapter), Carter's carnivalesque performance is not a liberating procedure; its form is symmetrically enclosed in the institutional (sociocultural and linguistic) structure. A deconstructive composure of Carter's text lies thus in a demystification of the structure and its inherent split rather than in a theoretical departure "beyond" or "outside" the structure. Carter's version of the witch, modeled as a femme fatale, reproduces invariably phallocentric prohibitions, fears, and anxieties. This figure is still so deeply entangled in the Western metaphor of the terrible mother that she is far from becoming a therapist figure, and equally far from transgressing her subordinate subject position. Trapped within Butler's "matrix of normativity," Madame Schreck impersonates a rapist, a female violator that lives in a "male-dominated society" and "produces a pornography of universal female acquiescence" (Sadeian Woman 20-21). She is "Miss Stern with her rods and whips, Our Lady of Pain in her leather visor and her boots with sharp, castratory heels," and as such she represents a distorted fantasy of power: "a distorted version of the old saying 'The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.' This whip hand rocks the cradle in which her customer dreams but it does nothing else." If she is cruel, it is not "for her own sake, or for her own gratification. She is most truly subservient when most apparently dominant" (21).

In agreement with Creed's theory, the fantasy of a phallic woman in Carter's story provides indeed an explanation as to "why the male might desire to create a fetish" and might want "to continue to believe that woman is like himself, that she has a phallus rather than a vagina" (Creed 116). Madame Schreck is such a fetishized phallic construction designed to negate the complex existence of "woman" as castrated/castrating. "The Count has given her a blue robe to wear over that terrible red dress that reminds us all, every time we see it, of the irresoluble and animal part of ourselves we all hold in common, since we are women" ("Scarlet House" 424). Although not without a subversive potential deriving from her sexual transgressions, a message underlying the story, Madame Schreck is dominated by the presence of the phallus, and cut off from her own pleasures and sexual sovereignty. Her image draws on the symbolic analogy between the female mouth and the labia of the vulva, both holes to be penetrated, hollow body entrances. To be sure, it is not without irony that
despite her particular reality, Carter's cruel woman exists entirely as a fantasy figure, more a surface for projections than a real being. Like the vampire's mouth, Madame Schreck's mouth resembles a lascivious surface, and her labia/vulva is part of what makes her abject: "[She] eats small birds such as fig-peckers and thrushes; she puts a whole one, spit-grilled, into her huge, red mouth as lusciously as if it were a liqueur chocolate and then she spits the bones out like the skin and pips of a grape. And she's got other, extravagant tastes as well; she likes to gorge upon the unborn young of rabbits. She acquires the foetuses from laboratories; she has them cooked for her in a cream sauce enriched with the addition of the yolk of an egg. She's a messy eater, she spills sauce on her bare belly and one of us must lick it off for her. She throws open her legs and shows us her hole; the way down and out, she says" ("Scarlet House" 419). Her role is to devour (a phallic fantasy of the vaginal orgasm), not to speak, although it is not her inability to speak that is to be feared but a shift in focus towards the other mouth, that is, towards her unrestrained sexuality. Her "hairy hole" promotes a paradigm of an enslaved, fetishized eroticism to which "we all pay homage as if it were the mouth of an oracular cave" (424). In linking eroticism and death, here again, the mouth alludes to the abyss through which "we must all crawl to extinction, one day; unless it is the way to freedom" (428). This apocalyptic landscape of sexual bodies alludes to the Foucauldian institutional structure in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised, and where sexuality is always a matter of institutional definition ensuring homogeneity by systematically denying and excluding difference. In this way, Carter's tales are indeed "forms of repetition" (Gallop, Daughter's Seduction 104), forms of subversive returns (in Butler's vision) produced by the desire to reveal the semiotic and the suppressed and to place the semiotic in the context of the subliterary forms of pornography, ballad, and dream.

As a nonlinguistic space, the semiotic chora is rendered foremost an illusion, a different form of fantasy in a far-away land of feminist utopian projections. Instead, Carter's attempt to retrieve female sexuality from "imaginary facts" rests on a systematic remembering of the oppressive experience. Since women of the Scarlet House are subjected to castration without knowing or remembering it any more, Carter's message (like Wittig's) is to remember through the unconscious. In "Scarlet House," the unconscious is symbolized by the hawk as a trace of the narrator's memory about her capture, "preserved as an image, or an icon" ("Scarlet House" 427). Once more in Foucault's vein, Carter's point is not that the social and its collective imaginary is dreadful, but that its power is dangerous, and that the ethico-political choice we have to make every day is to determine the main danger. As Butler puts it, power forms the subject by "providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire," and, in this sense, it is "not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are" (Butler, Psychic Life 2). In Carter's textual images women themselves, physically and violently forced back into conformity with an artificial norm, generate their "misunderstanding of sadomasochistic transgression" (Treat
234). This misunderstanding (from the sexual science of the last century to current collective consciousness) manifests itself as the "lack" of pleasure, of art, and the transgressive thought of the sadomasochistic universe as represented in Sadeian or in Sacher-Masoch's writings (Treut 235). Carter elaborates on the importance of physical transgressions (rape, sadomasochistic devices) precisely by taking into account the submissive role assigned particularly to women: "The whippings, the beatings, the gougings, the stabblings of erotic violence reawaken the memory of the social fiction of the female wound, the bleeding scar left by her castration, which is a psychic fiction as deeply at the heart of Western culture as the myth of Oedipus, to which it is related in the complex dialectic of imagination and reality that produces culture. Female castration is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men's attitude towards women and our attitude to ourselves, that transforms women from human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed" (Sadeian Woman 23). In this elaboration, the opposition between "law" and its underlying heterosexual matrix and "revolt" has been dismissed as artificial. Instead, they appear as politically prevailing tools that come to represent a complex structure of mutually supportive resistances. Subjection, in Carter's understanding, consists in the fundamental dependency on a discourse that is perhaps not chosen, but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains the agency of the subjected in resistance (Butler, Psychic Life 2). Voyaging through this resistance, Carter's "writing the body" undermines the symbolic value of passive affirmation with which "woman" has been impregnated. Her stories do not posit the witch as an archaic semiotic figure, but insist on a dialectical relation between the prelinguistic phase (the unconscious) and the order of language. Demystifying mythic, ready-made versions of women and exposing them as devices intended to obscure "the real conditions of life" (Sadeian Woman 5), Carter leaves her texts "unfinished," "written with a space for the reader's activity in mind" (Makinen 25). Her insistence on an open-ended structure is a strategic proposal for heterogeneity and plurality of sexual locations. It offers an active challenge to "the myth of patience and receptivity" in which the meaningful semen penetrates "a dumb mouth from which the teeth have been pulled" (Sadeian Woman 5). Such a mouth cannot speak and cannot be productive, but only hysterically reproductive. Carter's defence against this silent reproduction is a deconstructive use of irony, activated best if the reader is informed by feminism (Makinen 25). The hysterical displacements of the female vampire, of Madame Schreck, and in particular of the women in the Scarlet House intermingle therefore with political locations, positions from which to speak against cultural and linguistic displacements. This may happen even if the only available language is that of the (Freudian) unconscious, as is the case in the following narrative, which continues the theme of the split between mothers and daughters while depicting the phallic mother as the very cause and source of fe/male denigration.

The Defeat of the Maternal Subject

In Siostra (Sister), published twenty years later (1996) in the context of postcommunist Poland, Małgorzata Saramonowicz explores similarly problematic traces of the
witch as the terrible (phallic) mother. Saramonowicz belongs among the most promising Polish writers of the decade, placed along third-wave-feminist or feminism-informed authors such as Izabela Filipiak, Natasza Goerke, Manuela Gretkowska, and Olga Tokarczuk (on this, see Kraskowska). Siostra, a "psychological thriller," offers an exceptional perspective on motherhood within the postcommunist debates on abortion rights. As in Carter's story, the witch figure in Siostra embodies the destructive features of the abysmal vagina, and operates in and from the oppressive position of home. In discussing this narrative (clearly articulating a Deleuzian relation between text and clinical psychology), I draw on Juliet Mitchell's psychoanalytical insights into the sibling relationship and connect these insights with de Beauvoir's and Kristeva's theories of the maternal subject. Following such discourse in the light of Deleuzian theory, my discussion focuses on the question of the "stolen" body, which undergoes fabrications of opposable organisms in the process of constituting itself as a subject. This multifaceted vision of "becoming-a-subject," a dynamic entity defying the established modes of representation, opens new identifications within the symbolic (social meaning) and is thus of crucial importance for explorations of images that represent the female experience of proximity to the mother's body. As I argue, this exploration is central to Saramonowicz's narrative, albeit in a twist that turns the maternal subject into an overwhelmingly oppressive and inescapable bodily force.

Placed in the context of a dysfunctional family (mother-son-daughter) living in dilapidated housing conditions somewhere in late-communist Cracow, the narrative unfolds in the form of a fragmentary dialogue, revealing gradually the following key relationships: Marysia is the daughter of an absent (traveling) father, who is pursuing his career in medical science, and an attractive, persistently present (phallic) mother. Marysia's first coma occurs when she is six for which the reasons are obscure. Her mother dies from a brain tumor when Marysia is eighteen and this abruptly instilled maternal death coincides with Marysia's suicide attempt and the hospital's decision to separate her from the family. At this point, Marysia's brother, older by several years, moves to the United States and the further relationship between the siblings is tantalizingly uncertain. As an adult, Marysia becomes Maria, bearing her mother's first name (hence, Deleuzian "becoming-the-subject" and Irigaray's proximity of the maternal), and lives in Warsaw with Jakub, her husband. While writing her dissertation on eighteenth-century French prose, she becomes pregnant and undergoes another subject formation, at which point the maternal proximity converts into a physical symptom. How much this symptom is about unreadability (of the unconscious) and how much about the subject's resistance to the process of becoming remains at the reader's will to explore, as Maria secretly refines her academic work into "Insects—the motif in literature and art" and locks it in the university computer with an intricate system of passwords. During early pregnancy she experiences another coma and remains in a sleeplike state, first in hospital, then at home, until her "body gives birth" and dies. The sequence of these two bodily enactments is of importance to the very subject of becoming, as the process of giving birth intermingles with dy-
ing, such that it is unclear whether Maria's body gives birth in the process of dying or whether the newborn emerges from the body which ultimately resisted becoming and, thus, no longer lives.

Jakub (in a way, competing with the reader to make some logical sense of Maria's story) knows very little about Marysia: There are no family pictures, no childhood souvenirs, no connections, except for Maria's occasional but uncertain identification with her father. The reason for her "disease" and the controversial figure of her brother seem to be related in Maria's subconscious flow of thoughts, but the links are vague and contradictory. Is her brother a male hysteric in suspended/unfinished psychoanalytical treatment? Is Maria a victim of his sexual fantasies? Perhaps. The narration is neither from his position (both his and the mother's positions are silenced) nor that of Maria. The entire narrative, opening with Maria's pregnancy while in a coma and ending with her death, speaks the language of Maria's subconscious desire of dying, brought on by encephalitis lethargica ("sleeping sickness"), in which life itself has been reduced to a monstrous construction. What comes through the unconscious suggests a particular fascination with death as a release from irremediable tension, harking back to the most excruciating wounds of her childhood. Her "sleeping sickness," or catatonia (a term coined in 1869 by Karl Kahlbaum) draws our attention to the significance of the symptom. The typical signs are described by Kahlbaum "as a state in which the patient remains entirely motionless...devoid of any will to move or react to any stimuli....The general impression conveyed by such patients is one of profound mental anguish, or an immobility induced by severe mental shock" (Moskowitz 984). The symptom, Maria's bodily paralysis, is thus a reaction, but to what? In this psychoanalytical vein, I link Saramonowicz's disfiguration of the mother figure with Mitchell's analysis of fe/male hysteria in the Freudian context of trauma and death. Analyzing Dora, Freud's female hysteric, Mitchell refers to death and trauma as "crucial to the onset and manifestations of hysteria" (33) and emphasizes the long unrecognized importance of the siblings' relationship in the Oedipus myth. Drawing on this emphasis, I begin this analysis by associating Dora's life history with that of Marysia and argue that Saramonowicz offers a pathological extension of the Freudian case. Although the "mother has been ignored by Dora...there is one even more strikingly buried player in Dora's life history: her brother Otto, older by eighteen months" (Mitchell 100). Siostra, as the title suggests, has a similar underlying meaning; it is the story of Marysia's, transmitted in the form of a repressed dialogue between the siblings: Marysia, speaking from the position of the female victim, and Piotr, speaking as and representing an aggressive, omnipresent cockroach.

In the unconscious, Marysia is reduced to the defenseless, sickening body of a vulnerable child, the yet underdeveloped but already overwhelming body that the conscious Maria hopes to erase from her memory, but that stubbornly returns as a mental anguish, an immobility induced by involuntarily re-enacted scenes of her rape. Moreover, Saramonowicz does not tell us explicitly who, if anyone, has been repeatedly violating Marysia. This parallels Bronfen's suggestion that the hysteric
"broadcasts a message about vulnerability...of the symbolic (the fallibility of paternal law and social bonds)...the vulnerability of the body, given its mutability and mortality" (xiii). Hence, there is much more to Marysia's illness than the Freudian assumption about a mother giving all of her attention to her son (in Mitchell's analysis, illness "was" and still "is a standard means of getting more attention when one is jealous of one's siblings" [102]). In my interpretation, precisely because of the vulnerability of the girl/daughter, motherly love in Siostra turns into a mother-son conspiracy in search of a forbidden jouissance. Like Dora, Marysia tries "her best to remedy this situation by always having the normal childhood illnesses, which she caught...in order to get more attention" (Mitchell 103), especially from her absent father, but her "illnesses" and dreams are to be recognized also as an escape mechanism. The children's rhyme about a carrousel, a recurring motif of a danger that is playful and safe, has been replaced in her unconscious by a permanent warning; it is not the carrousel, but "the witch [that] is waiting, calling us from afar" (Saramonowicz 54; unless indicated otherwise, all translations from the Polish are mine). Constant fear of abuse and her alarming awareness of entrapment suspend Marysia in the vacuum of her obsession with the type of mother who does not come to her rescue. This figuration of "mother," a figure disassociated from comforting maternity, forms a persistent narrative resistance to the maternal subject as imposed on women's bodies. The reproductive function, standing for the voracious and violent aspects of the maternal, entirely destabilizes the current illegalization of abortion in Poland, voiding the maternal from all romanticized notions of dutiful and natural female pleasures. On the contrary, the maternal subject in Siostra suggests a seductive and manipulative force, which leads to repetitive sequences of trauma. Reminiscent of Freud's argument, the crucial factor determining the repetition of trauma is the presence of mute, disintegrative experience and its lack of access to language. The child's illnesses are illusory escapes and substitutes for security, entailing frequent in/voluntary hospital treatments (un/consciously) facilitated by coma and suicidal tendencies ("Inhibitions" 1953-74).

"So Freud tells Dora: The dream shows 'that we were here dealing with material which had been very intensely repressed'...'the mystery,' says Freud to Dora, 'turns upon your mother.' As the listener to Dora's tales, Freud is not her father but her mother in the transference. Dora not only tells things to Freud the therapist, she talks to her mother" (Mitchell 96). Although Maria does not have the luxury of a psychoanalyst with and through whom to speak, she opens a long repressed dialogue with her mother while communicating with the fetus in her womb. This dialogue recalls (but conceptually also extends beyond) de Beauvoir's description of a "drama...acted out within the [pregnant] woman herself" (521): "She feels it at once as enrichment and an injury; the fetus is a part of her body, and it is a parasite that feeds on it; she possesses it, and she is possessed by it; it represents the future and, carrying it, she feels herself vast in the world, but this very opulence annihilates her, she feels that she herself is no longer anything...the pregnant woman feels the immanence of her body at just the time when it is transcendence: it turns upon itself in
nausea and discomfort; it has ceased to exist for itself and thereupon becomes more sizable than ever before" (521). In her transference, especially in the transference to the mother, Maria repeatedly asks the foetus to die within her body. As articulated by the *unconscious*, she speaks to the repressive dominance of "mother," and wants to make this dominance recede. The powerful figure of the mother, alluding to "the unacknowledged foundation of the social order" (Whitford 25), is actually reinforced by the absence of the maternal comfort. The umbilical cord, as a symbolic passage to semiotic pleasures, leads her back to a hollow orgiastic mechanism, a gigantic maternal cockroach. Addressed as "he" in Maria's *unconscious*, the pronoun can refer to the cockroach brother or cockroach mother, or even perhaps to the foetus in Maria's womb as a symbolical extension of the monstrous semen: "It is becoming claustrophobic. The walls swell with wobbling blackness. Slimy, busy shapes continue to cloy and squeal. I am His. My body is His. There is no salt, no moisture, or the icy cave any more. There is hell. They grunt and whisper there. Scratch, scratch, scratch....But he enjoys this heat. I can hear him laughing at me. The walls have eyes. Thousands of eyes stare at me, following me and you. Little one, he knows that you are here. He knows everything. There is no way out of here" (Saramonowicz 43-44). By refusing to give life to her child, Maria ultimately rejects life as a perennial deferral of suffering because of her (becoming a) mother, "a newly shaped body filled with madness and death. And there is nothing that can stop this" (123). In its obvious premise, I read this rejection of life as an ethical gesture pointing towards a basic human (woman's) right to abortion. But beyond the obvious political aspects of the subject's autonomy, Saramonowicz's account can be read as a decisive rejection of the inherent maternal symbolism engulfing female bodies, a refusal to participate in and endure the "becoming"-of-the-mother. To follow this insight further, I turn to Kristeva's discussion of "primary narcissism": the self-importance and self-absorption of the maternal subject to which "we can definitely attribute existence," and yet, there too, "we are caught in a paradox" ("Stabat Mater" 161). The very discreet presence of the Virgin Mary in both narrative figures, the mother (Maria) and her daughter (Maria), at once consolidates and disrupts the role of a patriarchal mother as a silent agent of reproduction in search of her *joieissance*. Such deconstructive positioning of the Virgin Mary, the only sanctified model of "woman" in the Polish literary tradition, provides a distinct, innovative, and quite daring perspective on the maternal. Although in Maria's *unconscious* the mother is silenced, the projection of silence is not that of a victim, but of a violator. Her violence, linked with her potentially inadequate, uninhibited cultural condition (of being and having "one"), is already implicit, if unexplored, in de Beauvoir's concept of the mother. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir posits the mother as a figure that is both discontented (sexually frigid, unsatisfied, or socially inferior) and through all that threatening to the infant. Once we realize the difficulties in which "mother" is entangled, "how many desires, rebellious feelings, just claims she nurses in secret, one is frightened at the thought that defenseless infants are abandoned to her care" (540). Offering an important expansion of both de Beauvoir's and Kristeva's theories, Saramonowicz discloses her
own version of the Oedipus myth in the light of entrapment in the maternal trauma and hysterical erasure of the mother. In linking the mother's narcissism with the symbolic, Saramonowicz grants her an ambiguous position as an object and subject of desire, as someone who not only "is" the phallus, but who also possesses it (an achievement in a collaboration with her son). Indeed, in an attempt to resolve her condition by breaking the Law, Saramonowicz's mother fanatically "seeks to compensate for all her frustrations through her child" (de Beauvoir 540). In sanctioning incest, she unfolds her forbidden desire at her children's cost. The breaking of the incest taboo dividing the universe of sexual choice into permitted and prohibited sexual patterns (see Rubin) results in trauma: "To mother. Even your death does not diminish my hate. I will never forgive you. You are just as much responsible for my persecution...Come to me. Come to me. She calls. The witch. But I keep my eyes shut, and so she thinks that I am falling asleep...She says that Cockroaches only live in the kitchen. And then Baba Jaga captured the children and threw them into the oven. And there it was so hot, so hot, so hot and they were screaming, screaming their wits out and...She hugs me, pulls the cover over...And Baba Jaga devoured Jaś first, and then she devoured Małgosia...I immediately have to open my eyes to look up. Yes, he's there. Ready to jump on me. Lurching" (Saramonowicz 82, 159)

Clearly, the mother's transformation into a devouring monster can be viewed as one of the contemporary avatars of Baba Jaga, a witch descending from the Brothers Grimm's tale, "Hansel and Gretel," about siblings trapped in a chocolate house. Since there are no significant evil constructions of the mother in the history of Polish Christianity, the role of the terrible mother remains vacant. Should the terrible mother be understood as a fantasy, a reminiscence of the archaic, promiscuous, and unencumbered female body, she will be found in the images of stepmothers from the world of folklore and fairy tales. This association is particularly strong, since in the Brothers Grimm's story there is no mother and the witch is an extension of a mean and always hungry stepmother. Siostra, however, depicts the witch as a biological mother, and so the bonding with her (as well as the inability to break the process) is therefore culturally sanctioned as "natural." Unlike Gretel in the tales of the Brothers Grimm, Marysia is not able to outwit the witch and fails to succeed in saving either herself or her brother. Subsequently, the witch-mother in Siostra slowly consumes her children. Furthermore, the siblings' fascination and fear, as experienced in front of the chocolate house in Grimm's story, have been transferred in Siostra into the regions of premature sexuality, divided unequally between sister and brother. As designed by the witch-mother, the sister (an object of desire) and her brother (a figure of the abject and fear) reinforce mutually their entrapment. One experiences the abjection, the other exposes desire: both, however, live out their mother's fantasy of incest. This culturally tabooed fantasy, and indeed, its unthinkable veracity, afflicts the narrative structure. It may be, as Butler would argue, that what is culturally unthinkable "is precisely a fantasy that is disavowed," the horrible act that a parent (mother) was willing to perform, "or it may be that what is unthinkable is precisely their convergence in the event" (Undoing Gender 156). But in order to read such a
broken narrative structure, one becomes a reader of the ellipsis, the gap, the absence. In reading such absence, as is the case with Jakub in Siostra, we encounter a necessity to rethink the prohibition itself: the incest taboo that sometimes protects against violation, and sometimes becomes the very instrument of a violation: "what counters the incest taboo offends not only because it often involves the exploitation of those whose capacity for consent is questionable, but because it exposes the aberration in normative kinship, an aberration that might also, importantly, be worked against the structures of kinship to force a revision and expansion of those very terms" (Undoing Gender 160).

While the Freudian Oedipal analysis results in Dora's "failure to be like, as good as, or just be her brother," it "is the sibling situation that thrusts Dora back on to loving her mother and her father" (Mitchell 103). Dora and Maria attempt to recover by winning the father's attention, and while Dora for a time succeeds, Maria's recovery is deemed to fail. In both cases, to follow Mitchell's insight, the pursuit of the father "is still a part of craving for a mother" (Mitchell 107). In Marysia's case, this craving has been entirely suppressed by her fear of the maternal authority: "Fear became my skin. But fear does not kill. It paralyses" (Saramonowicz 137). Her slipping into coma manifests such a paralysis and indicates a refusal to live and communicate in an oppressive time/space relation. Hence it might be seen as a return to the state of nonspeech, the un/attainable semiotic chora. As some trauma scholars suggest, traumatic experience requires postinterrogation, not only for the sake of testimony, but above all for the sake of cure (see Caruth; Brison). "Piecing together a dismembered self seems to require a process of remembering in which speech and affect converge....The results of the process of working through [the traumatic memory] reveal the performative role of speech acts in recovering from trauma: saying something about a traumatic memory does something to it" (Brison 56). Dora's "desperate, exuberant protests, the labile identifications and demonstrative sexualising of every contact are a way of asserting an existence that has gone missing" (Mitchell 107). If "Dora is trying to find a place for herself" (107), Maria, on the contrary, refuses trying, and her imaginary refuge turns into a hysterical identification with death. Marysia's final refusal of this process, involving her and her baby's physical death, manifests her silent and only available form of protest against participation in the experience of fear. Ultimately, it manifests the defeat of the maternal subject. "Unconsciousness. It is better than consciousness. Oblivion is better. Ignorance is better. Emptiness is better. Non-existence is better" (Saramonowicz 13). In this somewhat concluding part of my analysis, I focus on the Freudian death drive, which monopolizes Maria's unconscious in a form of desire or craving for death. In her discussion of the negative therapeutic reaction (resulting in such desire), Mitchell wrote that Freud had difficulties "accepting Dora when she asked to come back in treatment because he knew she did not want to recover" (147). Contrary to Freud's hypothesis of the "death drive as innate and in perpetual struggle with an equally innate life drive linked to a sexual drive," Mitchell "combines the sexual drive with the death drive as well as with the life drive, as maybe innate, but all activated by the
initiating trauma of the conditions of life" (139). In setting thus the life drive against
the death and sexual drives, Mitchell argues that the "life drive is activated by the
presence of caretakers, as opposed to their absence" (147). Since in Marysia's life
there are no actual caretakers, the death drive develops into the dominating drive.
Maria's identification with her father could be seen here as an initial attempt to en-
dure life, at the expense, however, of the repression of trauma. As Caruth has argued,
"the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to
be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single
place or time" (9). On the contrary, the ability to recover the past "is closely and
paradoxically tied up, in trauma, with the inability to have access to it" in conscious-
ness (152-53). Projecting a quasi-normal family life, Maria fails to tell her father
what happens during his long absences and learns to maintain her desire for dying
as an invisible illness. "They sealed my lips. They had to do it, so that I would not
say anything. They want me silent. All of them. Perhaps in the grave. Death is soft,
warm and clear" (Saramonowicz 90-91). This particular desire for death is not only
a medical diagnosis, it is the victim's pathological identity carefully suppressed in
the unconscious. It is the absence and presence of the child's hysteria, caused by the
rejection and subsequent objectification of the child by the mother (as caregiver).
The hysteria, and the exploitable body of the hysteric, renders Maria a passive sexual
object of desire. Maria's role is that of a doll, a toy removed from the comforting
realm of a little girl's pleasure, and transformed into a passive and speechless instru-
ment of oppression. She fulfills this role in her withdrawal to a biological/physical
reflex of motionlessness, typical for insects and certain mammals enacting tonic im-
mobility in situations of danger (Moskowitz 997). Saramonowicz incorporates in her
narrative the German scientific term Totstellreflex ("death-feigning behaviour"; 25)
signposting a posttraumatic stress disorder.

Maria's hysterical lethargy, a particularly strong nervous reaction to pregnan-
cy (as diagnosed by doctors in the narrative), could be also interpreted as "a horrid
warning" (Carter, Sadeian Woman 124) sent by the mother to the daughter: "If the
daughter is a mocking memory to the mother—'As I am so you once were'—then
the mother is a horrid warning to her daughter. 'As I am, so you will be.' Mother
seeks to ensure the continuance of her own repression, and her hypocritical solici-
tude for the young woman's moral, that is, sexual welfare masks a desire to reduce
her daughter to the same state of contingent passivity she herself inhabits" (124). In
refusing and accepting this passivity, experienced through pregnancy and memories
of rape, Maria performs a passive/active abortion, not only of her baby but most
importantly of herself as an extension or reproduction of her mother. The thought of
repetition of her own experience, as projected onto her foetus, is unbearable. In this
final retrospection, moving from Freud's phallocentric focus towards the Lacanian
metaphysics of lack, Saramonowicz endows everybody, including the absent father
and Maria's husband (Jakub), with hysterical, pathological predispositions. In try-
ing to find some rational explanation for Maria's coma, Jakub explores the truth,
but his attempts are obscured, reminiscent of a cabbalistic initiation, a search for
something that is perhaps only imagined. As he believes initially, "Maria, like every other woman, has simply strange whims and fits. Fits are yet to be an illness" (17), or otherwise unattainable, as he begins to suspect that the injury Maria had sustained in her childhood was too painful to share with anyone, an injury she had to hide "deep inside" (72). Mitchell's portrayal of hysteria, and the patient's identification with the dead as a crucial mechanism in coping with hysteria, helps us to measure the depth of Maria's anguish. In hysteria, to follow Mitchell, "the anxiety is so extreme that the subject takes avoidance action" (35). Imitation of death can be brief, but when compulsively repeated, it manifests an erasure of the subject, a drive towards the inorganic, towards annihilation. Indeed, the more Jakub reads through Maria's secret academic research, the more he realizes the significance of the mother in Maria's drive towards death: She is the "reason, the source of evil—the mother, femininity in its entirety, betraying, sly, emotionless. Mother...replaced by the cockroaches [that] took the burden of childish hatred away from her" (77). In configuring the mother as an executioner, an assassin entangled in her own sexual obsessions, and shifting the castration anxiety from a man to a woman, Saramonowicz complicates the feminist standpoint on "female oppression" in the phallocentric structure. The mother is thus present and powerful, but her archaic power, the promise of semiotic pleasures, collapses, as she becomes a monstrous and oppressive substitute for the phallus. As in Creed's definition of the archaic mother, she is the one "who is thought to possess a phallus" (21). This mother is multiplied and confused in Maria's subconscious with her brother, who incorporates the phallus in place of his father. As an eroticized phallic abuser, the mother becomes the source of all evil, embodying a transgression of the ultimate. In breaking the incest taboo, she implies a shift away from the moral sanctions of her daughter's body, and suspends her son in a simultaneous horror (denial) and fascination provoked by her apparent castration. As a result, her son becomes a male hysteric, who "has failed to resolve the Oedipus complex, failed, that is, to internalize a prohibition on parental incest" (Mitchell 21). He "feels catastrophically displaced...because another [the father] stands in his place" (107). The fear of being engulfed in the dark abyss between the mother's legs lives in him as a projection of the violence he performs on his sister's body. The psychotherapeutic conversation, a video recording discovered by Jakub and involving the brother, makes this projection of violence and fear explicit: "I tried to overcome it, but there was something pushing me towards the door of her room. I used to approach her room quietly, surreptitiously, step by step....I saw my shadow move, and I knew that she saw it too. I think that she did not sleep at all. She used to lie there with her eyes open, night after night, and she waited...—Did you beat her?—No, I had never beaten her. I did not have to.—We had cockroaches....I have never seen anybody so afraid of them. If a cockroach was near her, she was ready to do everything. Everything. I did not even have to tie her. Only so that it would not touch her. But they did not obey. They crawled into all possible directions, went into every opening, as cockroaches do. Mother took them away later into the kitchen.—What for?—She used to talk to them" (Saramonowicz 151).
Drawing on the concept of "the peer and sibling as mirror," Mitchell points out that "Dora had a focus for her identification with another child" in her brother (106-07). In Marysia's life there is no space for a similar identification, since she does not seem to have a human brother. The leading image for the brother-rapist is that of a cockroach, an armoured rider—his armour protecting him against unnecessary compassion. However, Maria's compulsive repetition of a childhood trauma, and her obsessive need to analyze every detail of her anguish, indicate her search for a brother-as-mirror. She documents her phobia (her obsession with re/search) in her dissertation, which provides detailed descriptions of cockroaches and their monstrous mutations, their eating habits, and general behavioral patterns. This investigation circulates in her unconscious in the intermingling images of her brother's unrelieved sexual cravings and cockroaches penetrating her body. The mother is never activated in these subconscious reminiscences, except through the monstrous jouissance of the brother who is speaking to Maria as a cockroach commemorating the moments of her defenselessness. This monstrous jouissance, however, stubbornly returns to the unencumbered, engulfing, and specifically female sexuality of the mother. The question thus turns on the relations among memory and desire. As Gallop comments, a "desire must insistently repeat itself until it will be recognized. If satisfaction, the reduction of tension, were the true goal of a desire, it might find a more efficient path than repeated insistence, just as, if the goal of the death instinct were simply the reduction of all tension, it could surely find a quick path to death. Thus repetition...is the effect not so much of the frustration of a desire but of the lack of recognition of a desire" (Daughter's Seduction 104). The abysmal and authoritarian body of the mother, beyond which there is no law to refer to, is the underlying repetitive force of Maria's "acting dead," her motionless and speechless states because of omnipresent maternal desire.

In conclusion, I argue that Saramonowicz places the mother deliberately in the context of a Freudian cognitive alliance with the boy, who sees only that the girl's body is penis-less. Yet, if the girl's sexual organs were admitted as the possibility of another libidinal economy, the phallocentric system of sociolinguistic projections of her absence/insignificance would collapse. What the mother communicates to us is that an attempt to subvert phallocentric entrapments can turn into a traumatic experience. As the figure of abjection and horror, the witch-mother indicates permanent displacement; she is first devoured by the (symbolic) abyss, and then taken as its very incorporation. As a displaced, fragmented, or disfigured subject, she is subsequently rejected and erased. The memory of an inevitable distortion of all forms returning to the maternal womb/tomb intermingles both with the belief in maternal comfort and with the fear of the terrible mother. The paradox of the mother, trapped in the biological repetition of life, is that she neither continues nor discontinues, but only suffers, as does Kristeva's mother in her yearning for the Law: "And since it is not made for [her] alone, [she ventures] to desire outside the law. Then, narcissism thus awakened—the narcissism that wants to be sex—roams, astonished.... Nothing reassures, for only the law sets anything down. Who calls such a suffer-
ing jouissance? It is the pleasure of the damned" ("Stabat Mater" 175). Equally, in Saramonowicz's account, the mother cannot continue as the origin of life; rather, she incorporates the paradox of the subject in process, drawing our attention to the sociopolitical implications of rejection, loss, and death. Speaking through the unconscious against the cult of the motherhood as superimposed on the subject in the social, the narrative confronts us with a concrete, physical collapse of the female body into a grave-mound composed of abject umbilical cords. It thus confronts us with the unexplored and difficult spaces of desire to defeat the maternal. Indeed, the assumption of the mother's phallic sufficiency, her coherent and self-contained identity as an autonomous subject, is disrupted in the narrative by the collective death of the mother, daughter, and subsequently child. This particular synthesis of death, as a form of narrative's conclusion, is the only resolution to the trauma offered—a dissolution, in fact, indicating the collapse of the female subject entrapped in the maternal identification.

I follow these intricacies of the maternal as explored by Sara Maitland in her two short stories, published in the 1980s in Britain. Employing absences, distortions, and slippages of the symbolic, Maitland's narratives continue to speak from the position of the rejected cord (the refused mother). In a resonant parallel to Siostra, Maitland draws on the phallocentric force of entry to the symbolic that subjugates the girl/woman's love and desire of and for another woman. This, to continue with Irigaray, throws her into a whirlpool of "a normative hetero-sexuality" (Irigaray, Speculum 54) and results in uprooting her from subjectivity.

The Narrative Fraud of the Phallic Mother

Sara Maitland's narratives, "Cassandra" and "The Burning Times," published in a collection of stories Women Fly When Men Aren't Watching (1988), address this suspension of subjectivity in the context of both remembering and contesting the memories of the lesbian/virgin body, its history of cultural incompatibility, and its connectedness with the maternal, semiotic, and fantasized spaces of articulation. The narrative fraud, as I suggest, refers both to the formal structure of the stories (bordering on invented memory and reconstructed history) as well as to their contents (narrative fantasies of a woman who is thought to possess a phallus). In discussing this fraud, I employ Kristeva, Irigaray, and Butler's theories, which all, differently, focus on female subjectivity and its troublesome absence from mainstream Western mythology and history of thought. What Maitland narrates are imagined biographies (herstories) about women such as those Irigaray has written about: "uprooted from their subjectivities" and thrown into a whirlpool of "a normative hetero-sexuality, normal in our societies, but completely pathogenic and pathological" (Bodily Encounter 44). Similarly to the narratives discussed so far, I examine her texts as forms of feminist therapy posited as alternatives to the established Western canon, and inherently divided between the methodical (logical, reasonable) and the semiotic fantasy that is out of phallogocentric control. In this political sense of absence, the unwritten biographies are reinvented in terms of femininity, identity and language,
and critically performed/narrated. As such, they are extremely effective in removing some of the perturbing distinctions between written and unwritten tracks of history, specifically in the contexts of madness and desire, licensing the use of both in terms of what is missing rather than what is true.

Maitland's "Cassandra," a narrative reminder of Christa Wolf's feminist rewriting of Cassandra's story, is a reconstruction of history that might never have taken place, a biography (if Cassandra ever had one) fraught with fantasy of the semiotic and left untransliterated. Maitland's Cassandra is a prophetic "madwoman," unable to recognize herself as an autonomous, consciously speaking (and remembering) subject. My reason for choosing this particular story is its bizarre context of the "phallic woman," collapsing into a phallocentric fetish on the one hand and transforming into a threat to masculine identity in the form of a Python on the other. This conflict, to follow Bronfen's insight, crystallizes in the act of Apollo's slaying of the snake Python, who was both Gaia's child and guardian of the omphalos. After Gaia's defeat, and the displacement of her prophetic powers through Apollo's sacrificial murder, "the mephitic cleft in the earth and the omphalos as site of oracle, were maintained. The fetish stone and maternal emblem, however, received a new encoding and were transformed into the sign of the earth's center on which Apollo's monistic faith in a paternal God could be based" (Bronfen 18). In Maitland's account, Apollo "has made love to mortals" and "they have delighted in him" (60). But "who is she, this child, to make mock of a god's desire? Who is she to shame him and despise him? And seeing her as a child, he is more ashamed than ever. And like white heat his anger rises, rises to replace the rising of his genitals which are withered by her rejection" (60). My question, involving the imagery of the "phallic woman," is whether the phallic refers to the Freudian assumption of woman's lack (which in itself is fraught with fallacy) and the subsequent appropriation of phallic discourse by the symbolically castrated woman. Is this appropriated "penis" not perhaps mistaken for a similar, but differently deleted, organ, the umbilical cord, in the form of the snake (Python)? And ultimately, in what relation does the phallic woman stand to the symbolic? Alluding to Ovid's account in the Metamorphoses, Maitland describes Cassandra's initial fascination with Apollo, but emphasizes her lack of experience in "sexual matters" and the ease with which Apollo has seduced her (59).

According to Geoffrey Miles, Cassandra's legend, told most famously in Ovid's Metamorphoses (Book 14), relates that Apollo "granted the Trojan princess Cassandra powers of prophesy but, when she refused to submit to him, added the rider that no one would ever believe her" (39). Maitland's narrative focuses precisely on Cassandra's refusal to submit her body to Apollo's sexual force, which is incompatible and incommensurable with her desire. Her pain originates in the encounter with phallic desire, with "an" eroticism so different from her own that it violates rather than excites her senses. What we are reading then might be an extended account of Irigaray's "handsome Apollo, a lover of men rather than women, the narcissistic lover of their bodies and their words," who helps Orestes "to recover from his madness" (Bodily Encounter 36) and (in Maitland's story) infuses Cassandra with madness:
"When she becomes conscious, she does not remember. They do not understand the long scratches on her face, nor the bruising on her head until she starts having fits. In her fits she murmurs dreadful and dangerous things, lost perceptions that make no sense but are discouraging....Although she is very beautiful they conclude that she is mad. She is often placed under restraint, because of the complicated distortions in all her forms of communication" (Maitland 61-62). I propose that it is worthwhile to investigate the meaning of madness in the ancient Greek context. Following Padel's study, there is a distinction between madness as a physical and mental contamination, and possession as a divine (immaculate) penetration of the fe/male body fertilized by a god: "The key word [to possession] is entheos...'with god inside.' It distinguishes 'possessed' from ekphron, 'mad'" (14); being possessed implies madness, yet madness does not necessarily mean possession. The connotation of physical pain and erotic penetration establishes the belief "that prophetic possession by a male god involved pain, which the priestess naturally resisted....The entry of god into woman is painful; as, in medieval fantasies about the Black Mass, women's copulation with the evil was painful, since he was very cold" (Padel 14). As the result of an erotic penetration, madness presents one of the main images for possessing a female (soul) that is "a womb-like receptacle for divine intrusion and inner pain" (17). The intensity of Apollo's sexuality, in Maitland's narrative, certainly attests to this, while repeatedly focusing on the violent nature of his paternal intrusion. Cassandra's traumatic refusal, which is too painful to endure, can be thus linked with the unspoken experience of a girl entering the symbolic structure that cannot deliver pleasure but only pain. This child will be punished for rejecting the phallus, and perhaps therefore thought to possess one: Apollo addresses Cassandra, saying: "Since you make a gap between me and my desire I shall make one between your seeing and your saying. You can never leap that gap. It will be a very lonely place" (Maitland 61). This loneliness, bearing a metaphorical sense of a gap, separates the girl from jouissance in the act of the symbolic cutting of the umbilical cord.

Wolf's Cassandra explores the similar territory of an unwritten biography, and (in the English translation) it takes the form of a "raging desire for confrontation with the poetics" (Wolf 141) of the patriarchal order. Maitland's narrative pursues this confrontation further back to reconstruct Cassandra's punishment as a violent split of the speaking subject, a subject posited as the momentary stasis of homosexual eroticism between mother and child, interrupted by the paternal envy and revenge: "'You're hurting me,' [Cassandra] says, trying to wriggle free. 'I know,' [Apollo] says, without compassion. He puts his tongue on her lips, but now there is no desire, his tongue is like a knife, he runs it up the narrow crevice above her upper lip, very slowly, very coldly....With the force of his chin he bows her head and runs his hard cutting tongue right across the centre of her crown, and she feels the sharp blade cut into her cranium, and into the depth of her brain, a single even slicing and there is intolerable pain, intolerable confusion" (61). Entangled in the impossibilities of language, Maitland's Cassandra remains frozen in nonspeech, in nonstructure, because of her own not quite conscious choice. Her biography is subsequently
anesthetized by the paternal language. Further, in a link to Padel's exploration of the divine possession, Cassandra is infused with a distorted form language, with the "real" that, entangled in the umbilical cord, refuses to become symbolic: "She has a knowing that [Agamemnon] will not...that he will wait...that he will...she does not know the word for what it is she fears, for what it is she knows he will not do. Then the next minute it is gone, it is all gone" (55). Cassandra's identity is fragmented like the child's attachment to the mother in Baym's analysis: "The pre-Oedipal mother is rudely rejected when the child discovers the mother's appalling 'lack,' such rejection indicating that...the child was never 'really' attached to the mother, only fantasized such attachment; the 'real' attachment was always to the father" (288), to the symbolic. In psychoanalytic theory, both the pre-Oedipal and the phallic, when referring to the/a woman, articulate her condition in and with reference to the symbolic. Posited, however, at a site of "real incision" (separation from the "wholeness" as mother), Maitland's Cassandra, motherless and childless herself, survives between the semiotic and the symbolic, in a position where the first is unattainable (since there is no return to the mother) and the second is incomprehensible (since she is mad). Her disobedience draws on Lacan's concept of female incongruity with the symbolic function, and provides another interesting link between the imagined biography of the semiotic with the history of paternal desire.

In exploring this link further, I focus on Sissa's analogy between the mouth and the other female stoma, "the cervix of the uterus and the labia of the vulva" (5). As Sissa comments, the lexicon of Hippocratic medicine exhibits an early crystallization of this analogy: "the upper and lower portions of the female body are shown to be symmetrical through the use of identical terms to describe the parts of both. The mouth (stoma) through which food is ingested and from which speech emanates corresponds to the "mouth" (stoma) of the uterus. A narrow orifice, the latter is nevertheless equipped with lips that close, just as the lips of the upper mouth are sealed in silence. The image was so apt that it even entered the lexicon of Aristotelian biology, which in other respects was not particularly susceptible to the gastric [but also verbal] connotations of the female apparatus" (53). In a parallel mode, Cassandra appears as a self-sufficient, homoerotic subject in a double understanding of the female labia: the uncontrollable lips of the speaking female mouth and the insubordinate unreceptive lips of the vulva: "'I can't,' she cried. 'Stop it, let me go...I don't want it [Apollos's penis]. I don't want your present. I don't want to know the future. I was only joking'" (60). In an attempt to disrupt the symbolic superiority of Apollo's desire, Maitland centers on Cassandra's physical pain and her girlish virginal body. Cassandra's vaginal wound, unarticulated in the Greek legend, inscribes her madness with a lack of sexual joy, a type of jouissance that has never taken place. In this sense, Cassandra's punishment for rejecting Apollo's divine semen follows Sissa's argument: She is entrusted/fertilized with the visionary powers that will stay imprisoned within her mouth, unspoken. Just as her vagina refuses the divine power/knowledge, so her mouth is unable to articulate it. Apollo's amatory adventures with humans are even more destructive than those of his father, Zeus (Alcmene, Leda, Io). Besides
Cassandra, Apollo offers the gift of prophecy to Sibil, but faced with the continuous refusal of his advances, he punishes Sibil by making her immortal without granting her eternal youth. Daphne, who may have been immortal herself, actually escapes Apollo's lust by being metamorphosed into a laurel tree. All three are destroyed by Apollo's attention. The nonlinguistic space, in Cassandra's case, has little to do with the semiotic chora as a place of jouissance. Similar to Carter's and Saramonowicz's narratives, it is a place of oppression, imprisonment, and paralysis. Cassandra's brain is projected as inherently divided into the conscious and the unconscious, the accessible and inaccessible fragments. The signifier and the signified are split between what she knows and what she can/not say. Held responsible and punished for the disintegration of the phallic subject (Apollo's desire), she is split open right between her two disobedient mouths. The gap, the "hemispheric split," accounts for her inability, inarticulacy, and insanity. But what really is "the hell of it," as Carter has put it (and Maitland's story is explicit here), is that the split refers to permanent brain damage inflicted as the Father's revenge (Sadeian Woman 5). Cassandra, like the Kristevan Phallic Mother, is the one who is outside the law and the symbolic structure and hence must be annihilated. "No language can sing unless it confronts the Phallic Mother. For all that it must not leave her untouched, outside, opposite, against the law....Rather it must swallow her, eat her, dissolve her, set her up like a boundary of the process where 'I' with 'she'—'the other,' 'the mother'—becomes lost" (Desire 191). Disconnected from her mother/herself, Maitland's Cassandra lives in her desire for the whole that indeed, in a Lacanian sense, becomes illusory. As a divided subject, she does not recognize herself as the Phallic Mother, the "unconscious buttress of the laws of the city...apprehended, comprehended, and thrust aside" (Desire 192). What the narrative repeatedly reminds us is that Cassandra "cannot leap the gap," and in this sense she is thrust aside with "too many feelings of depression and guilt and euphoria" (Maitland 54). Frozen in her understanding of self before separation, Cassandra "sees what will happen and she tells it and no one can believe her. She cannot believe herself; in each bitter instant Cassandra hears her own truths as spittle and crazed foaming" (56). She is the hysteric, as described by Kristeva, with the phallus that could be the mother, and which "is something often said, but here we are all stopped short by this 'truth': the hysteric, the obsessed, the fetishist, and the schizoid. It is a focus of attention that drives us crazy" (Desire 191). And it is this "focus of attention" that is of crucial importance to the fantasy of the/a phallic mother. Her oracular discourse, split and multiplied by the very fragmentation of the phallic structure, carries the scar of not merely the trauma but also the triumph over her fantastic body that is marked by the "real incision."

If Cassandra had not refused Apollo, she would, perhaps, have become (divinely) possessed, and Apollo's semen might have turned her into a phallic oracle governed by the law of the Father. But her fears are stronger than her aspirations; the fear of being raped and turned against her own pleasure simultaneously gives her the right to reject Apollo and denies her the right of entry into the symbolic. The interrupted and denied fertilization of Cassandra deconstructs the myth of the vaginal or-
gasm (and of the importance of penetration) as ensuring the foundation of the public monopoly of patriarchal society over women. Positing Cassandra as the un/speaking subject, and thus illustrating the dialectical opposition between the semiotic and the symbolic, Maitland's biography of Cassandra re-enacts the experience of a female suffering that both results from and constitutes the opposition between the two. Cassandra's split position is a painful vacuum, a fantasy of suspension of the signifying structure. Drawing on early feminist constructions of the female body as a locus of fear, "The Burning Times" (1988), Maitland's second narrative for discussion here, continues to speak from the position of the rejected cord (the refused mother) and draws on the phallocentric force that subjugates the girl/woman's love and desire for her mother. But is it a memory or a fantasy, or is it both: a historicized metaphor for the split subject, mother and daughter unweaving their destinies, undoing their split? Undoubtedly, what Maitland narrates is again a story of pain, regret, and confusion, perhaps her own testimony, both fraud and fantasy, maintaining traces of a traditional memoir in terms of tone, vocabulary, and its ecliptic fragmentary form. The story is narrated from the perspective of a grown-up daughter (of a lesbian who was burned as a witch) who has now herself become a mother. The mother that the narrator attempts to reconstruct is phallic and therefore fake, either because she acted as if she had a phallus or because she rejected it in ignoring its symbolic centrality. Throughout the story, she and her mother remain nameless, void of reference and location. In this sense of writing about the past (which in Maitland's story is left unspecified and could be anywhere between the fourteenth and twentieth centuries), history is always already suspended, performative, fantastic. Once again, this history proves very useful as a narrative form of biography that reinvents lost authenticity. Supplementing the suffocating atmosphere of her present home with reminiscences from her childhood, the narrator projects her unorthodox childhood cottage onto the omnipotent historical structure of a nearby Catholic church. This structure, ambiguously as well as ironically, becomes the space of the narrator's physical and metaphorical refuge. The church, and specifically its altar of the "burning Virgin," where the narrator spends hours mourning and thereby reviving her past, gains or even usurps the maternal space of the semiotic chora, the womb/tomb of the burned witch-mother. It is in the act of displacing memory into a narrative enactment that the events of her childhood spent with her mother are performed anew. In remembering and reconstructing her mother as a witch, Maitland's narrator enacts a return to her childhood fears: a journey into the heart of patriarchal darkness. The central figure introduced in the story is the agonizing Virgin, conceptualized by the narrator as an absence (ghost, spectrum) of the archaic mother, born of flesh and martyred. The narrator describes the Virgin as a lady "crowned with the sun, aglow with the light from the candles lit by women like [herself]" (133). In the absence of the mother, widely discussed by Irigaray in the context of psychoanalysis, the daughter's prayer is spoken as "a gestural mimesis," in which verbal exchange is useless or perhaps impossible ("Limits" 110). Her words flow into the mysterious desire for the ghost of the archaic mother (Irigaray's "woman"); her desire takes place before speech
intervenes and before the authenticity of her as a subject establishes itself in the history (110).

Keeping in mind this prelinguistic space of desire, I turn to explore what might possibly take place in the maternal spaces of the church as narrated by Maitland. First, the memory of the victimized (burning) witch has been projected onto the figure of a sanctified and fetishized Virgin. It is the daughter (as narrator) who focuses on this particular intermingling of the "wild" burning mother (whose body is exhibited, made to be a central focus of the villagers' attention) with the Virgin, veiled and confined to the claustrophobic, restricted space of the church. The two historical/historicized figures fuse into a fraud: a mother, but a phallic one, and therefore not quite a woman. This particular constellation of the (lesbian) mother-virgin who "often seemed on fire" is crucial to the narrator's memory of identity split and alienation, a memory under erasure. Finally, the daughter's fear of historical repetition is intertwined in the story with her personal responsibility for her mother's death: "when I look up at her through the tears and through the candle flames, she seems to me on fire...she is burning, smiling, burning and I scream. Aloud. Dear mother, let no one have heard. But she will not listen to my prayers, because I burned my own mother, I betrayed her and they burned her and I danced around her pyre....And I cannot confess this sin, because they will burn me too. They will torture and break me as they did her. Then they will burn me" (133-34). The daughter, still "alive" and a mother herself, burns thus in a self-imposed penance in front of the Virgin's altar. Accompanied by ferocious images of other burning bodies, her suffering is underscored by the fear that the same thing might happen to her. The frequently repeated "they will burn me, too" motif refers both to a concrete physical fear and to the reoccurring maternal trauma of the "real incision" that keeps "the symbolic castration" intact: "Torn between the sons and the fathers, the stake or sacrifice in dispute between men, she is fragmented into bits and pieces, and therefore unable to articulate her difference" (Whitford 27). It is because of her unresolved erotic difference that the daughter condemns and denounces her mother to the authorities of the village. In burning thus the maternal cord, the narrator appears as a hysteric daughter oppressed by the hegemonic patriarchal structure (she is unhappily married, has three adult sons and no space for herself in the tiny cottage). Possessed and displaced, like Cixous's figure, she becomes "a witch in reverse, turned back within herself" (Cixous and Clément 36), and trapped in the imaginary land of the phallic mother whose desire remains unarticulated. Perhaps only under a different name, a name without identification, half erased, half fraud, a fantasy name. Like Cixous's Medusa, Maitland's figure of the lesbian mother refers to the "universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history" ("Laugh" 347). To begin with, this subject interrogates the philosophical tradition (Irigaray), particularly from the side of desire. In this link with desire Maitland's mother emerges most prominently as a remembered and remembering subject who "laughed at everyone and at herself" (Maitland 135). The significance of her subversive Medusa-like laugh undermines and ridicules heterosexual hegemony: "Her hair was a great mass of tangled curls,
and she would not smooth them down. She was a widow woman, they said, though as a child I heard other things....She did not come from that village, but from another further west, towards the mountains. She never spoke of her childhood, or of what and where she had been before. She was a lace-maker; a very skilful lace-maker, and she loved the work" (135).

Through her daughter's memory, her/story is revived, and her anonymous past, that of a woman ignored by history for centuries, is replaced by the unexpectedly unfolding biography of a peasant artist. In contrast with alienated "madwomen" (such as Cassandra), Maitland's mother emerges as an excellent storyteller, a mouth-dominated, or two-lipped subject speaking from a place that is sealed, inaccessible to her daughter. But nothing, not even her mother's liberatory laughter, can heal the separation and betrayal stored in the daughter's memory. Again, in a parallel to Cassandra's story, the significance of this passage lies in the narrated disconnection between one space, which can be remembered and the "other," which remains unattainable and returns as distorted, collapsed, and incomplete. In what, on the surface, materializes as a "lumpish" attempt to "hush the boys," something else is put out of sight: a broken dialogue between the fantasy that "goes wrong" (becomes fraud) once articulated in the paternal structure: the narrated reality of the daughter who, like Maria in Siostra, insists on revising the traumatic past. The question that calls for attention therefore concerns what memory routes or systems she can possibly employ to recreate her mother. How does she remember the unspeaking (remembered) subject that, like Cassandra, refuses to remain silent and is therefore remembering (perpetuating) itself? The narrator remembers her mother as a chaotic, dominant, creative, but also economically self-sufficient woman, assuming the phallic (self-centred) position. Simultaneously capable of maintaining and trespassing against the unwritten laws of the village, the mother is dangerously suspended between both possibilities, perhaps even aware of her collapse to come, as if she knew that her end was just the matter of time and opportunity. Purkiss, commenting on this story, concludes that the mother's lesbian sexuality and the daughter's own unrecognized desire for her mother's lover "lead the narrator to denounce her mother, but plainly this daughter envies her mother at every possible level" (23). This envy for the "phallic" integration, combined with the brutal separation from her mother, repeatedly returns to her in the form of anxiety attacks. The church merely offers a shelter to her body, where in/independence (her striving for space) is suspended between the archaic images of the unencumbered woman and the domesticated woman bound to heterosexuality. Her body balances between virginity and motherhood, but unlike the Virgin she has no alternative but to be one or the other: "The statue of the Virgin is in painted wood. She holds her son somehow clumsily I feel, having held three of my own. A chance lurch of that serene head and he will fall out of her arms; she should bring him lower so that he straddles her hip....I try to concentrate on that, on that dangerous way in which she is holding the Son of God; and how easy it is for a child to fall out of even the most loving arms" (Maitland 134). This passage clearly links with Kristeva's reference to the maternal attempt "to unite the logic of passion with the order...of the
ideal, of the prohibition, of the law" (Clément and Kristeva 114). It is true, writes
Kristeva, "that cornering [the Virgin] for her lack of experience with babysitting...is,
of course, very funny, but avoids the difficulty of the cunning and, I maintain, splen-
did construction of the Virgin-Mother-of-God" (114). In escaping to the "splendid"
Virgin, the daughter is prey to this "cunning": what she faces is at times her burning
mother, and at times a silent stature representing an abstract institution with the om-
nipresent Father at the top. The imagined dialogue between mother and daughter is
broken, divided between the forbidden (homosexual desire that remains unspoken)
and what is heterosexual and consciously experienced as knowledge.

This division has been explored by Irigaray in her radical project postulating
a female homosexual bond that is required to recompose women's primary narcis-
sism, badly wounded (damaged) by the phallocentric symbolic. The love of another
woman is crucial to this process. However, if both the maternal body and the lesbian
experience are described "from a position of sanctioned heterosexuality that fails
to acknowledge its own fear of losing that sanction," the love of another woman
inevitably emerges as already acknowledging its own loss (Gender Trouble 87). This
argument by Butler has its roots in cultural subversion that not only acknowledges
female homosexuality, but also "the varied meanings and possibilities of motherhood
as a cultural practice" (Gender Trouble 87). Finally, cultural subversion is of concern
here since it emerges from beneath the surface of culture, beneath the territory of its
laws and prohibitions, from the semiotic possibility of a language and its unwritten
track of history. The discussed narratives explicitly draw on these unwritten spaces
of cultural subversion and precisely therefore appear as fraudulent, fantasized, and
suspended. For various reasons, the relationship with the mother, as described by
Maitland, "is a mad desire," a "dark continent" that "remains in the shadows of our
culture; it is its night and its hell" (Irigaray, Bodily Encounter 35). Although address-
ning different destinies, these narratives clearly converge in the recognition of the
historical debt to the lost maternal identity that, as Irigaray advocated, would free
the mother "to become a sexual and desiring woman" and "the daughter from the icy
grip of the merged and undifferentiated relationship" (Whitford 77). In deviating
from the restorative and liberating spaces of semiotic pleasures, the archaic chora
appears as a hole that leads nowhere, an empty barren space, or as a ghostly (spec-
tral) apparition of repressed desires. The texts are thus charged with the repression
of the maternal subject that escapes the paternal law but inevitably needs to remain
within that law in order to be granted cultural validity. Similar alienation is central to
my analyses of Atwood's novel, Alias Grace (1996), and, subsequently, Tokarczuk's
E.E. In both cases, alienation takes the forms of separation and madness infused by
the split of one subject (that of mother and daughter) in the process of socialization.

Transcending the Exposures of the Repressed

Mapping the intellectual territory of nineteenth-century Canada, Atwood's narrative
reclaims the documented but enigmatic story of Grace Marks, who was convicted
in 1843 of murdering her employer Thomas Kinnear and his housekeeper, Nancy
Montgomery, and was subsequently held in the Lunatic Asylum in Toronto and the Kingston Penitentiary. The controversial conviction sparked much debate about whether Marks was actually instrumental in the murder or merely an unwitting accessory. A number of theories were offered as to Marks's psychic state: that she acted as if she suffered from mental illness in order to be placed in an asylum, that she had multiple personality disorder, or that she was possessed by the consciousness of her deceased friend Mary Whitney. Another theory, controversial but supported by some evidence, was that Marks had died, not Whitney, and Whitney had adopted Marks's name and identity (on this see Westwood). As I argue, Atwood explores Grace's estrangement while suggesting a link between a sexually exploited woman and a fantasy of her archaic narcissistic self that refuses to accept the exploitation. Speculating on alternative states of consciousness in a pre-Freudian context, Atwood recreates the nineteenth-century conception of "female difference" that alludes to "the unknown [that] is always more wonderful...than the known, and more convincing" (Atwood 268). Sexuality, the materiality of human reproduction, and consequently the patriarchal household system are central to this exploration. As neurological conditions of possession and hysteria are intertwined in Alias Grace with fragments of biblical imagery, superstitions, and, in fact, with demonology, what emerges is an interesting narrative of the female body/sexuality as a contradiction to itself.

To explore this contradiction, Atwood follows the nineteenth-century sociological projection of "woman" as deficient and biologically inferior, conceived to assist and support a masculine "consciousness to itself" (Felman 9). Excluded from the patronymic signifier, the "woman" does not possess sexuality on her own, but exists as a relational supplement, bringing something that is missing.

Grace's madness is thus brought into immediate and recurring association with her culturally restricted and exploited body, subjected not only to science and law, but also to the private fantasies of the doctors and judges. Evoking associations with the Derridean "undecidable structure," her sexuality represents the pharmacon, a contradictory signification of the hymen, both remedy and poison, the fusion of the self and other. It is "an image almost medieval in its plain lines, its angular clarity: a nun in a cloister, a maiden in a towered dungeon, awaiting the next day's burning at the stake, or else the last-minute champion come to rescue her" (Atwood 59). In an oppressively phallocentric structure of knowledge, Grace's hysteria, and perhaps madness, seems to be derived from her connection with the distorted mother of mankind, Eve, who was seduced by the snake and infused with disobedience. Identifying Grace with such disobedience, Atwood narrates a story of her revolt against paternalistic assumptions about Eve's objectification in the face of the Law. This particular identification converges with Cixous's argument, offering a possible key with which to read Grace's madness: "the first fable of our first book is a fable in which what is at stake is the relationship to the law. There are two principal elements, two main puppets: the word of the Law or the discourse of God and the Apple. It's a struggle between the Apple and the discourse of God. All this transpires in this short scene before a woman. The Book begins Before the Apple: at the beginning of ev-
erything there is an apple, and this apple, when it is talked about, is said to be a not-to-be-fruit. There is an apple, and straight away there is the law” (Cixous “Extreme Fidelity” 134). Focusing on Grace’s absence of mind (God, Law) in the moments of her hysterical attacks, Atwood inscribes madness as mysteria, a “Western nineteenth-century view, which linked hysteria to a specific version of femininity as itself a ‘mystery’” (Mitchell 112): “Two hundred years ago, they would not have been at a loss,” says Reverend Verringer. ‘It would have been a clear case of possession. Mary Whitney would have been found to have been inhabiting the body of Grace Marks, and thus to be responsible for inciting the crime, and for helping to strangle Nancy Montgomery. An exorcism would have been in order.’ ‘But this is the nineteenth century,’ says Simon. ‘It may be a neurological condition.’ He would like to say must be, but he doesn’t wish to contradict Verringer too bluntly. Also he is still quite unsettled, and unsure of his intellectual ground” (Atwood 405). To follow this mystery with Kristevan psychoanalytical insight, Grace is left without the social support within the symbolic, without the loving third or access to sublimation. It is within this context that the narrative emphasizes the crucial importance of sexuality in the formation of subjectivity, without which there remains depression, melancholia, and entrapment in the biological body. Indeed, Atwood depicts nineteenth-century (women's) bodies as "meant" to be domesticated, "caged in wire crinolines...so that they cannot get out and go rubbing up against the gentlemen's trousers" (22), just as they are destined to become pregnant in order to preserve their cultural entrapment. This specifically female condition correlates with hysteria as a gendered complaint deriving from woman's social role to serve masculine centrality as "a daughter / a mother / a wife" (Felman 7-8).

The parallels between feminist psychoanalysis and Atwood's text are overt. In fact, as I see it, Grace Marks attempts to become one of the many dutiful Daughters committed to the patriarchal system without understanding its doctrine and also unknowingly reinforcing their own subjugation. A witness to her mother's continual pregnancies, Grace is already urged prematurely to become a "little mother." The wish to kill the father who impregnates the mother becomes her part in the Oedipal drama. Her family position is ambiguous, placed between hating the father and becoming a parent substitute, a role she assumes literally after her mother's death but is soon forced to abandon. Her double separation, first from her mother, then from her numerous siblings, reinforces the need for identification with another, which she finds in Mary Whitney, her roommate and a servant like herself. Mary Whitney introduces Grace into the life of a maid, a "respectful" life within the structure of the patriarchal household, contrasted with prostitution as the only alternative. Echoing this juxtaposition, Atwood exposes both household and prostitution as equal products of the Law that encodes nineteenth-century women alternatively as submissive subjects to the system or potentially mad. In Atwood's account, not only the servant, but every woman, independently of her social position, can be "exploited, enslaved, treated as a thing rather than a person" (de Beauvoir 586), and consequently, needs to be analyzed in the context of madness (as inflicted by Law). To return to Felman's
formulation, Grace is in "the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation" (8). Far from being a contestation, her mental illness is a request for help, a manifestation "of cultural impotence and of political castration. This socially defined help—needing and help—seeking behaviour is itself part of female conditioning, ideologically inherent in the behavioural pattern and in the dependent and helpless role assigned to the woman as such" (Felman 8).

What seems to be crucial in Atwood's reading of the nineteenth-century woman is the imagery of her disobedient (speaking) mouth that in refusing to keep silent destabilizes the Law of the Father/God who "made women with skirts," so they can be "pulled over their heads and tied at the top, that way you don't get so much noise out of them...the only thing of use in them is below the waist" (Atwood 240). As with all other cultural attributes of the nonconforming female body, the mouth is defined in terms of hysterical sexuality. Having a cunning mouth, Grace Marks is fascinating, and then abject, trapped, and imprisoned as she continues to speak. Her stories, like those of the Homeric Sirens, "ought never to be subjected to the harsh categories of Truth and Falsehood," since they "belong in another realm altogether" (377). The realm Atwood refers to is the Freudian unheimlichkeit, correlated by Kristeva with the linguistic suspension of judgment. In this state, the uncanny "is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind, and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Kristeva, Strangers 184). Although Grace's "behavioural pattern" might indeed be "ideologically inherent" (Atwood 8) to phallocentric thinking, it discloses irregularity, slippages of personality, and difference from patriarchal patterns. The violent death of Mary Whitney, in particular, undermines the ideology Grace took for granted or deemed "kind enough" and "usual" (Atwood 308). Her behavioural irregularity begins with a sudden loss of memory and a split in her mind that causes the "other voice, whatever it was" (189) to speak and to act in her name. Grace, left in the room with Mary's body, imagines/is able to hear her dead friend asking her to "let [her] in" (179). The shock of the uncanny she experiences implodes both her mind and body: "An auditory hallucination, of course...followed...by an episode of fainting, and then by hysterics, mixed with what would appear to have been somnambulism; after which there was a deep and prolonged sleep, and subsequent amnesia" (189). This particular collapse of Grace's identity could be read as a Freudian Spaltung (break, fracture, split) caused by the repetition of an abrupt female "death in blood." In both cases—Mary's, and earlier, her mother's—death is caused by the lack or incompetence of doctors and accompanied by the imagery of maternal bloodshed.

Mary Whitney, victim of an illegal and clumsy abortion, initiates in Grace a sequence of returns to her repressed desires. Returning as the uncanny, unsettling, and supernatural, Mary becomes what Creed calls "the phantasy of the castrating mother," who "undermines Freud's theories that woman terrifies because she is castrated and that it is the father who alone represents the agent of castration within the family" (151). Mary, as the voice of the uncanny, "remarkable for its violence" but
"not without a certain logic" (Atwood 406), reveals Grace's unconscious, subversive desires, leading her to take on the double task of clarifying and correcting paternal "irregularities" in the name of the loss she has experienced. As she says, "the Bible may have been thought out by God, but it was written down by men. And like everything men write down, such as the newspapers, they got the main story right but some of the details wrong" (459). Thus, what Grace desires, without being able to articulate it, is not a masculine self-identity, but the imaginary semiotic chora, the protective space of the repressed maternal voice. In her somnambulistic trance, she keeps "asking where Grace had gone. And when they told [her] that [she] was Grace, [she] would not believe them...and tried to run out of the house, because...Grace was lost, and had gone into the lake, and [she] needed to search for her" (180). The lake, a watery space, evokes the protective and destructive potential of the mother's womb, as well as the memory of the ocean, another uncanny space that devoured her mother's body during their transatlantic journey to Canada.

In her description of the mother's death, Atwood provides evidence that Grace's mother died owing to the continuous pregnancies that eventually distorted her womb: "There was a hard swelling, and I thought it was another little mouth to feed," although the doctor said "it was most likely a tumour, or a cyst, or else a burst appendix...but there was no way of telling without cutting her open" (120). The distorted womb, suggesting the end rather than the beginning, becomes in Grace's imagination the source of a desire to avenge her mother's and Mary's death-causing pregnancies. As "a token of repression" this womb/tomb imagery disturbs Grace's identity by leading back "to what is known of old and long familiar" (Creed 54), the contradiction of the maternal as an intimate, as well as a concealed, deceitful, and malicious space. In Alias Grace, the familiar and the intimate are reversed into their opposites in an analogous way: pregnancy and death are brought together with an uncanny strangeness emanating from the Unheimlichkeit of wombs cut open. This strangeness will manifest itself in Grace as madness, although it can also appear to be a "clumsy" defence of the distressed low-class and uneducated woman, or mother (to be), as nineteenth-century medical attitudes suggested.

Locating female madness in the context of a homicide, Atwood shows that the concept of crime is constructed along the axis of masculine presence and female absence, a conclusion drawn also by Creed in her conceptualization of the monstrous-feminine. The difference in association between murderer (monster) and the murderess (monstrous feminine) lies in the socially ambiguous status of the female body, both intensifying and suspending the act of murder and its monstrosity. Owing to this unresolved suspension, the female suspect will become a female demon or a witch, and, contrary to Foucault's famous analysis of crime as spectacle, will continue to be publicly displayed. In analyzing the treatment of the condemned in the nineteenth century, Foucault refers to a body that is no longer tortured but caught up in a system of constraints, obligations, and prohibitions: "One no longer touched the body, or at least as little as possible, and then only to reach something other than the body itself" in the form of imprisonment, forced labour, and penal servitude. "But
the punishment-body relation is not the same as it was in the torture during public executions" (Discipline and Punish 11). Clearly, Atwood's depiction of nineteenth-century imprisonment rituals and interrogation do not attest to "the disappearance of the spectacle" or the "elimination of pain" (Discipline and Punish 11): "The reason they want to see me is that I am a celebrated murderess. Or that is what has been written down. When I first saw it I was surprised...what is there to celebrate about murder?...Murderess is a strong word to have attached to you. It has a smell to it, that word—musky and oppressive, like dead flowers in a vase" (Atwood 22-23).

Grace in the asylum and prison is still above all an attractive, celebrated body that forces us to reinvestigate Foucault's claims in Discipline and Punish. Although the relation of body to the punishment has changed, and Grace will indeed no longer be burnt at the stake, she remains "a temptation": her body is suspended between the doctor's scientific interests and his physical desires, "if possible to arrange it unserved" (Atwood 29). Her madness and her monstrosity are simply used here as a medical pretext to interrogate her female organs: "Keep still, I am here to examine you, it is no use lying to me" (32). Contrary thus to Foucault's assumptions, physical pain, in the context of Atwood's narrative, is still "the pain of the body itself," even if "officially it is no longer the constituent element of the penalty" (Discipline and Punish 11). Grace's abused body is loaded with the fear of rape, and it is the particular combination of female pain and fear that constitutes "a remarkable aphrodisiac" (Atwood 378) somehow overlooked by Foucault. The disappearance of spectacle as a part of the new "economy of suspended rights" (Discipline and Punish 11) is illusory in itself, since Grace's sexuality is put on display and confession is in order: "Confess, confess. Let me forgive and pity. Let me get up a Petition for you. Tell me all" (35). Consequently, in a hysterical spectacle of outrage, Grace re-enacts her initial shock at confronting both death in bloodshed and her own vulnerability, whereby death is displaced/replaced by an "irrational" fear of rape as well as of doctors in general: "of being cut open by them, as some might have a fear of snakes" (30). What is thus transmitted through the fear of being cut open parallels Bronfen's suggestion that the hysteric "broadcasts a message about vulnerability—the vulnerability of the symbolic (the fallibility of paternal law and social bonds); the vulnerability of identity (the insecurity of gender, ethnic, and class designations); or, perhaps above all, the vulnerability of the body, given its mutability and mortality" (xiii).

With the wisdom of the hysteric, Grace remains silent when she is "back to normal" (32), as if in a refusal to assist in perpetuating the experience of mortality: "Even when they are not doing the killing themselves it means a death is close" (27). The experienced shock, as Mitchell explains, converts "the previous pleasure of contact to a desperate, painful excitement, a kind of survival-sexuality kit which could well lead to rape or compulsive, violent sexual encounters. The frenetic repetition is the mark of the death of the 'other' and of his own survival—it is sexuality in the interest of the surviving self" (143). Although Dr. Jordan, a "psychotherapist" pursuing Grace's case, is a liberal thinker, he still unmistakably represents the Law. In analyzing Grace as "one of the negative female variety" (361), he follows
what Irigaray has explicitly revealed as the self-sufficient discourse of the masculine subject. Indeed, Dr. Jordan treats Grace's fluctuating identity as a provisional neurological but inherently female indisposition. In linking Grace's amnesia with "the effects of a hysterical seizure," he maps the subconscious as a form of "auto-hypnotic somnambulism, not much studied twenty-five years ago but well documented since" (432). Both idealistic and disillusioned, he resents "the widely held view that women are weak-spined and jelly-like by nature, and would slump to the floor like melted cheese if not roped in" (73). He has dissected enough women to know better; he "has been where they could never go, seen what they could never see; he has... peered inside" (82). Visiting Grace in the Penitentiary, Dr. Jordan approaches her as he would any of the cornered women, but Grace eludes him: "She glides ahead of him, just out of his grasp, turning her head to see if he's still following" (407). The only memory "she seems to have forgotten" is the memory of the crime; "the very plenitude of her recollections may be a sort of distraction, a way of drawing the mind away from some hidden but essential fact" (185). The biblical motifs that Grace interweaves into her story clearly focus on the paradox of primordial sin chas- ing her memories since childhood. In an attempt to adjust the symbolic imagery to her own understanding, Grace unfolds new spaces within her biblical knowledge, spaces for the archaic mother. Filling in the missing role of the mother as a powerful and autonomous life-giver, this imaginary, dyadic figure connects in Grace's fantasy with a revengeful and angry woman, cornered, like her own mother, and abused like Mary Whitney. Grace, subconsciously identifying with Mary, is now able to laugh at "the curse of Eve [menstruation]" (179), because Mary thought it "stupid, and the real curse of Eve was having to put up with the nonsense of Adam, who as soon as they were in trouble, blamed it all on her" (164). These imaginary and autonomous spaces allow her to keep Dr. Jordan at a distance, and make her suspicious of all his suggestions: "[Dr. Jordan shows her an apple] An apple, I say. He must think I am simple; or else it's a trick of some sort; or else he is mad and that is why they locked the door—they've locked me into this room with a madman... The apple of the Tree of Knowledge, is what he means. Good and evil. Any child could guess it. But I will not oblige" (40).

To decipher this implicitly erotic scene, I turn to Mitchell's analysis of the relationship between the patient and the therapist: "the traumatic shock experienced by the patient becomes the moral shock of the therapist. This is one of the reasons why it should never be the task of the therapist to investigate what actually happened—that task must fall to others. But the shock itself is crucially important" (Mitchell 141). Dr. Jordan follows precisely what Mitchell postulates: He is the first who rejects the necessity to investigate Grace's crime and attempts to define the source of her shock. However, Grace's sexuality constitutes a significant obstacle to his investigation: "With memory blasted, the shock can be sexualised. The shock itself becomes an end in itself" (Mitchell 142). Climaxing in the image of her seductive mouth, Grace's hysterical symptoms are irresistibly fascinating, projected as the abyss, the biblical metaphor of eternal punishment, of a bottomless pit. Dr. Jordan got "the
hook in her mouth, but can he pull her out? Up, out of the abyss" (Atwood 322)? What Atwood suggests is that the relationship between the patient and the therapist is broken, or caught in a symptomatological interpretation. Grace, "whose song is sweet but dangerous," seduces him "into deep waters" (423), where symptoms and diagnosis become inseparable, making readable what otherwise cannot be said. In the end, "it comes to him that Grace Marks is the only woman he's ever met that he would wish to marry" (388). Notwithstanding Dr. Jordan's fantasies of her deceitful mastery, Grace remains yet a rather "flat landscape" (388), a good, dutiful Daughter attempting to please the paternal gaze. If we follow this contradiction further, it is not because of her "bad will" but because of her unresolved nucleus of unconscious emotions that she cannot be successful in the symbolic order. She has a history of lapses, of dangerous splits of identity that make her the "undecidable structure": "If I am good enough and quiet enough, perhaps after all they will let me go; but it's not easy...like hanging on the edge of a bridge when you've already fallen over; you don't seem to be moving, just dangling there, and yet it is taking all your strength" (5). As the recipient of a shock, Grace is "by definition, passive" (Mitchell 141). Her "strongest prison is of her own construction" (Atwood 361), and her stubborn strength is set to thwart the doctors, to prevent the "recovery." According to Mitchell, violent death, the trauma of separation, and the collapse of identity belong to the most "penetrating" of human experiences and need a long-term psychological convalescence: "When, in the process of recovery, a fantasy is constructed, this fantasy bears the marks of both the shock and the implosion" (141). Placed in the context of such a fantasy under construction, Grace's subconscious projection of herself as Mary can be understood as the protest of a hysteric who cannot define herself in the world. The world is "like a puzzle [she] could not guess" (Atwood 202); it has become for her a place of difference. Because the "hysteric does not remember. An actual trauma...wipes out memory. The hysteric unconsciously models [her]self on this process and becomes amnesiac in order to create a traumatic shock" (Mitchell 141). Thus, Grace escapes to the unconscious, so that she cannot remember but repeats and recreates shocks; "these shocks entail the blasting of memory. The broken object, rather than the feeling that caused the breakage, becomes the focus of attention—the feeling can then be forgotten" (Mitchell 142).

In a process of self-therapy for what she has (not) done and in a protest against repentance, she locks herself out of anybody's reach and interrogates herself. Moreover, this self-interrogation expands into an analysis of the doctor "as if it were [the doctor], not she, who was under scrutiny" (Atwood 59). The more she remembers and relates to the doctor, the more energy "she's drawing out of him—using his own mental forces to materialize the figures in her story, as the mediums are said to do during their trances" (291). Finally, approaching the center of Grace's story, Dr. Jordan realizes that the center was always missing, that, in fact, there is no language to describe the center: "'The truth may well turn out to be stranger than we think,' says Simon. 'It may be that much of what we are accustomed to describe as evil, and evil freely chosen, is instead an illness due to some lesion of the nervous system, and
that the Devil himself is simply a malformation of the cerebrum" (80). For Grace as much as for Dr. Jordan, the "area of erasure" (291) cannot be grasped, analyzed, or named. As a result of all the failure to break the inaccessibility of the unconscious, Dr. Jordan agrees to hypnotize Grace. This happens in front of the invited audience of experts (other Law representatives) as the doctor agrees to display Grace’s body. The hypnosis should constitute advancement, albeit with shocking disruptions, towards remembering the object. In this final attempt to link science with the unconscious, the hypnosis ironically becomes a session of modern exorcism. While the re-enacted shock causes an estrangement of Grace’s body/mind in the form of Mary’s voice, the "area of erasure" turns into a carnival (sabbath), a temporarily liberating force. Mary’s voice, representing Grace’s unconscious, is not prepared for compromises, and in its refusal to speak in the symbolic, it erodes any possibility of scientific understanding. The voice/force actually comes close to "becoming" the semiotic chora, a "place" or a "state" that Grace, with all her "incongruence," is unable to retrieve from linguistic formlessness. Mary’s voice represents "quintessentially, the absent or missing body" as part of the collapsed maternal subject, and "it is the terror of the body going absent that drives the hysteria" (Mitchell 221). Rather than providing a therapeutic treatment, Mary gives Grace a therapeutic shock (competing with Dr. Jordan’s therapy) that re-enacts (remembers) the death of her mother. Coming against Grace’s will, Mary’s uncompromising voice initiates an unsettling confrontation between fear and fascination with death. Moreover, her absent body constitutes a misleading, paradoxical factor since, as Mitchell explains, "there is no more excessively present body than that of the hysterical (in hysteria the body is always acting and thereby expressing something)." However, "it is exactly this bodily excess which is dependent on its subjective absence" (222). Tracing this paradox, Atwood grounds the objectification of Grace in the logocentric metaphor of "the inhuman female demon," a woman already marked with the Scarlet Letter, "a foul-tempered witch" (277). The reference here is to Hawthorne’s 1850 novel, which provides one of the most memorable images of social stigma, hypocrisy, and punishment set in the early days of Puritan US. In Atwood’s novel, Simon "is surprised to find a clergyman reading Hawthorne: the man has been accused of sensualism, and—especially after The Scarlet Letter—of a laxity in morals" (192). Placing the figure of a doctor on the other extreme, in the context of an institutionalized confession, Atwood describes him as "one of the dark trio—the doctor, the judge, the executioner," all sharing "the powers of life and death" (82), powers similar to those of the mother’s womb. Certainly, Atwood’s narrative focuses on institutionalized forms of female madness and on professional doctors who fail to penetrate the unconscious. But most importantly, her narrative is about Grace’s failure to locate the (unconscious) voice within herself. She had been only as far as "the threshold of the unconscious" (412). Owing to this lack of (self-) communication Grace does not succeed in defining herself outside of the symbolic. Upon her release from the prison (as a result of general amnesty), her story converges with the promise of pregnancy, indicating her dutiful return to the symbolic. The return is provisional, because Grace’s story
refuses to end precisely where Atwood's narrative ends, offering an open (unspoken) conclusion. The pregnancy reintroduces her to the mother's body, which, as a metonymy of female execution, articulates pain that cannot be ignored. Although Grace comes to represent the imaginary and the unconscious associated with the mother, she necessarily tries, but eventually fails, to articulate her experience in the symbolic. This confirms Mitchell's division of the woman into a "true" woman "who accepts her 'castration' and the replacement of her missing penis by a baby" and "a false or phoney woman who only pretends to. This phoney woman is the new name given to the hysteric" (187). Without being aware of the consequences (without becoming a feminist rebel), Grace finally evaluates her biblical knowledge, and in fact her world knowledge, as censored and castrated. As she draws towards the end of her (narrated) story, she returns to a household structure, but her sexuality attains a new quality. Atwood depicts her sitting peacefully and making a new quilt (459), into which Grace weaves whatever remains unspeakable and otherwise might interfere with her newly arranged status of wifehood. In this sense, Grace's weaving alludes to the Homeric account of Penelope's un/weaving as a form of un-doing his/story. In itself, Grace's quilt-making is a conservative, conforming activity placing her among the obedient patriarchal daughters, but its pattern (the language) is subversive, stealing the patriarchal myth away in order to rewrite and to revise its meaning. In the absence of valid representations of female sexuality, the dutiful quilt-making merges with Grace's sexuality as a whole. There are no words to talk about it, except mutilating words to the effect of anxiety and "a haunting fear of castration" (Irigaray, "Bodily Encounter" 41). But she finds ways to express the urgency to transcend the repression without words. The quilt-making represents both household stability and sexuality-in-process, a release from the repressed self-consciousness and a strategic protest against the phoney and the hysterical. Her pregnancy, a fluctuating fantasy of pleasures and dangers, creates a space for the om-phalic mother, the one symbolically inarticulate and prohibited (Kristeva, "Stabat Mater" 14).

As demonstrated through my readings, Atwood, like Maitland and Carter, attempts to rewrite the specific histories of paradigmatic boundary figures (Grace, Cassandra, and the female vampire) into biographies of the repressed archaic mother. In an astounding parallel to these narratives, Olga Tokarczuk's novel E.E. explores a similar case study underscored by Freudian theory from a culturally different but nevertheless psychoanalytical feminist perspective: "For the first time [Freud] saw his mother naked. Her full breasts must have awoken an anxiety in the child. He desired and feared them at the same time. Her naked body was a knot by which the world was tied" (Tokarczuk 18; unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine). Providing a link to the Freudian geography of the unconscious at the turn of the twentieth century in Central Europe, Tokarczuk provides a paradoxical illustration of the enigmatic figure of a hysteric visionary. Equally drawing on the uncanny, Tokarczuk's E.E. provides a parallel to Freud's personal discoveries and encounters. Among other narrative elements, she introduces the figure of a six-year-old Freud who travels by night in a train with his mother (the fragment cited above). More
importantly, the main character's initials, E.E., bear connections to Freud's work on male hysteria, specifically referring to his neurotic patients (Mitchell 64-65). The narrative contextualizes the uncanny in the hysterical experience of puberty, following Deleuzian implications of the girl's "becoming" as the primordial erasure of her access to the social structure. The uncanny womb is no longer relating "to the literal origin of the subject" or "the experience of separation" (Creed 54), as is the case in Siostra or Alias Grace. Rather, it transcends the "literal origin" to broach the supernatural, or paranormal, beyond earthly phenomena. Focusing primarily on the puberty drama, the narrative involves culturally somatized figures of mother and daughter, inevitably touching upon Irigaray's notion of "cultural paralysis" caused by "non-differentiation between one woman and another," "enforced rejection or hatred, or at best 'pretence' [faire comme]." In this cultural paralysis, "the girl's earliest pleasures will remain wordless; her earliest narcissizations will have no words or sentences to speak their name, even retroactively" (Whitford 101).

In E.E., set in Breslau and written in postcommunist Poland, Tokarczuk introduces an interesting blend of Polish and German names. E.E., an ambiguous, teenaged Erna Elzner, belongs to the Freudian prototype of an upper-middle-class German family, living in Wrocław under German control in 1910. Erna's father, Fryderyk, spells his first name according to Polish orthography while his surname remains German. Streets, places, and servants' first names are German. The city landscape is a permeable borderland between Polish, German, and Jewish ethnicities. Erna's mother, Mrs. Elzner, a housewife of Polish origin, lives an unexciting life with her German husband, the owner of a textile factory, in a spacious apartment in the heart of the city. Erna is portrayed as an uninspiring, unattractive, perhaps even inadvertently disappointing girl, compared to her younger and elder siblings. Shortly after her fifteenth birthday, during a family dinner, Erna suddenly becomes aware of a ghostly apparition and loses consciousness: "No one paid attention to the man standing in a visible spot and Greta went through him with a bowl full of asparagus" (9) and Erna concludes "that she became ill due to some disease which enables her to see ghosts" (19). This condition remains undiagnosed. As in Atwood's narrative, the status of her illness builds an ambiguous tie between neurological predicaments and supernatural phenomena: "When Dr. Löwe came, Mrs. Elzner closed herself up with him...and told him in a clear and confident tone what, or rather whom Erna saw yesterday during dinner. She also said that most probably Erna had revealed mediumistic skills that were not uncommon among Mrs. Elzner's family members.—'In that case I have nothing to do. You should rather call for some exorcist'—said Dr. Löwe and stood up" (14). To explicate this enigmatic diagnosis, I engage the Deleuzean-Guattarian suggestion of the "originary" theft of the girl's body as achieved through the transcendental organization of her organs into a symbolic form, a receptacle for male desire and progeny. Following Deleuze and Guattari, it is because neither a "girl" nor a "woman" is accomplished socially as (a fully-fledged) subject that "becoming-woman" constitutes an identity-in-process, not an outcome or result, but a transgressing continuum. In reading Deleuze and Guattari with Irigaray,
I propose here that Erna constitutes such an unfinished subjectivity, a passage, or a "line" that is never realized fully. In order to "become," as Irigaray notes, one needs a gender or an essence (necessarily sexed) as horizon; "otherwise the becoming will be only partial or multiple without a future of one's own" (Sexes 73). "Becoming" "means achieving the fullness of all that one could be," (73) a process that obviously remains open-ended. In this context, Mitchell's comments on Freud's Dora, referenced in my reading of Siostra, are relevant again. Although it "is commonplace to note the patriarchal suppression of Dora's mother to a marginalized position of housewife's neurosis, of making life difficult and of being ill-educated and lacking culture" (Mitchell 96), neither Mitchell nor Kristeva agree with this (feminist) belief: "When Dora came to Freud...at the turn of the century, we can see that mothers were powerful and important figures behind the structures of patriarchy, and that sexuality among the bourgeoisie was rampant and profoundly subject to sickness. It was round this conjuncture that Freud the doctor started to shift his ground to become Freud the psychoanalyst. And hysteria was at the centre, indeed was really the cause, of this shift" (Mitchell 98). Similarly, in her letter to Clement in 1994, Kristeva notes: "Freud wrote that women did not have the capacity for a superego. I am well aware that he was thinking of his Vienna and his protected middle-class women, but that doesn't ring true for everyone, far from it. The anorectic is welded to her superego: hypermoral, hyperscrupulous, hyperdevoted to the Law, to God, to the One—call them what you like. It is because of that rigidity, which both sustains and destroys her, that she has come to me, to ask that I get rid of it" (Clément and Kristeva 116). In Tokarczuk's narrative, Dr. Löwe is rather conservative, pre-Freudian Jewish family doctor prescribing herbal infusions and purges for all types of complaints (61). However, in a case like this, "the scientific word 'hysteria' was the key," and Dr. Löwe, "the same evening when he was called to Erna, remembered that term and held on to it" (39): "In medical science, as in a textiles or furniture, various fashions come and go. Hysteria was an absolute hit, but it was also particularly shapeless, undefined. He sometimes had the feeling that this word was uttered by his colleagues when they were covering up their embarrassment" (39). Under this fashionable influence, Erna is diagnosed as hysterical but healthy; her "indisposition" is linked to her biologically immature, "transitory" body (13). During his regular visit, Dr. Löwe concludes that "Erna's nervous system is still developing and at this age she is prone to faints or convulsions, hence the use of made-up diabolical fairy-tales could only upset her already unstable balance" (14-15). To Erna, however, the experience offers a chance to be noticed, while her subjectivity becomes acknowledged in the symbolic order. As an undistinguished sibling, Erna naturally exhibits her greed for love/food in her un/consciously enacted deviances. Her vision takes place in the presence of all the family members (greed for love) at the dining table (greed for food), and provides an interesting parallel to the phobia from which Freud himself suffered, as well as his patient E., as analyzed by Mitchell (65-66): "The motives for being ill often begin to be active even in childhood. A little girl in her greed for love does not enjoy having to share the affection of her parents with her brothers and sisters; and she notices that
the whole of their affection is lavished on her once more whenever she arouses their anxiety by falling ill. She has now discovered a means of enticing out her parents' love, and will make use of that means as soon as she has the necessary psychical material at her disposal for producing an illness" (89).

Erna's animated alterity (alienation and distinction in the household) is derived from the fact that her sisters have either already gone through menstruation or are still very young. Her longing for mother, "the old and long familiar," to have her entirely to herself before it is too late (before she herself becomes a woman/mother), turns for Erna into a desire for the uncanny, categorized by Creed as related to the notion of a multiplied object, (a ghost or spirit), "an involuntary repetition of an act" (54). "Whatever it is, let us pretend that nothing happened" (E.E. 15) is Dr. Löwe's suggestion, but Mrs. Elzner does not share his opinion, stubbornly insisting on "the easiest method to make a madwoman out of [Erna]" (17). In a narcissistic trance, the mother recognizes herself in her daughter who reminds her of how "she was at that age—modest, ugly, lonesome and strange to the world, as if she did not belong to it" (13). The mother, "imprisoned in the same house with a man, who did not understand her at all, as if they were from different worlds" (17), projects her daughter's talents as her own. Erna's parents do indeed speak different languages: the mother's background is characterized by Tokarczuk as hysterical, irrational, and set in opposition to everything that is represented by her stereotypically German husband. The mostly neutral to entertaining narrative tone becomes at this point sadly ironical. Erna, trying subconsciously to please her mother, becomes the mother's chance to live. The mother's desire to "become significant" (organizing séances, inviting interesting people) signposts her subconscious protest against "housewife's neurosis" (Mitchell 96). Not unintentionally, the mother thus instigates the objectification of her daughter, turning her into a multiple object of desire: her own desire and that of many others, including the doctors, the specialists, and the audience. The narrative pattern emerging from "diagnosing" the girl echoes Irigaray's claim that "desire is connected to madness. But apparently one desire has chosen to see itself as wisdom, moderation, truth, and has left the other to bear the burden of madness it did not want to attribute to itself" (Bodily Encounter 35). Already, before Erna "becomes" a woman, she is "the phoney or hysterical feminine" (Mitchell 187), linked by Irigaray and Mitchell alike with the Freudian/Lacanian concept of "femininity as masquerade": "Joan Riviere, a British analyst analysed by Freud...wrote of 'femininity as a masquerade,' indicating a particular type of woman whose femininity was an act, or, I would claim, hysterical. Lacan turned this notion of Riviere into 'femininity is a masquerade' (thereby echoing Freud's mistake of a universal repudiation of femininity instead of a repudiation of the hysterical situation). In this argument one cannot be a 'true' woman, as the woman is defined as being nothing to be—no penis" (187).

In her masquerade, or enactment of femininity, the woman loses touch with herself and "plays" on her femininity: "this masquerade requires an effort on her part for which she is not compensated" (Irigaray, "Power" 130). Associated with her immature, not-yet-fruitful womb, Erna's phoniness becomes the abysmal figure of
another medium, Teresa Frommer. These two female (but, for different reasons, not quite "feminine") bodies echo each other in the story. Teresa, a visionary marginal character with "an appearance of a very old, wrinkled child," a "hunchbacked gnome from a fairy-tale" (22), bears the marks of the witch and becomes central to the narrative through Erna. Teresa's soul overwhelms and deforms her body (25), evoking cultural associations of the masculine mind/soul in a body that is unfeminine. To follow the Platonian tradition, which continues through Descartes, Husserl, and Sartre, "the ontological distinction between soul (consciousness, mind) and body supports invariably relations of political and psychic subordination and hierarchy. The mind not only subjugates the body, but occasionally entertains the fantasy of fleeing its embodiment altogether" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 12). Teresa's "huge soul" is thus, to take a cue from Butler, incompatible, rendering her a nightmarish creature of "the imaginary" with no place in the symbolic order. There is no "proper boundary" between her soul (which could be understood as the unconscious) and her physical body: "Only with difficulty had she learned how to read, but she bravely performed all the household duties. She talked in an unclear and chaotic manner, however, when she described her dreams, they seemed much more real than reality....Whenever [her brother] managed to convince her to tell him one of her dreams, he was surprised to be able to find, in these fragments, connections with real events, some important like political strategies, catastrophes, conflicts, others banal, like the neighbor's illness, the cat's death or Dr. Löwe's visit" (E.E. 22). Teresa's biography is of significance here: As a malformed and slow-witted daughter of a continuously travelling, mentally unstable but fascinating mother, she lives with her brother. Her first and only erotic experience is with Rainer, an ambiguous half-relative who discovers Teresa's mediumistic talents. It is Rainer who inconspicuously informs children of the account of their mother's madness leading to her suicide. In her passing, the mother becomes a familiar stranger, a source of the "uncanny" desire, generating among her children a life-long fascination with death-related phenomena. Teresa "was a medium, she talked with ghosts, but that gift was taken away from her" (23). Now, she participates in the séances with Erna as her silent ally, someone who knows "that all things that happen, are connected, perhaps in a chaotic way, but with no exception" (60). In this role of the Kristevan "another other," Teresa represents the shadow of the archaic mother, the om-phalic fragment that refuses to be cut off, thrown out, or wasted. Instead, she emerges as heterogeneity of the "becoming" subject. In concentrating on the beyond, both Teresa and Erna transcend their phoney, un/feminine bodies in an "uncanny" experience, in a momentum of different, transgressive, and metamorphic "becoming." In describing this momentum, Tokarczuk explicitly renders it fluid, bottomless. Their bodies are receptacles for all the other dis/connected elements (voices, pictures, apparitions) that are contrasted throughout the narrative with the dominant and acceptable discourse of the symbolic structure within which the medical and spiritual doctors operate. The suspension, or the gap between these two dimensions, is conflated in the narrative with the gap between the unconscious and the conscious, or the semiotic and symbolic functions. Erna seems to be living
in this suspension and her instability derives precisely from it.

For Teresa and Erna alike, the experience of the *chora* is closing the gap between the living and the dead. They are able to synthesize binaries, polarities, and different "scientific" approaches with the passive amusement of an observer, involuntarily "incorporating" the experience/place in which voices/bodies speak. Precisely as such incarnations, they can be identified with the archaic spaces of the maternal that will be employed, indeed spectacularly "utilized," during the séance. In contrast to phallic figures, including Erna's mother, who exploits this experience, Erna and Teresa undergo involuntary metamorphoses of their bodily objectifications. The séance in *E.E.*, like Cixous's "sabbat," is a "reverse spectacle" (Cixous and Clément 10), with Erna's theatrical body as a central object of desire for the "beyond." The guests gather around her and "through" her body take part in the trance, in "the celebration, in which everyone participates, in which no one is voyeur" (10). This type of "audience, ready to satisfy its fantastic desire" (10), calls to mind the spectacular scene of hysteria in Atwood's depiction of Grace Marks's hypnosis, and Cixous's description of a comparable scene: "It is, above all...the circle of doctors with their fascinated eyes, who surround the hysterical, their bodies tensed to see the tensed body of the possessed woman" (10). However, in Tokarczuk's text, the mother is an active agent of interrogation, and her presence is crucial to Erna. The mother is the knot that ties her down rather, as in reference to Freud's encounter with his mother's naked body (130), a knot by which the world was tied. The motherly knot is also the one that Erna involuntarily holds on to in her hysterical, hypothetical "thought delivery" (49). The mother is, in fact, the very secret of the trance, the actual ghost (absence) and the reason for her daughter's "madness." The narrative welcomes all thinkable explanations of the case, including fraud, a secret spectacle of fantasy and seduction. Interweaving the adults' séances (secret gatherings) with the children's secrets, Tokarczuk brings Erna's younger twin sisters into the scene. They act, or imagine they act, as enchantresses, "little witches" as they call themselves. Through their equally seductive but similarly threatening presence, Tokarczuk once more draws our attention to Erna's objectification. In a "secret" performance that is set up to imitate the adults' séance, the twins deconstruct its phallic structure. Their subversive voice both engages and undermines what Cixous has referred to as a "terrifying, immense, and paternal character...as indefinite as the huge shadow of a he-goat haunting the sabbat nights" (Cixous and Clément 12). In Cixous's parallel readings of a secret spectacle, such as the clandestine sabbat or illicit children's games, the involvement of the audience will be saved for later in the scene of punishment, purification, or exorcism: "When the institutional spectators of the Church are in place, when the parents are ready to enforce the punishment—that is the spectacle. For the moment, there is play....The scene will soon take shape. It is a scene of seduction" (12). During this blend of archaic fantasy and phallic seduction, Erna's body and her talents are "returned" to her. The "play," meant simultaneously as a therapeutic act and unconscious feminist strategy (in the girls' acting "as if adults"), releases Erna from the entrapment endorsed by her mother's and Frommer's desires.
Ultimately, I read this scene as a strategy to return voice to Erna, who should finally speak for herself. The twins' aggressive presence, as they act against the ongoing denigration of their mother as well as the forthcoming denigration of all their elder sisters, makes Erna indeed perform her "speech" that takes the form of a spectacular hysterical performance, a transition towards becoming a woman. Shortly thereafter, Erna has her first menstruation and enters the sphere of her elder sisters who initiate her into the "feminine" ritual of blood/filth disposal. The final scene in the story portrays Erna's moment of most intense pleasure, one that climaxes in death, or a deathlike condition. Walking through the woods, where she seeks a rescue from the "filth," Erna stops, lifts her shirt and touches the "device" restraining her body. In undoing the cotton loops (187), she freezes and begins to examine the hot, pulsating place with her hand. Her encounter with maternal blood intermingles with orgasmic pleasure, the newly discovered desire of the woman's body. The blood is "nothing new," but in combination with the place from which it issues, it is "uncanny," and Erna separates from it through a deathlike experience, a transcendence of the literal origin. The question as to whether she loses her breath momentarily or whether her ecstasy causes actual death remains open. However, to return to the Deleuzean-Guttarian theory of becoming, her transcendence, or "flight," articulates transformative possibilities of her identity that might or might not escape from the codes that constitute the subject. If her puberty drama is a preparation for phoney "femininity," a masquerade of womanhood, then perhaps it is not meant to be realized in "the symbolic," but in the return to the very first symbolic act, the act of "real incision." To conclude with this insight, Erna does not become a woman, rather, as Deleuze and Guattari would have it, she "is an abstract line, or a line of flight" (\textit{A Thousand Plateaus} 276), a leaping over a logocentric abyss that opens up as a "different" possibility.

The Witch as the Maternal Space of Filth

Shifting the critique from the witch as a source of \textit{herstorical} powers to the properties of the witch as an archaic mother, the narratives have focused on the primary (maternal) loss, depicting cultural constructs of mothers and daughters expelled outside the symbolic structure. As phallic rather than \textit{omphalic} depictions of mothers (\textit{omphalos}, the navel, as the scar left by separation), I view these narratives as both participating in and failing Butler's strategies of subversive repetition. Bronfen's definition of the \textit{omphalos}, following Lacanian and Kristevan discussions of the psychic history of the subject, structures this fundamental loss of the maternal body—"a loss we never own or represent but one that we repeat" and commemorate (19). This reading of the witch as a primal cartography of the body coincides with Kristeva's "precondition for language even though it depends on language, and which suffers and takes pleasures in an other logic, complementary to the logic of linguistic signs imposed and consolidated by paternal laws" (Clément and Kristeva 95).

Subverting the culturally stigmatized cartographies of the body, Kristeva's semiotic unquestionably celebrates the difficult (impossible) separation from maternal
authority (95), and further connects with the psychoanalytical intricacies of the navel as discussed in this chapter. In return to Bronfen's visualization of the navel as "a cultural image fraught with reticence," the navel is a common point of connection and severing: "often prominently displayed in sculptures of the human body and frequently a significant detail in paintings of the nude, it yet remains an oversight. Most dictionaries of subjects and symbols of art, or motives and themes in literature and folklore, will ignore the navel or merely include a cursory entry mentioning its multifarious usage as trope for conceptualizations of the center. Nor has the navel been privileged theoretically in psychoanalytically informed semiotic and cultural studies of the body, as have other body parts such as breast, penis, vagina, eye, nose, or foot" (Bronfen 3). Owing precisely to its intangibility, the navel, "an obscene detail that fascinates even as it repels" (3), clearly connects here with the semiotic that is founded on the abject, on what is considered "filth" (Clément and Kristeva 95). The navel, as a reminder of a bodily wound, culturally embodies this semiotic filth. It exists already in terms of culture as "a boundary line that makes the dirty turn into the tainted, since it is then understandable how the ritualization of filth can be accompanied by a complete effacement of the dirty object" (93). In the figure of the witch, the semiotic and the navel converge in the maternal space of filth (placenta, umbilical cord), echoing the old practice of midwives predicting pregnancies by reading the knots on umbilical cords as prophetic signs (Bronfen 4). Definitely, the dirty object, in Clément's and Kristeva's discussion, vanishes when it is transformed, within a particular logic, into "filth" that is "no longer noticed, it no longer smells" (93). This practice suspends the midwife-witch between "symbolic castration" and "the real incision." To distinguish between these two conditions, I propose Bronfen's concept of "denaveling," which "harks back to the traumatic wound at the onset of mortality yet defies any direct representation" (11), and allows me to posit the witch as a negotiator between the phallic and the omphalic spaces of culture. The navel, in Mieke Bal's understanding, designates "the other force field constituting the subject," distinct from "phallus" as a gender-specific association in terms "to have it" versus "to be it." On the contrary, the omphalos is genuinely "democratic in that both men and women have it" (qtd. in Bronfen 11). Although it emerges metaphorically as the scar of dependence on the mother, unlike the phallus and its iconic representations disseminated throughout post-Freudian culture, the navel is starkly indexical (qtd. in Bronfen 11). Favoring thus the omphalic as a source of effective subversion, the witch, in this chapter, like Cixous's figure, "serves to connect all the ends [i.e., loose strands] of a culture that is hard to endure" (Cixous and Clément 8). The narrative representations of the witch embody the instability of culture (symbolic structure), disturbing sexual/gendered identity, and collapsing into a Kristevan abject that designates bodily discharges, excrements rendered alien, to be expelled: "I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself" (Powers 3). What is established by the logic of this expulsion are "the boundaries of the body," "the first contours of the subject" (Butler, Gender Trouble 133). In linking this specification of the witch with Judeo-Christian
associations between the sacred/heretic and feminine/maternal, Kristeva identifies Christianity as the most refined symbolic construct in which femininity meets with "virginal maternity" as a way "of dealing with feminine paranoia" ("Stabat Mater" 180). In a reference to Warner's study (1990), Kristevan Virgin both assumes and overcomes her feminine denial of sex "by setting up a third person: I do not conceive with you but with Him. The result is an immaculate conception (therefore with neither man nor sex), conception of a God with whose existence a woman has indeed something to do," on the condition that she acknowledges her subjugation. "But she succeeds in stifling megalomania [of Church] by putting it on its knees before the child-god" ("Stabat Mater" 180). Exploring intersections of the feminine and the sacred, both Clément and Kristeva posit women's spirituality as a paradoxical crossroad of heretic/sacred and religious experience. The Judeo-Christian concept of virginity or the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception intersect in their analysis with the historical persecution of Eve-like women stigmatized as witches, heretics, and monsters. As in Warner, whose text is constantly at work in Kristeva's analysis of the Virgin, medieval images of Mary are those of the second Eve, constructed as positive models that supplement Eve's negativity: "The idea of the second Eve, through whom the sin of the first was ransomed, was important to the west, where it inspired the ingenious imagination of the medieval Christian to pun and riddle with a characteristic sense of delight and love of symmetry" (73). 

Eve, the woman seduced (bitten or penetrated) by the (evil) snake, bleeds every month thereafter. On the contrary, Christian Virgin becomes a locus of female in/dependence, a fluctuating trace of ancient fertility and magic, but representing a body devoid of all her blood and sex.

Diasporic locations of Mary (culminating in Kristevan "paranoia") erase pagan traces of her carnality, but she continues as the (eroticized) maternal body, and intersects in my analysis with the border-locations of the "witch." One of the premises underlying this intersection is Irigaray's notion of the sacrificed state of the earth's fertility, which delineates the cultural horizon of the paternal language and its "forgetting of the scar of the navel" (Bodily Encounter 41). The witch as a trace of the presence/absence of the Virgin builds a symbolical counterpoint to the female sex equated with pollution (i.e., the fifteenth-century Virgin, radically opposed to the idea of female carnality and continued to expand over the course of the centuries coinciding with the most severe witch trials on the European continent). The witch's womb, fantasized as "a devouring mouth, a cloaca or anal and urethral outfall, a phallic threat, at best reproductive" (Bodily Encounter 41), represent her only way to communicate the body, her only language in fact. "In the absence of valid representations of female sexuality, this womb merges with woman's sex [sexe] as a whole. There are no words to talk about it, except filthy, mutilating words" to the effect of "anxiety, phobia, disgust, a haunting fear of castration" (41). Following Warner, the Judeo-Christian concept of femininity replicates the Greek tradition of equating female innocence with ignorance, and translates virginity as the lack of (sexual) knowledge (185). The same femininity, the "sweetness, submissiveness, and pas-
sivity" (that constitutes Levinasian alterity) permits the Virgin "to survive [as] a goddess in a patriarchal society," stigmatizing the nonvirginal body as a locus of abjection. Hence, the witches' condemnation flourishes in countries such as Poland, Italy, or Spain where the cult of the Virgin is particularly strong (Warner 191), and where women rarely act in the public as autonomous subjects, relegated to other discursive arenas, mostly within the domestic domain as mothers. In close reference to Warner, Kristeva speculates whether "the 'virgin' attribute for Mary is a translation error that substituted the Greek word _parthenos_ for the Semitic term indicating the sociolegal status of a young unmarried woman, which on the other hand specifies a physiological and psychological condition: virginity" (Clément and Kristeva 163). In this twist affiliating the sacred with eroticism, Kristeva's own understanding of virginity differs from the constructions discussed above, since it refers to "a proto-space, a timelessness," to a "radical transcendence" of the feminine and the maternal. She writes, "The fact that this nonplace before the beginning has been designated feminine or maternal is not likely to displease me, and it has led me to understand the 'feminine' as something completely different from a symmetrical double of the masculine" (Clément and Kristeva 73). What this "transcendence" allows us to see "are strategies of sense without signification," memories, if you like, but far below language and the signifier" (151). In linking these signifying limits of the body (Clément and Kristeva, Irigaray), I have attempted to reformulate the archaic (prephallic) mother as a therapeutic territory, allowing space for the emergence of resistance to hegemonic, symbolic discourse. This archaic figure, viewed as a pre-oedipal/semiotic mother, in contrast with the phallocentric fantasy of the mother-fetish, serves as a chain of metonymies for a particular (peculiar) space of nullification of the phallic function that fails to represent "all" of the sexes. This turn to the pre-oedipal has taken place "to rethink desire in relation to the maternal," and "engages us, unwittingly, in the resurrection of the dyad: not the phallus, but the maternal, for the two options available are 'dad' and 'mom'" (Butler, _Undoing Gender_ 136). Butler's position reminds us of course that there are "other kinds of descriptions that might complicate what happens at the level of desire and, indeed, at the level of gender and kinship" (136). Consequently, the witch, translated textually into a semiotic form, comes to represent the "maternal" part of the Freudian/Lacanian _unconscious_, but is always already unfinished in relation to the "feminine." This feminine no longer coincides with the "maternal" reflection of a dominant subject and takes her departure from these subjectivities. The archaic mother is thus approached as an _unconscious_ trace, leading towards the emergence of the feminine as a reconfiguration of language in which the affirmation of the feminine might be accomplished—in fact her morphological metamorphosis, as Braidotti would put it. Irigaray's "transcendental subject" emerges precisely from the place of affirmation: the embodied subject against which multifaceted "feminine" subjectivities can measure themselves "rather than progressing only by taking the place of the mother, the other woman or the man" ("Limits" 112).
Although coming from different cultural contexts, the narratives analyzed in this chapter converge in recognition of the debt to the mother trapped within constructions of phallocentric discourse. This recognition allows the mother to "become a sexual and desiring woman" and frees the daughter from her undifferentiated relation to the maternal. Marking the possibility of the mother's cultural re-evaluation, the archaic witch manifests clearly a desire to connect the semiotic chora with the symbolic. Going beyond the herstorical sociosexual victimization of women, the narratives illustrate the multifaceted feminist conviction that women's oppression is not only material and political but that it is established in the very logos connecting "abjection" and "monstrosity" to the feminine libidinal economy of desire. In conveying their own historical reminiscence of a cultural split (in culturally distinct contexts), the figures of women discussed negotiate their positions not in a quiet act of introspection, but in a painful re-member-ing that requires a plural consciousness and fluency in using several systems of cultural understanding. At this point, in contrast to the difficulties encountered in work against the theory of "symbolic castration," another issue is at stake, namely that of a "real incision." This "real incision," with reference to psychoanalytical concepts developed by Gallop, Mitchell, and Bronfen, is posited as a continuous separation from the (archaic) mother, perpetuated through women themselves as carriers of patriarchal ideology. My analysis of the narratives, viewed as feminist configurations of the archaic mother (projected in Western imagery as a figure of horror, monstrosity, and abjection), parallels Butler's belief that the critical task for feminism is not to establish a position outside of constructed identities, but rather "to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions" (Gender Trouble 147). The narratives demonstrate this split in subject positions and deviate from the restorative and liberating function attributed by some to the archaic mother. Rather than a locus of semiotic pleasures, the archaic chora appears as a hole that leads nowhere, an empty barren space, or as a ghostly (spectral) apparition of repressed, uncanny desires. I recognize the problematic aspects of associating the witch-woman with the imaginary where female desire will be perceived inevitably as a hysterical inconsistency, the signpost of the unspeakable. Designated as the omphalic (in distinction to the phallic) mother, she is still so deeply entangled in the Western metaphor of the abject, or otherwise nonexistent figure, that she cannot provide a therapeutic but only a traumatic passage to the symbolic. Deleuzean-Guattarian notions serve here as a device of readability of her trauma, a way of presenting what otherwise cannot be articulated. Surviving from the prelinguistic phase, this omphalic creature exists only in dialectical relation with the linguistic and cultural order, assuming therefore marginal (semiotic) positions. To follow Butler, the pleasures of maternity constitute only "local displacements of the paternal law, temporary subversions which finally submit to that against which they initially rebel!" (Gender Trouble 88). The performances of the witch result thus in a dialectical process of deconstructing the mother in the symbolic. The witch as a semiotic in/disposition cannot exist without constantly challenging the symbolic order (of language), and without being constantly silenced by it. In the discussed nar-
ratives, the _unconscious_ has a language (voice), and the witch figure constitutes its significant revelation. This language does not represent a position of command, but the more subjective, vulnerable position in which the subject is already exiled from the _chora_. It constitutes an "unsettling confrontation" between two subject positions: one that assumes its linguistic castration and the other that realizes this castration as a gain rather than a loss (Gallop, _Daughter's Seduction_ 21). The position adopted involves complex attempts to speak the _unconscious_ in the-name-of-the-mother and "to point out some effects, some elements of unconscious drives, some relations of feminine Imaginary to [Lacan's] Real, to writing" (Cixous and Clément 92). Recognizing that the "vacuum" is not only political but is established in the very logos, in the subtle linguistic procedures through which meaning itself is shaped, a new type of linguistic/symbolic awareness of the phallic rape is established. The rape is no longer effected by the father, but above all, by the fetishized suffocating mothers as deployed in the symbolic. Connecting this awareness with the trauma of the "real incision," the narratives install the witch as a variable of the hysterical (displaced) archaic mother and the phallic (devouring) mother-rapist. Emerging from the dialogue established between these two, the witch figure (proposed as a type of return to the _unconscious_) appears in the form of a spectrum of the repressed _omphalic_ mother.

In this constellation, it remains difficult "to distinguish between incest as a traumatic fantasy essential to sexual differentiation in the psyche, and incest as a trauma that ought clearly to be marked as abusive practice" (Butler, _Undoing Gender_ 154). Although not without liberating potential gesturing beyond the maternal, the _omphalic_ is dominated by the presence of the phallus, and cut off from its distinct pleasures and sovereignty (e.g., figures dominated by the presence of physicians, judges, and psychiatrists, objects of physiological and psychological explorations). Their subjectivities emerge from victimizing and oppressive positions, unable to resolve the divide. To follow Nancy Fraser, the subject is thus split into two halves, neither of which is a potential political agent. Defined exclusively in terms of transgressing the norms, this subject cannot engage in the reconstructive moment of feminist politics, a moment essential to social transformation (_Justice Interruptus_ 164). "Nor can the two halves be joined together," since they rather cancel each other out, "the first forever shattering the identitarian pretensions of the second, the second forever recuperating the first and reconstituting itself as before" (164). What follows is a "paralyzing oscillation between identity and nonidentity without any determinate practice issue" (165).

The suspension of the witch is thus a reference to the culturally inarticulate gap between the radical _fantasmatic_ and the archaic mother, a dialogical figure of permanent transgressions. For various reasons, the relationship with the mother, as described in these narratives, maintains a position of a "mad desire in the shadows of our culture" (Irigaray, _Bodily Encounter_ 35), from where the strategies of resistance might depart, and what Braidotti would later call "the strategic essentialism of sexual difference" (_Metamorphoses_ 34). The final chapter explores the narrative attempts to move beyond the limiting experience of disassociation from "the symbolic," insis-
ing on "the illusion" of identity, which in the end, owing to its paradoxical status, contests and possibly bridges the gap between the semiotic and symbolic types of articulation. In contesting this gap, the witch remains composed of deficiencies, subversions, and historical silences, and through this embraces the essential diversity of the feminine space. But since her essentiality in paternal language continues to indicate absence, the archaic subject emerges as a ghostly, spectral materiality in search of its own (cultural) body. It encounters a type of paradox that recalls Kristeva's *aporia* of the chora: to be approached both as an absent (repressed) and persistently recurring desire for a provocative subversion. If this subversion has any agency, it is opened up by the fact that its constitution was initiated in the social order. That it is contained as a paradox does not mean that it is impossible: "it means only that paradox is the condition of its possibility" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 3). The subversion, in the end, entails unexpected exposure to new unconscious and multiple forms of expression. Perhaps the seeming absence, as Dietze has written, is also an opportunity: "Maybe there are no places, systems, or identities where an individual woman can stand phallically erected in order to survey the world. Maybe it is not the place but the journey, not the system but the aphorism, not the identity but the multiplicity from which one speaks. It could be playing with theory fragments, juggling with standpoints on a trial basis, just [like] unabashed eclecticism, that women put to their service" (293).

As I argue in the final chapter, it is the witch's diverse un/belonging, her condensation as a deviant territory that allows her to embark on new processes of responding to woman's cultural "becoming" rather than her denigration.