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**Different Ways of Seeing: The Language Games of  
Mothering**

**by**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy and Literature

University of Warwick, Department of Philosophy

November 2005

# **Different Ways of Seeing: The Language Games of Mothering**

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## **Acknowledgements**

I wish to acknowledge the support of Canterbury Christ Church University; the Philosophy Department at the University of Warwick; the Wittgenstein Archive at the University of Bergen; and Professor Lyn Innes from the University of Kent for her suggestions of narratives.

I am very grateful to my supervisor, Dr Christine Battersby, for all her encouragement and inspiration.

I thank my friends Sally Leaver, Amanda Rose and Sally Minogue for academic and moral support.

Lastly I thank *all* the members of my large family, who have helped me more than words can say.

## **Declaration**

In Chapter 4, I have included material from my review of Naomi Scheman and Peg O'Connor eds., *Feminist Interpretations of Wittgenstein*, *Women's Philosophy Review*, 33. (Mitchell, 2004, pp. 93-97) In Chapter 6, I have included material from my review of Adriana Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood* from *Women's Philosophy Review*, no. 27. (Mitchell, 2001, pp. 82-87).

The thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

## Abstract

My thesis is original in placing together Wittgenstein's ideas of how language works, and arguments for the philosophical significance of the embodied and relational figure of the mother. I both use and resist a Wittgensteinian therapy to overcome the problem of the forgetting of the mother in philosophy.

I begin with the problem of essentialism, important to Wittgenstein and to feminist philosophy. My reading of Wittgenstein finds an ignored lacuna between language and (female) experience. I add in to the debate the type specimen approach from botany. Adopting this approach enables me to avoid a classification which requires a true inner essence to mothering, and provides a way for me to denote the significant place of the language games of mothering in language games about women.

I argue for a different symbol of the mother. I agree with Wittgenstein's account of language, but add to it. I show the importance of Wittgenstein's insight that although meaning is not fixed independently of use, use does not fix meaning in that I create new meanings for the figure of the mother. I argue, through an exploration of Wittgenstein's concept of '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*', that Wittgenstein can help us to see the phenomena of our life differently, in a way that makes space for understanding female difference. His concept of a form of life provides such openings.

As the Wittgensteinian agent seems distinctly un-female, I bring in the philosophy of Kierkegaard in my argument for a different relational self as mother. I argue for a Kierkegaardian flexible maternal self with mobile edges. I insert the language games of the mother into Kierkegaard's writing on women. My aim is a more adequate representation of a (true) reality.

I use the work of John Wisdom to make a bridge between Wittgenstein and the narrative form, which I use throughout. Wisdom's strategy is to engage in unconventional reflection in looking for new ways of telling philosophical stories, and in finding new patterns of meaning in the familiar. I claim that the narrative form enables me to express the shifting essence of the mother and the diversity of mothers; and to acknowledge the silences which are part of the mother's story.

My aim in this thesis is creative. I use Wittgenstein to create a new kind of relation to philosophy. I do not offer a correct reading of Wittgenstein or Kierkegaard. Instead, aided by the insights provided by feminist philosophy, I *write in* the language games of the mother to their ideas. Thus, I bring into existence through utterance a different, feminist philosophical symbol of the mother.

## Abbreviations

### Wittgenstein's Works

- T. Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1990) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. Pears, D.F. and McGuinness, B.F., Routledge, London.
- R.F. Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1993) *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* ed. Rhees, Rush, trans. Beversluis, John, in *Philosophical Occasions 1912-1951*, eds. Klagge, James and Nordman, Alfred, Hackett Publishing Company, Cambridge. pp. 115-156.
- P.I. Wittgenstein, Ludwig (2000) *Philosophical Investigations*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Anscombe, G.E.M., Blackwell, Oxford.

### Kierkegaard's Works

- F.T. Kierkegaard, Søren (1985) *Fear and Trembling: Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de silentio*, trans. and ed. Hannay, Alastair, Penguin, London.
- E/O Kierkegaard, Søren (1987) *Either/Or*, trans. and eds. Hong, Howard V. and Hong, Edna H., Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- C.U.P. Kierkegaard, Søren (2000a) *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, trans. and eds. Hong, Howard V. and Hong, Edna H. in *The Essential Kierkegaard*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

I began this thesis because I was confronted by the problem of silence. The philosopher whose work spoke to me most powerfully, Wittgenstein, is a philosopher of ordinary language, yet he confronted me with an absence of words relevant to my experience as a mother. His silence generated a silence in me, indicative of the conflict that this thesis seeks to resolve. As I am a mother, I wanted to adopt the strategy of reading and writing as a mother. My concern is not with ontology but with language. I could not discover the language, nor, in Wittgensteinian terms, the language games, nor the form of life of the mother in his writing. So how could Wittgenstein both speak to me and not address me?

My aim is to unravel both terms of the paradox by investigating the position of the concept 'mother' in philosophy, and by investigating Wittgenstein as both part of the solution and part of the problem of silence. Wittgenstein is a valuable resource as a philosopher of ordinary language. Also, I suggest that the therapy of a critical employment of Wittgenstein's method is more powerful than the absence of examples given by him which are relevant to the concept 'mother'.

My paradox raises various questions: is Wittgenstein part of a tradition of ignoring mothering, as a human (and not merely animal or biological) practice? Why does the language of human mothering matter? It would be absurd to suggest that the language of the uncle, the cousin,



the niece matters. There seems to be more to the concept 'mother' than a formal description of a relationship. I claim that there is a distinctive normative element to understanding the concept 'mother' which comes from her particular embodiment, and her particular relationality to her child. The concept of the mother is significant for questions raised in philosophy.<sup>1</sup> Why does it seem to be thinking against the grain to think of the mother as a participant in language games, rather than a material presence? What is different about language surrounding mothers?

I first diagnose the nature of the silence. After this, my main aim is to illustrate the methodology I use in my thesis for 'curing' this silence. I position my problem in the context of feminist philosophy. My methodology is inspired by Wittgenstein, but I resist Wittgenstein in that I find that the figure of the mother cannot be mapped on to the Wittgensteinian agent. Though I refer to other Wittgenstein texts, I focus mainly on the *Philosophical Investigations*, written between 1936 and 1945 (Monk, 1990, p. 483); and on *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, partly written in 1931, and completed, 'not earlier than 1936 and probably after 1948.' (Rhees, 1981, p. 119) Through the work of John Wisdom, a pupil of Wittgenstein, I make a bridge between a Wittgensteinian methodology and the narrative form. John Wisdom was inspired by Wittgenstein, but his more discursive writing differs in tone from

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<sup>1</sup> I was first alerted to the significance of the mother for philosophy through the work of Adriana Cavarero, who is a major figure in my thesis.

Wittgenstein's remarks. The change of perspective on Wittgenstein, and on narrative, provides an opening for the language of mothering.

In my view, the obscurity of the mother's place in the symbolic is rooted in both the history of philosophy, and in us, as women ourselves. Both sources bring about a forgetting of the mother. I discuss both sorts of difficulties in writing of the mother. Drawing on Plato's *Timaeus*, (1961) Prudence Allen shows how the earth mother is placed in the Platonic scheme. According to Allen, for Plato, the mother is matter, not active spirit:

She is the natural recipient of all impressions, and is stirred and informed by them, and appears different from time to time by reason of them. But the forms which enter into and go out of her are the likeness of eternal realities.

(Allen, 1985, p. 59)

The entry of the true immortal forms into matter is similar to the father's act of depositing seed during intercourse. The actual mother generating children suffers from inclusion by likeness. The mother receptacle is:

stirred and formed by the forms which enter into and go out of her .... The cosmic male is superior to the cosmic female in that it is the source of all activity and is an 'eternal reality' that contains everything with enduring value for wisdom and virtue; while the cosmic female is a passive receptacle with no identity of its own, which would

cease to be of use when no longer needed by the forms.

(Allen, 1985, p. 60)

Being seen as a passive receptacle is not conducive to speaking philosophically.<sup>2</sup>

Adriana Cavarero adopts a polemical style in exploring the silencing of the mother. She explores the trajectory of the Greek myth of the 'Great Mother', Demeter. (Cavarero, 1995, Chapter 3) Using as her starting point, Plato's reference to Demeter in *Cratylus* (Plato, 1977, 404b) 'named after the gift of food she gave as a mother', Cavarero suggests that the ancient Goddess who held the 'secret of life and fertility' has been erased by Plato and in post-Platonic philosophy. The figure of the mother has been downgraded from a powerful life-giving creature to a mere giver of food. This indicates that 'the patriarchal symbolic order...has established itself precisely on the erasure of the symbolic order of the Great Mother.' (p. 58) However, the erasure is not complete. Although the female symbolic order has been 'defeated and effaced', clues to this distortion are to be found in the context, 'thereby providing evidence of the crime'. (p. 58) Cavarero shows that the mother is ensnared in materiality after her 'erasure from the symbolic', in that the mother in patriarchy is concerned with the material, food, rather than with creation. Through analysing the myth, Cavarero shows the importance for the patriarchal symbolic order of casting the mother aside. Like Allen she

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<sup>2</sup> Allen also contrasts Plato's cosmic view of women with his alternate view of women in the world. (Allen, 1985)

shows how the mother as a source of language, and as a symbolic figure, is occluded in Plato's cosmic system by the elision of the mother to the material. My view is that this elision casts a long shadow, so that within philosophical tradition the figure of the mother remained unspoken and unspeaking. However, whilst I object to including the mother in the material, I insist that her embodied nature is crucial to her importance. Cavarero asks whether the mother has been entirely erased from the history of philosophy. She offers a way forward in suggesting that feminist thinkers can work with the remaining traces of a once powerful female symbolic in order to re-project the embodied difference of the female.

Turning to sources of difficulty in approaching the figure of the mother in women, I suggest that the mother is both a potent symbol in a woman's life, and one with which she is apt to feel ill at ease. The forward thrust of youth stands between the mother and the daughter. Thinking of one's mother may well arouse memories of an unwelcome dependency. To illustrate these tensions, I draw on the reflections of the eighty year old Hazel Barnes, who addresses the issue with the candour of age. She writes as an individual, but her words have a general relevance:

I find it extraordinarily difficult to write about my mother  
.... I have never plumbed the depths of ambivalence that  
existed between her and me, though not for lack of trying  
... Tenderness, resentment, and pangs of guilt combine to

prevent me from ever feeling that I am fair to her or to myself, whatever I may write. (Barnes, 1997, p. 16)

Barnes also goes on to say:

To be unlike my mother became for me, all but synonymous with realizing myself. (1997, p. 23)

Barnes acknowledges the complexity of the mother/daughter relationship, the difficulty of articulating their importance to each other, and the part they played in each other's lives. She acknowledges that the love between a daughter and a mother, stretched out over a lifetime, in which the mother's strength must wane and the daughter's will tend to grow, involves occasions for a variety of conflicting feelings. In the final sentence quoted, she reveals her existentialist commitment to realising herself. Such a commitment requires a commitment to freedom. De Beauvoir argues that the subject 'achieves freedom (*liberté*) only through continually reaching out towards other freedoms'.<sup>3</sup> (Beauvoir, 1999, p. 296, quoted Barnes, p. xiv). For Barnes, such freedoms could only be reached by moving away from the unwelcome domesticity and constricting family life represented, whether fairly or not, by the figure of the mother.

For many women these tensions are ameliorated when the daughter becomes a mother herself. The pattern of the relationship may well change. The experience of being a mother may bring a young woman a

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<sup>3</sup> My corrected translation

greater understanding of the hardships and joys integral to all motherhood. Seeing her daughter pregnant and caring for a child may remind a mother of her own experience. Thus the generational distance between mother and daughter may be lessened in favour of a greater co-operation.

The mother has been under-theorised in feminist philosophy. As feminism is, traditionally, a movement towards independence, the figure of the mother is bound to be problematic in that she is living with dependence. For some feminists, it has been more urgent to write on abortion, which has a clear resonance with the ideal of the independent woman, than on mothering. I contrast my position with that of Simone de Beauvoir. In *The Second Sex*, she begins her chapter entitled 'The Mother' with a long (and moving) discussion of abortion. (Beauvoir, 1999, pp. 501-542) I do not engage with the abortion debate, but rather focus on what the symbol of a shared body can reveal. De Beauvoir's wary attitude to the female body is evident in the first chapter of *The Second Sex*. She describes menstruation as a 'burden' which may cause the woman to display 'serious psychic disturbance' (pp. 60-61) and the menopause as an 'impoverishment of the individual's vital forces'. (p. 63) De Beauvoir's downgrading of the female body led her to be unjust to the mother. (Beauvoir, 1999, p. 513)<sup>4</sup> For me, the pregnant woman is important as a bodily symbol of the mother. For de Beauvoir, the

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<sup>4</sup> For de Beauvoir we are not trapped by our bodies, and freedom is exercised via a negation of the given of biology. Nevertheless she regards women's bodies as more entrapping than those of men. (Beauvoir, 1999)

transition to motherhood is a transition from being a 'conscious and free individual' to an individual she associates with domesticated animals, whereas I intend to show that the relationality of the figure of the mother is philosophically significant.

My intention of contributing to the rescue of the mother from philosophical obscurity carries a risk of idealising or sentimentalising the mother. There is a danger that all mothers begin to shine with maternal goodness. Although very many ordinary women and their children have a loving relationship, in our society expression of romantic love is far more acceptable than expression of mother love. The latter form of love is often thought of as enfeebling, even crushing. I am wary of these dangers, and avoid them by framing my ideas of the mother within the concept of the virtue of mothering.

My understanding of the term 'virtue' is indicated in the expression, that a woman loves her child *by virtue of* being her mother. My interest is to write of the ordinary mother in our society, who, in my view, normally exhibits to a greater or lesser degree, the virtues of mothering. I draw on MacIntyre's *After Virtue*. (MacIntyre, 1981) MacIntyre here outlines a masculine tradition of thought, and exemplifies the concept of virtue with mainly masculine examples. John Wisdom uses the phrase 'altering the geometry' of a concept. (Wisdom, 1964, p. 82) I alter the geometry of the concept of virtue by bringing in the female.

MacIntyre traces the concept back to heroic societies, which he characterises as ‘competitive’,<sup>5</sup> and primarily concerned with success in war. In Homeric poems *aretê* is used for excellence of any kind; a fast runner displays *arête* of his feet. (*Iliad* 20. 411, Homer, 1973, referred to in MacIntyre, 1981, p. 122<sup>6</sup>) Such an understanding of virtue rooted outside moral terms is not unhelpful to the idea of the virtue of the mother. A virtue may be seen as a quality of character, not ‘given’, but chosen and adhered to over a period of time.

As being a mother is not a biological necessity, neither is exhibiting the qualities that in our society we associate with mothering. In becoming a mother, a woman makes an embodied choice. I see a woman’s body as active, not passive. For example, just as the runner displays *arête* of his feet, by placing his physical energy into running, by shaping his body so that it is light and speedy, so a mother might display the *arête* of physical well-being in pregnancy, and stamina, both of which are advantageous in delivering and bringing up a child.

In the Homeric poems a virtue is a quality the manifestation of which enables someone to do exactly what their well-defined social role requires. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 184)

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<sup>5</sup> He acknowledges borrowing this term from Adkins (1960). Adkins divides the competitive virtues of heroic societies from the quieter virtues of the classical age.

<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre does not indicate which edition of the *Iliad* he is using.



Despite the fluidity of social roles in contemporary western society, the social role of the mother remains fairly well defined.<sup>7</sup> Her role is to care for her child in such a way that the child thrives. Her identity as a mother depends on manifesting such care, as the identity of the Homeric hero depended on manifesting prowess in battle. As a mother, a woman shows the qualities, such as vigilance, which enable the child to develop well. As a Greek soldier, a man showed the qualities, such as bravery, which enabled him to win battles. The mother is a mother through her vigilance, as the soldier is a soldier through his bravery.

MacIntyre claims that although the concept of virtue changes through time as societies change, providing the necessary background to the concept, there is a 'unitary core concept' of virtue. Relevant here is his focus on the importance of practice:

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human

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<sup>7</sup> I discuss the difficulty caused for mothers by combining their roles as mother with other roles in my critique of MacIntyre in Chapter 6. Here, I am diverging from most contemporary Western mothers' life experience by cutting out the role of the mother as a separate activity, and therefore with distinct virtues.

conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended .... (MacIntyre, 1981, p.187)

Entering a practice entails obeying the rules internal to that practice, and accepting the authority of the standards of the practice. MacIntyre moves on to his definition of virtue:

A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.  
(MacIntyre, 1981, p. 191)

The primary good internal to motherhood is a reciprocal love between the child and the mother. Another such good is enjoyment of the work of mothering. To distinguish between goods internal to a practice, and goods external to a practice, MacIntyre uses the example of a boy playing chess well for a bribe (an external good) and a boy playing chess well for the love of the game. Analogously, a mother who brings up her children well for the sake of social approval, or has a baby as an accessory to her femininity, attains some external goods of mothering, whilst the mother who loves her child attains the internal goods. Of course, the mother who does not, or cannot, love her child is debarred from these goods.<sup>8</sup> MacIntyre's dignified words 'trying to achieve those standards of

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<sup>8</sup> The criminally abusive mother and the criminally neglectful mother lie outside the scope of this thesis.

excellence' may cause an ironic wince in the mother who, exhausted and hungry, gets up in the night to feed her baby, but in overcoming her own needs, she is moving towards the standards of excellence of the mother of a dependent child. Mothers frequently relate desperate episodes: 'I felt like throwing her out of the window' or 'I felt like leaving the house and locking the door behind me' but, the wonder is, in general, they do not behave in these ways. A mother learns the virtue of generosity towards the child, and the change in herself stays with her in her relation to the child.

As the child grows and develops the mother's virtuous love is usually sorely tested by the youthful egoism of the child. Mothers are as varied in their personalities as non-mothers, and engage in the tasks of mothering with varying degrees of patience and impatience, anger and acceptance. I recognise that the ordinary virtuous mother may well resent her child's demands. She may place a distance between herself and the child and focus back on her 'own' life. Yet only rarely does she withdraw her love for the child. Her excellence may be very different from excellence at chess, or the excellence described in MacIntyre's other examples, but it is an excellence which she has chosen.

Understanding the qualities of the mother in the framework provided by MacIntyre allows me to write of the practices which constitute a mother's identity, to which maternal love is significant. I write of the

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mother who embodies the virtue of loving her child in the society of which she is part. We are surrounded in our everyday life by evidence of maternal love. It is difficult to deny that the virtue of maternal love is normatively built in to the idea of the mother. Although there are, of course, both biological and adoptive mothers who do not, or cannot, love their children, normal maternal practices are impelled by love. In Chapter 4, I discuss the mother's place within the shifting practices in our society. I do not suggest that this is a simple or conflict-free love. Although I do not make the suffering of mothers central to my thesis, I am well aware of the experience of very many women illustrated in Adrienne Rich's chapter on 'Violence: The Heart of Maternal Darkness', in *Of Women Born*, (1984). Rich provides extreme examples not on the basis that these women are radically different from 'ordinary mothers' but that these women are responding more dramatically to the harsh patriarchal conditions that very many mothers face. She graphically describes the wearisome nature of pregnancy, and the emotional conflict engendered by unwelcome pregnancy. Rich presents contrasting images of motherhood – the care provided by the ordinary mother 'who hangs out the wash, or runs to pick up a tear-streaked two-year-old'; Renoir's blooming women; and also darker pictures. These include a young girl pregnant by her father; lesbians struggling to keep custody of a child; a woman struggling to keep working while pregnant; a woman forced to give up her baby for adoption for economic or social reasons. Rich writes of the wintry loneliness of being trapped at home with small or sick children; and of the exhaustion of mothers who struggle to provide an income, and

simultaneously care for children. Yet she affirms the passion, tenderness and courage of maternal love despite these hardships. (1984, p. 279)

Let me return to the problems of absence and silence using a Wittgensteinian ‘therapy’. Wittgenstein writes:

The real discovery is the one that makes me capable of stopping doing philosophy when I want to.—The one that gives philosophy peace, so that it is no longer tormented by questions which bring *itself* in question. Instead, we can now demonstrate a method, by examples; and the series of examples can be broken off.—Problems are solved (difficulties eliminated), not a single problem.

There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are different methods, like different therapies. (P.I.133)<sup>9</sup>

Wittgenstein is not building a philosophical system, his method is focused on the individual reader, and the individual reader’s problems. My method is to follow Wittgenstein in working from examples, but to choose my examples from female lives. In working through such examples I find that the series does indeed break off, in that they reveal the attraction of moving from Wittgenstein to different frameworks for approaching the mother.

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<sup>9</sup> P.I.133 indicates the number of the remark in Wittgenstein, Ludwig (2000) *Philosophical Investigations*.

Within the web of philosophical language, the ordinary language of the mother subsists, but a new way of looking is needed in order to see it aright. The sheer ordinariness of the ordinary mother poses a challenge. Like a constant feature of the landscape, because she is always seen, she remains unseen. Wittgenstein provides guidance here:

Here it is difficult as it were to keep our heads up—to see that we must stick to the subjects (*den Dingen*) of our everyday thinking, and not go astray and imagine that we have to describe extreme subtleties, which in turn we are after all quite unable to describe with the means at our disposal. We feel as if we had to repair a torn spider's web with our fingers. (P.I.106)

Anscombe's translation slightly alters a helpful strand of meaning in the German. '*Es ist uns, als sollten wir ein zerstörtes Spinnennetz mit unsern Fingern in Ordnung bringen.*' A more helpful translation is: 'It is to us, as if we should bring into order with our fingers a wrecked, vandalized spider's web.' All the thread of the spider's web is there, but it has been vandalized so that it no longer works properly. We should keep to our everyday thinking, and recognise that the web of language is complete, but out of its proper order. If the significance attached to ordinary female practices, such as the meaning of the terms 'woman' or 'mother', is diminished and overlooked, then language is not '*in Ordnung*'. I suggest a different use of the concept 'mother' taken from an analysis of the virtues attendant upon the practice of mothering.

As an authoritative precedent for the project of using a Wittgensteinian method in areas in which the historical Wittgenstein did not engage, let me make an analogy between my project and Alice Crary's examination of whether Wittgenstein's vision of the way language works enables his readers to use him for political purposes. The main part of Crary's chapter, 'Wittgenstein's Philosophy in Relation to Political Thought' (Crary, 2000) challenges what she terms 'inviolability' interpretations of Wittgenstein. Such interpretations hold that the claim that the meanings of our language games derive from agreement in the form of life we inhabit entails that there is no point outside a form of life which can be used to criticise that form of life. Such interpretations lead to a 'quietist' understanding of Wittgenstein in that there can be no argument from, for example, a principle of justice which stands outside a form of life, enabling criticism of that form of life. (pp. 119-20) Crary agrees with the interpretation insofar as there is no fixed point outside our language on which we can stand to criticise a form of life. But she still thinks that Wittgenstein can be used in a critical way.

She points out that although Wittgenstein attacks views which stipulate that 'meaning is fixed independently of use, he should not therefore be understood as claiming that use fixes meaning'. (p. 131) Working out the uses of a word is like seeing if a chess piece has more than one role. We can see new uses of words, not by standing outside the game, but by examining their roles within the game. I am suggesting different uses of the concept 'mother' by examining her partly hidden role

in various texts. As, for example, the sideways attacking move of the pawn is not immediately apparent in the outline of the chess game, the meaning which I find for the mother is not immediately apparent in the texts with which I engage. But as the move comes to light as the game is played, so do the female meanings come to light in my dialogues with philosophical texts.

Crary shows through a series of Wittgensteinian arithmetic examples that we can persuade others of our meaning if we can persuade them to *perceive* the regularities in our practice. (p. 137) We can persuade a tribe of the correctness of a method of calculating which always results in the same answer for our calculations, only if we can persuade them that our answers are regular in a way that they had not previously found useful, but which they can find useful. Such persuasion is the only proof of the correctness of our practices. So in suggesting a different use of the concept 'mother' my task is to persuade the reader that such a use has regularities, that the features I pick out can be aligned with, though not absorbed into, the traditional understanding of the term. Differences between the figure of the mother and the standard male figure are ignored in the majority of philosophical discussions of identity. I intend to establish the philosophical usefulness of an understanding of the mother which recognises the distinctness of her body, and of her relationality.

In insisting on investigation of words that is internal to practice, Crary writes that in investigating the meaning of a term we should be aware of connections with other uses of the term. Human agency is thus



employed not, or not only, in fixing meaning, but in further developing meaning in line with ‘sensitivities we learned when learning language’. (p. 138) In suggesting a different use of the term ‘mother’ I note connections with uses of the term in everyday language, and in philosophic and literary texts. As I have already suggested, the sensitivities acquired when learning the term ‘mother’ are complicated precisely because we normally learn the term from our mothers. Such complications are better recognised than overlooked, as they are part of the requisite sensitivity.

The work of Naomi Scheman is significant for my thesis. Scheman uses Wittgenstein to produce a relation to philosophy which questions ways of defining and of excluding, and creates a new form of ‘diasporic’ identity. I am influenced by the creativity in her approach. Like Scheman, I do not provide a faithful reading of Wittgenstein, but a reading that aims to create a space – in my case, a space for the mother.

Scheman both appreciates the value of Wittgenstein’s ideas, and the value of resisting his ideas. She focuses on experiences which elude Wittgensteinian language-games. She brings in narratives as a better way of approaching such experiences. In an interview with Miranda Fricker, Naomi Scheman made clear that Wittgenstein’s affirmation of the importance of a community is helpful to those of us working in the community of feminist philosophy. (Scheman and Fricker, 2000) She expresses Wittgenstein’s idea that our agreement in our form of life is integral to the reality of our form of life. She calls this a ‘notion of reality that is context-dependent.’(p. 7) She does not take this agreement to be

static, but capable of change as our practices change. She raises the question of one's intelligibility to oneself and others, examining the Wittgensteinian idea that a person can only be made intelligible within a form of life.

Scheman's writing makes problematic the Wittgensteinian close fit between language and experience. She makes clear the predicament of those who have a choice between not expressing themselves, and expressing themselves and not being understood. She refers to her attempt to 'articulate that sense of not-at-homeness' (p. 18) which she finds in Wittgenstein despite his insistence on the importance of community. She questions the position of those who are not at home in a form of life, who do not agree in the form of life which they inhabit. (p. 18) In the interview, her case in point is Wittgenstein himself who, as a Jew and a homosexual, is, in her view, a figure alien in his society. Elsewhere in her work she considers the positions of transsexuals, homosexuals and her own identity as a 'Diasporic Jew.' (Scheman 1996b, Scheman 1997, Scheman 2002) Her method is to make full use of Wittgenstein's idea of intelligibility within a form of life, while questioning such intelligibility through short narratives which expose the seams and ruptures within the agreement.

In my thesis, I show the significance of a ‘blurred’<sup>10</sup> concept of a female form of life, and a maternal form of life, which underlie and hold together our language games; but, like Scheman, I contest the idea of agreement in a form of life as crucial to self-understanding. I suggest that not all female nor all maternal experience finds expression in language, and that the language that is used to describe such experience can be distorting. I place mothers – ironically so often associated with the home – among those whose place in the symbolic is one in which it is easy to feel ‘not at home’. Like Scheman, I struggle to articulate that sense of ‘not-at-homeness’. I suggest that some female experience does not simply find expression in language but struggles towards expression, haunts language, shadows language, and resides in lacunae in language.

Scheman is also helpful to me in her pervading attitude to Wittgenstein. Fricker asks her about the conflict between her ‘political intellectual purposes’ which differ from Wittgenstein’s purposes. Scheman replies:

‘I don’t see myself as getting Wittgenstein right, as being in that sense a ‘good reader.’ ... I resist occupying the constructed reader position. I read philosophical texts that

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<sup>10</sup> Wittgenstein writes ‘One might say that the concept ‘game’ is a concept with ‘blurred edges’. — “But is a blurred concept a concept at all?”—“Is an indistinct photograph a picture of a person at all?” Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn’t the indistinct one often exactly what we need?’ (P.I.71) Scheman and I both adopt Wittgenstein’s idea of a blurred picture for some female concepts.

way, and that precludes certain kinds of ‘good interpretation’, because I refuse to be what is in some sense that text’s ideal reader. What I want to do instead is find ways of bringing Wittgenstein into my world, but without being held to his consenting in any way!’ (Scheman and Fricker, 2000, pp.18-19)

Similarly I do not see myself as in the constructed reader position, grappling with the same questions as those with which Wittgenstein’s male interlocutor grapples. My resistant reading of Wittgenstein does not make a truth claim, but aims to change how Wittgenstein is seen in philosophy.

For me, Wittgenstein is both a foil and a resource for my more pressing interest in the language of women and mothers. I too attempt to bring Wittgenstein into my world, but I do not enclose myself in a Wittgensteinian framework. I both use Wittgenstein’s ideas, and contest such ideas from a perspective that it is unlikely that the historical Wittgenstein considered, or would embrace. Having used Wittgenstein as a starting point, I move away from him into philosophical questions that he would probably not have seen as philosophical. This difference of worlds was illustrated for me when I asked in a Paris bookstore for books on Wittgenstein and was directed upstairs to the logic section. When I asked for books on feminist philosophy I was directed to sociology and psychology. Booksellers are, of course, not employed to make discriminations between the subjects of books, but the physical distance

between the two shelves, and the dismissive certainty of the bookseller, brought home to me strongly the accustomed rift between Wittgenstein's thought and the areas of concern to me, to Scheman and other feminist 'Wittgensteinians.'<sup>11</sup>

Like Scheman, I do not offer a 'good interpretation' of Wittgenstein. I claim that language is important, and that language is differentiated. Language gives access to the world, and different people use language differently. So far, Wittgenstein would agree in that he uses the concept of a variety of language-games to capture the meaning of our engagement with the world. I part company from Wittgenstein on the question of the relation between language and experience. I follow Christine Battersby in averring that 'all our experience is mediated through language' (1998, p. 36), and I investigate the nature of this mediation. I suggest that different experiences are differently mediated. For the Wittgensteinian agent, experience is expressed in language without gap or residue. Influenced by Scheman's reservations about the expressibility of experience, I ask whether maternal experience is so expressed, and thus raise the question of the distinctiveness of human maternal experience. I argue that the relation of language to experience is a relation of incompleteness, vagueness and fluidity. I find that the sense of self arising from discursive practices that Wittgenstein suggests does

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<sup>11</sup> Scheman has co-edited *Feminist Interpretations of Wittgenstein*, which aims at bringing the two worlds closer together. (Scheman, Naomi, and O'Connor, Peg, 2002).

not take into account either the embodied nature, or the psychological interiority of the mother.

In that I use narrative to remedy omissions from the Wittgensteinian agent, I use it as a corrective. Michael Bell reminds us that the twentieth century has invoked narrative as a corrective to the 'paucity and abstraction' of analytic philosophy.<sup>12</sup> (2004, discussed below) I follow Adriana Cavarero in showing how narrative moves us from the question 'What am I?' which leads to the masculine abstraction, 'I am a man', to the corrected question 'Who am I?' which leads to narrative. (Cavarero, 2000, Chapter 1) Once the question 'Who am I?' is posed, the distinctiveness of the maternal body can be recognised, in stories deriving from the experience of such a body. Narrative bespeaks a viewpoint, and thereby provides an opportunity for consideration of the viewpoint, that is, consideration of interiority.

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<sup>12</sup> In a paper entitled 'Hannah Arendt's Narrative Philosophy: The Political Relevance of Story-Telling', Veronica Vasterling made a similar point with regard to Arendt and Nussbaum: 'Arendt and Nussbaum are two philosophers inspired by the practical philosophy of Aristotle, who both defend the use of narratives in philosophy on the basis of a critical diagnosis of philosophical discourse as it is usually practiced. Whereas Arendt emphasizes the political significance of Aristotle's work and Nussbaum its implications for ethics, their interest in his practical philosophy is motivated by a similar concern. Both Arendt and Nussbaum are dissatisfied with the usual philosophical approach to ethics and both are convinced that the use of narrative would help a lot to improve practical philosophy.' (2004, Unpublished)

John Wisdom's witty and humane lectures *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* present and discuss 'curative' philosophical narratives. (Wisdom, 1964) The lectures show the influence of Wittgenstein, but also move away from him to present a distinctive philosophical position. John Wisdom shows how a process of discovery in philosophy can resemble the therapy of psychoanalysis in that new discoveries are made not by observation or deduction but by finding a new way of looking. (1964, p. 248) This brings me to the paradoxical figure of the mother as a forgotten emblem. The mother is significant, but she is not seen. Although I do not adopt a psychoanalytic framework, it is helpful to recognise that writing about the mother carries particular habitual patterns, and that there might be other patterns of significance which are missed. The dominant patterns of the language surrounding the figure of the mother are, as I have suggested above, compromised by being too heavily invested with materiality, and by particular tensions in the mother/child relationship. I offer a new way of looking from which a new pattern of meaning may emerge. This method is necessarily tentative. It relies on suggestions which are held together not as the building blocks of an argument, but rather as pieces in a pattern. John Wisdom writes: 'It is possible to have before one's eyes all the elements of a pattern and still to miss the pattern.' (1964, p. 153) The familiarity of the topic under discussion increases rather than reduces the likelihood that there is a pattern of meaning which is being missed. Such a method does not require new information, but a different way of seeing what is already familiar. Thus I do not suggest new information about the mother, but I simply ask my

reader to look again, to look differently, at the mother. I try various avenues to persuade the reader to see the figure of the mother differently. I do not claim to have discovered any novel talents or deficiencies. Instead I show her in her everyday being. This approach is to offer a different projection of the phenomenon being studied:

the process of argument is not a *chain* of demonstrative reasoning. It is a presenting and re-presenting of those features of the case which *severally co-operate*<sup>13</sup> in favour of a conclusion, in favour of saying what the reasoner wishes said, in favour of calling the situation by the name by which he wishes to call it. The reasons are like the legs of a chair, not the links of a chain. (Wisdom, 1964, p. 157)

This method will only work if the reader or listener is persuaded.

Perelman discusses the importance of the philosophical distinction between persuasion and convincing in his study of argumentation, which he describes as intellectual contact aimed at the adherence of minds. (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p.14) My discussion here aims to elucidate the question of to whom my thesis is addressed. Perelman provides Kant's distinction in the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Taking something to be true is an occurrence in our understanding that may rest on objective grounds, but that also requires subjective causes in the mind of him who

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<sup>13</sup> All italics in original.



judges. If it is valid for everyone merely as long as he has reason, then its ground is objectively sufficient, and in that case taking something to be true is called *conviction*. If it has its grounds only in the particular constitution of the subject, then it is called *persuasion*. (Kant, 2000, A820/B848)

Both convincing and persuading are rhetorical techniques, which are relevant to the subject, but the difference lies between a universal and a non-universal subject. For Kant arguments which convince will convince anyone, but arguments which persuade will persuade a sub-set of the universal audience. Conviction is associated with understanding, and is characteristic of the universal audience. Perelman associates persuasion with action. Persuasion acts on a particular audience.

Philosophy, traditionally, works with universals, not on a universal audience; and with truth, not conviction, which is assigned to rhetoric. However, Perelman's strategy is to treat philosophy as a particular kind of rhetoric, a rhetoric to which universals are important. Argumentation addressed to a universal audience must convince the reader that the reasons adduced are of a compelling character, that they are self-evident, and possess an absolute and timeless validity, independent of local or historical contingencies. (p. 32) In argumentation before a single hearer, the single hearer, after hesitation and questioning 'yields to the evidence of truth.' The single hearer may be seen as the incarnation of the universal audience. The idea here is that if one person may be convinced by the

argument, then anyone may be convinced by the argument. It is 'valid for all reasonable beings'. (Perelman 1969, p.110) The single hearer, or interlocutor, may be replaced by a second voice within the self in self-deliberation.

In practice, the universal audience is absent. The universal audience is a mental construct of the writer or speaker who actually addresses herself to a specific group, or to a single individual. Perelman makes clear the significance of the practical effects of argumentation, which are distinct from knowledge claims. Argumentation is 'oriented toward the future, it sets out to bring about some action or to prepare for it by acting, by discursive methods, on the minds of the hearers.' (Perleman,1969, p. 47)

Let me indicate how my thesis fits into this discussion. I work not with universals, but with limited universals. The figure of the mother is a timeless figure, a limited universal, which Wittgenstein forgets, and in so doing forgets certain kinds of reader. I find ways to address such readers. In writing of the figure of the mother, I direct my arguments to the *understanding* of my reader, and so seek to convince her, but I do not present *a* truth, but a variety of truths. The action I seek is to create a more adequate representation of the mother, whilst not insisting that any specific representation need have absolute validity. In working with the concept of limited universals I move towards convincing, but I retain the dynamism and fluidity of outcome associated with the language games of

persuasion. I address a universal rational female reader as Perelman's 'reasonable being' whilst also addressing a wider philosophical audience. My primary aim is to bring into existence philosophical language games of mothering.

Wittgenstein recognises the importance of persuading as I have indicated in my section on Crary above. In the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein addresses himself to an imaginary interlocutor, in a form of self-deliberation. In the Preface to *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein alludes to his audience:

I make them [my remarks] public with doubtful feelings.

It is not impossible that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light to one brain or another—but, of course, it is not likely. (p. vi)

In this sad, modest and poetic statement he does not address the universal audience but the solitary thinker. Perelman suggests that, 'written dialogue, even more than spoken dialogue assumes that the single hearer incarnates the universal audience.' (Perelman, 1969, p. 37) In my view, Wittgenstein's approach is to take himself as an incarnation of a restricted universal, a solitary thinker, not a philosopher working with universals. He allows himself to be convinced not by *a* philosophical method, but by different methods, like different therapies. (P.I.133) Similarly Wittgenstein asks his reader to be so convinced. I place myself in a dialogue with Wittgenstein, different in kind from Wittgenstein's dialogue

with his interlocutor; and in dialogue with differing philosophical texts, as a way of creating the philosophical significance of the language games of the mother.

Female hearers or readers have not formed part of the specific group to whom philosophy is in practice addressed. Cavarero has engaged with this difficulty. Braidotti writes of the importance to Cavarero of the ‘question of the relevance and range of social and political applications of philosophy itself’. (Braidotti, Foreword to Cavarero, 1995, p. ix) My aim is to make the maternal relevant to, and within the range of, philosophy. I create a way of doing philosophy in which the figure of the mother becomes significant to the reader. The movement of becoming is what matters.

Although I do not restrict myself to feminist philosophy, in my thesis the figure of the mother becomes important *via* feminist philosophy, through the differences made to the reception of texts by feminist philosophers.

Between the feminist woman reader and the woman in the text there is a relation of identification and recognition: both are caught in a masculine conceptual universe.

(Braidotti, Foreword to Cavarero, 1995, p. xiii)

Such identification and recognition makes a difference to the way texts are understood. This does not imply an essentialist understanding of ‘woman’, but an ‘affirmation of the difference that women can make.’ (p.

xv) For me, as for Cavarero, the female, feminist reader has a powerful transformative presence. Addressing the universal rational female reader is part of the task of philosophy. Philosophy narrows itself if it deals solely in abstract truths.

In beginning with the question of silence, which is much discussed in psychoanalytic literature, and in drawing on John Wisdom's *Philosophy and Psychoanalysis*, I raise the question of the relation between my project and feminist critiques of psychoanalysis. I differ from such critiques in not adopting a psychoanalytic framework. In the following brief outline of some differences, I have selected from the influential writings of Luce Irigaray and of Julia Kristeva. Sexuality is a very important theme in both of their writings, whereas I have chosen to write without recourse to Freudian-inspired ideas of the pervasiveness of sexuality in all areas of human relationships.<sup>14</sup>

Grosz shows how Irigaray uses Freud's idea of the unconscious to suggest:

a close resemblance between the unconscious in its relation to consciousness and women in relation to patriarchal social relations. She [Irigaray] accepts Freud's identification of the repressed with femininity but goes one step further: if what is repressed is the feminine, she

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<sup>14</sup> For reasons of space I consider a selection of the ideas of Irigaray and of Kristeva mainly as they are presented in exegeses in Grosz, Elizabeth (1989) *Sexual Subversions*.

claims, it is possible to regard women not as *having* an unconscious, but as *being* it (for men, for the phallic, for patriarchy). (Grosz, 1989, p. 107)

For Freud, the unconscious is structurally inaccessible to consciousness, so the male silence which Irigaray sees as indicative of the repression/oppression of women is seen only in its effects, or symptoms in the male psyche. For Irigaray, the male silence can be countered by a female remembering. The analogy of the female with the unconscious is a major part of her challenge to the masculine nature of psychoanalysis, and simultaneous challenge to masculine representations of femininity. According to Grosz, Irigaray:

actively affirms a project challenging and deconstructing the cultural representations of femininity so that it may be capable of representation and recognition in its own self-defined terms. (p. 101)

For both Freud and Irigaray, in different ways, the unconscious is a necessary causal factor in the production of silence. For me, neither female meanings in philosophy nor female silences are analogous with the unconscious in psychoanalysis. For me, such meanings and such silences are not unconscious, but just not attended to. My aim is to bring to notice meanings that are in principle possible to be noticed. I shape my questions from within what Wittgenstein termed the 'labyrinth of language', as used, rather than searching to elicit the unconscious. Yet Irigaray has an indirect influence on my questions as I follow Cavarero's approach in

seeking the traces of female resistance residual within some male philosophical texts.

Underlying the texts that comprise Western philosophy, we have a phallogentric system of representation, but there are within it also some traces of resistance—which are the traces of the data, resisting this false/inadequate representation. (Cavarero and Richardson, 1999, p. 13)

The influence of Irigaray on Cavarero is mentioned in the Foreword by Rosi Braidotti to *In Spite of Plato*. (1995, pp. xiv-xvi). My aim is to seek out such traces, and to move them away from an inadequate phallogentric representation. My method also has a resemblance to Irigaray's (and to Cavarero's) in that I make a strategic and combative use of the psychoanalytic technique of storytelling.

My strategy of (re)discovering the female does not require what Grosz terms Irigaray's 'profound and difficult reorganisation of language itself'. (Grosz, 1989, p.109) Grosz shows that Irigaray is concerned to 'place phallogentrism on trial', while I am concerned to discover the forgotten, but discoverable, maternal. Irigaray writes of 'woman' in the western post-matriarchal stage of civilisation making clear that what she writes is not *necessarily* true of 'woman'. Grosz explains:

Prerequisite to the attainment of an autonomous position (if not identity) as a woman is the representation of woman as, and beyond, her maternal function ... Maternity has

functioned to elide the specificity of women's identities and social positions by equating femininity always and only with reproduction and nurturance. (Grosz, 1989, p. 119)

As I will demonstrate in my thesis, I do not see an autonomous position or identity as more desirable for a woman than a relational position or identity. For me, in our stage of civilisation, maternity is a particular virtue or strength of women that stands in need of reevaluation. I agree with Irigaray, that, in the interests of both women who are and who are not mothers, the female should not be elided with the maternal. But for me reproduction is a remarkable ability of women, which has profound philosophical implications; and the work of nurturance is valuable labour.

For Irigaray, the contemporary mother exists in conditions of 'severe limitation', 'subjection', 'renunciation', 'cut off from social and sexual recognition', either giving too much of herself and thus suffocating the child, or giving too little and being 'selfish'. (Grosz, 1989, p.121) Irigaray's prevailing suggestion here is of the mother in our society as a woman whose female sexuality, female sexual pleasure, is of prime significance, while her identity as a mother far less significant. By contrast, I write of the ordinary mother for whom, motherhood, even within a patriarchal society, for all its pains, is a worthwhile part of her identity.



For Julia Kristeva, as for Irigaray, the unconscious impacts on consciousness. However, Kristeva works primarily within a Lacanian framework.<sup>15</sup> In her adaptation of this framework the symbolic is the domain of language, and the feminine becomes the pre-symbolic. For Kristeva the pre-symbolic is the semiotic which is a space rather than a subject. To characterise this space she draws on the idea of the *chora* in Plato's *Timaeus*. (Kristeva, 1986, pp. 93-98) For Kristeva, the feminine semiotic is associated with the maternal *chora* and occasionally erupts into the symbolic, which is paternal, masculine. Kristeva discusses avant-garde artists and writers in whose work the [feminine] semiotic is traced on to the [male] symbolic in a way that is productive. She writes mainly of male writers and artists but does consider some females, but in terms that are, in the early to mid-works at least, not always positive.

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<sup>15</sup> 'In opposition to both [Descartes and Freud], Lacan stresses that the concept of the unconscious subverts the primacy of consciousness, the immediacy of truth and the transparency of communication. The subject is irremediably split, a being located in a conscious agency (which takes itself as master and knower) *and* in an unconscious agency (which is in fact the 'true' locus of the absence of identity.) Freud, Lacan claims, demonstrated the subject's *inability* to know itself. Its self-certainty is a defensive ruse. The subject's identity is not given in consciousness nor in the form of an ego, but comes from being positioned in language as an 'I'. The subject is not the master of language, its controlling speaker, but its result or product.' (Grosz, Elizabeth 1989, p. 19) For Lacan, love comes from the separation between the infant and the mother and is thus a search for a lost other.

As I have indicated above in my discussion of Plato's idea of the *chora*, for my purposes, which differ from Kristeva's, it is damaging for women if the mother is seen in terms of the *chora*. My interest is to provide an alternative to Kristeva's notion of the mother as that which can be traced onto the social and psychic order and never directly be spoken. For me, the mother can be spoken. Part of my task is to search out ways in which mothers can appear and be read into philosophical texts. Kristeva is in favour of the mother but not in favour of the female, so motherhood becomes detached from female bodies. In exploring the language games of mothers, and the form of life of the mother, I insist on an embodied female identity.

Iris Marion Young's use of Kristeva enables me to clarify my own position in relation to Kristeva's on the question of pregnancy and split subjectivity. Young finds helpful Kristeva's Lacanian idea that the unity of the self is itself a project. She starts her analysis of her own pregnant body by quoting Kristeva's remark:

Pregnancy seems to be experienced as the radical ordeal of the splitting of the subject: redoubling up of the body, separation and coexistence of the self and another, of nature and consciousness, of physiology and speech.

(Kristeva, 1996, p. 76)

Without entirely endorsing Kristeva's psychoanalytic framework, Young confirms Kristeva's notion of pregnancy as split subjectivity. My own position is that the mother and the fetus engage in a movement of

becoming together – thus there is no radical ordeal. Moreover Young agrees with Kristeva that the ‘pregnant and birthing woman renews connection to the repressed, preconscious, presymbolic aspect of existence ...’ and thus ‘recollects a primordial sexual continuity with the maternal body ...’. (2005c, p. 53). For me, the pregnant woman engages differently with the symbolic rather than entering the presymbolic, and her sense of continuity with her own mother’s body is not sexual, but simply female, and is engendered by the female bodily practices of pregnancy and birthing.

Let me present an overview of my thesis with brief examples indicative of my technique. The overview is not so much a diagram of structure and connections; it is more like the pictorial print on a square of tapestry netting before the stitches are filled in. My technique is to keep the wider picture in mind while focusing on the part of most interest to me. Thus throughout I draw on the position of the female in philosophy, as a means of reaching the maternal position. I do not see the maternal position *as* the female, but I do see being female as a necessary condition of being a mother. My female examples make clear that the female ‘everyday’ differs from the male ‘everyday’. I exemplify female cultural and social practices. I highlight the differing understandings of feminist and female communities existing alongside male communities.

In writing as a mother, I recognise that in my society with its emphasis on the autonomous individual, and on economic success, being a mother causes tensions and difficulties for women. Equally, not being a

mother is problematic in that the particular opportunities for love and fulfilment accorded to the mother are absent. I do not define myself against women who are not mothers. I make no claim that all women are potentially, or should be, mothers.

In Chapter 2, I engage with the debates over essentialism and anti-essentialism in order to build towards the concept of the mother which is vital to my thesis. My reading of Wittgenstein here is rooted in the antecedent thinking of Naomi Scheman. Her ideas create a different context for understanding both Wittgenstein's problem with essentialism, and the problem of feminist philosophy in this area.

I begin by explaining how Wittgenstein came to view essentialism as a 'sickness,' and I show the strength of his family resemblance approach, which is important to my own position. Such an approach finds resemblances between language games without insisting on a common factor. I critique the (masculine) Wittgensteinian agent through Naomi Scheman's 'Forms of Life: Mapping the Rough Ground' (Scheman, 1996a). Like Scheman, I attend to the problem of those who cannot express their experience in the language games available. Scheman's analysis of this problem raises the difficulties of those who are not 'at home' in the forms of life that underlie language games. Her solution is to offer a more fluid 'diasporic' concept of home for words.

I change the context of the debate on Wittgensteinian anti-essentialism in moving it into the feminist debate on whether there is an

essence to the female. Thus, I examine the effect of a new context on perceptions of a traditional philosophical problem. I trace the history of some moments in the feminist debate to show the importance of this question in the context of the emergence of contemporary feminist philosophy. I show how a Wittgensteinian approach allows 'sameness-in-difference' which helpfully avoids the dichotomies of the essentialist/anti-essentialist positions, which feminist philosophers have found damaging.

The new context of debate reveals new similarities. I find useful Scheman's exploration of the meaning of being a woman which sets the case of those she terms 'women-born-women', as she describes herself, in the context of debates on the status of transsexuals. (Scheman, 1997) By highlighting her own uncertainty as to what makes her a woman, she indicates the fluidity of the idea of being a woman. Being a woman is not defined in terms of properties but is a concept with 'blurry' edges. Her idea of herself as a woman has a Wittgensteinian family resemblance to a transsexual's idea of being a woman. Setting the claim of 'women-born-women' to be women in the context of the transsexual claim, makes clearer the claim of 'women-born-women' to be women. John Wisdom exemplifies the value of a change in context:

Certain features ... are made to stand out and are assembled and ordered and the whole case set in a context of like and different cases in such a way that at the end we have a grasp, an understanding, an apprehension of the

case before us which we lacked when we started. (Wisdom, 1964, p. 263)

This describes Scheman's method, and also mine, as I show below.

Chapter 3, though brief, I have kept separate in order to clarify my position vis à vis the concept 'mother'. This concept underpins my thesis. I add to both Wittgenstein and Scheman in introducing the type specimen method from botany. Through employing this method I suggest that through a qualified family resemblance approach the term 'mother' can emerge from its philosophical obscurity. My position on the concept 'mother' avoids the exclusions which bedevil essentialist positions, and the threat of multiplication of voices which enfeebles anti-essentialist positions. I acknowledge and welcome diversity amongst women both those who are mothers, and those who are not. My approach is Wittgensteinian in that it depends on the family resemblance approach, but, crucially, I am able to insist on the mother's significance.

I place the term 'mother' in a context which illuminates new features. My strategy is to retain the importance of the mother's body, seen as active, not passive, while arguing for a blurred border around the concept 'mother'. I move towards an exploration of the paradox of the mother as forgotten emblem. Such an emblem does not determine rules for treating individuals in a rigid way, decided in advance, but rather provides a Wittgensteinian changing norm for handling instances.

I close this discussion by turning to Adriana Cavarero. Cavarero insists on the embodied sexually differentiated individual. She introduces the uniqueness of the individual. Such uniqueness is, for Cavarero, best expressed in the fluidity of the narrative form, which plays an ever-growing part in my thesis as it develops.

In Chapter 4, *Absence in Wittgenstein: Difference in Wittgenstein*, I begin by examining Wittgenstein's account of language learning. I throw a new light in showing that women are silenced in his examples of everyday language games by countering Wittgenstein's examples with contrasting examples drawn from feminist thinking. Two points noted by John Wisdom are:

[There is] a close connection between discovery by reflection and discovery by investigation. The second is the difference between conventional reflection upon lines already laid down and unconventional reflection, in which it is necessary to introduce a new notation or remould an old one in order to express that new awareness of the known which this reflection brings. (Wisdom, 1964, p. 253)

The change of viewpoint may be all that is needed to allow the significance of what is discovered by investigation to be recognised. Whereas conventional reflection keeps coming back with the same answers to the same questions, unconventional reflection is hospitable to

new ways of asking questions, and hence new answers; or new appreciations of traditional phenomena which express different facets of what is familiar. I hope to engender a *Gestalt* shift in the reading of Wittgenstein. To demonstrate such a change in perception, John Wisdom uses as an example Socrates' dialogue *Meno*. (Plato, 1964) Socrates is questioning a boy about the measurements of a square. 'The boy said at first that a square twice the size of another would have sides twice as long.' (Wisdom 1964, p. 249) On reflection, the boy sees that this answer is wrong. Socrates draws out the new perception without supplying new information. The slave-boy changes from seeing the square as a collection of lines that need to be doubled in length, to seeing the square in terms of its area. The square remains the same, but the boy has a new perception of it. This powerful example works from the notion of the *Gestalt* shift in which one perception blocks out the other. The error of the slave's first answer to Socrates' question became apparent to him as the area of the square dawns on him. Wittgenstein's own examples in Part 2 of *Philosophical Investigations* include the duck/rabbit. (P.I. p.194) He uses several geometrical examples (P.I. pp. 200, 203) of aspect-dawning.

The aspect that I wish to dawn on my readers is the masculine nature of Wittgenstein's language games, as exemplified at the start of *Philosophical Investigations*. Here, I replace the 'primitive'<sup>16</sup> language game of builders that Wittgenstein outlines in the opening remarks with

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<sup>16</sup> This language game is primitive in that it is composed of only a few words such as 'slab' or 'beam'.



the language game of female cleaners. This shows the builders not as neutral participants in Wittgenstein's demonstration of a language game, but as participants in a masculine form of life. Wittgenstein's point about 'primitive' language still stands. I agree with Wittgenstein's idea of how language works, but once the builders have been seen as male builders, they can no longer play the purely technical role that they supposedly played before. The dawning of the masculine aspect of the example replaces the prior neutral aspect.

Although the Wittgensteinian agent seems distinctly un-female, Wittgenstein can help us to see the phenomena of our life differently, in a way that makes space for understanding female difference. Since Wittgenstein's concept of language games is underpinned by his idea of a form of life, I explore what Wittgenstein meant by a form of life. I move on to introduce female forms of life, thus making an opening for female and maternal language games. I counter Wittgenstein's forgetting of the mother by interposing Cavarero's resymbolisation of Demeter. Although Wittgenstein does not engage with female difference, I show that his thinking can welcome difference, and help us understand difference through examining *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. This is especially helpful as here Wittgenstein takes his subject matter from outside the Western patriarchy that he inhabited. I draw on a selection of the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* in which Wittgenstein places together the form of life of 'primitive' communities and our form of life in order to change a view of both which may have been induced by Frazer's

study. Wittgenstein forces a reassessment of the power of magic and ritual as a challenge to our conventional ways of understanding the world. I focus on his resymbolisation of the practices of 'primitive tribes', and I highlight the female practices that he discusses.

Wittgenstein here employs the concept (*der Begriff*) of '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*' (R.F. p. 132).<sup>17</sup> I now provide a detailed explanation of this phrase, which is complex to translate, as it is important to my strategy of offering a different pattern for understanding the figure of the mother. A *Darstellung* is not a representation, but rather an exhibition or performance. The word does not imply a mimetic representation but a sense of display, of placing so that the exhibited item can be viewed. Whereas representation supposes a vantage point from which what is represented can be mimetically displayed to the viewer, *Darstellung*, in Wittgenstein's usage, implies that there is no privileged place to present from, that the viewer and what is seen are both already '*embarqué*', already part of the language game. Furthermore, '*übersichtlichen*' does not bring in the sense of a superior overview, but rather of a clear or transparent view. Equally '*übersichtlichen*' does not convey that there is a correct perspective, as does the English, 'perspicuous', nor the idea of a detached overview. '*Über*' translates as 'across' as well as 'over'. An '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*' helps us find

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<sup>17</sup> R.F. indicates Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1993) *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*.

our way about in a way that becomes clearer as we do find our way about, rather as a mathematical formula becomes clearer as we operate with the formula. The performance is integrated with the meaning.

An *'übersichtlichen Darstellung'* depicts relationships. As he introduces the phrase Wittgenstein writes: 'It is just as possible to see the data in their relation to one another and to embrace them in a general picture... (*Es ist ebensowohl möglich, die Daten in ihrer Beziehung zu einander zu sehen und in ein allgemeines Bild zusammenzufassen ...* ' (R.F. pp. 130-1). The emphasis on relationality might be thought to suggest the hidden influence of Kierkegaard given that Wittgenstein stressed the 'importance of finding *connecting links.*' [*Zwischengliedern*] to reach an understanding of phenomena. (R.F., p. 133) Wittgenstein disaggregates language to investigate the working relationships within, whereas Kierkegaard's related personae indicate the fracturing of the self; Kierkegaard's interior view shows the relationality between individuals which forms the individuals (as I demonstrate in Chapter 5). Wittgenstein's uses the concept of *'übersichtlichen Darstellung'* to show the relationality between language games, gestures, rituals and practices which form our overlapping lives. This conception of philosophy shows a desire for clarity:

linking its content to the idea of exposing new aspects of systems of expression in order to break our bondage to analogies absorbed into the forms of our language. (Baker, 1991, quoted in Clack 1999, p. 45)

In Chapter 5, *Difference in Kierkegaard: Spaces for the Mother*, I move on to a feminist interpretation of Kierkegaard's idea of a relational 'self'. I bring in Kierkegaard as he is a philosopher who influenced Wittgenstein; and as he has been subject to feminist scrutiny and interpretation in the work of Christine Battersby. I begin by focussing on part of *Either/Or* (Kierkegaard, 1987) which juxtaposes three existence spheres. Kierkegaard indicates the importance of viewpoint by his use of pseudonym authors, with contrasting world-views. In placing Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard in consecutive chapters, I do not so much illustrate commonalities between them, as think them together, thus focusing attention on the point of view of each philosopher. This consecutive placing indicates how the Wittgensteinian agent lacks the interiority which fascinates the reader in Kierkegaard's 'narrative portraits'. Kierkegaard's vivid tracing (through the words of his pseudonyms) of the thoughts and feelings, the differing subjectivities, of his individuals makes more evident contrasts between the Wittgensteinian agent and the Kierkegaardian individual. The Wittgensteinian agent speaks, gestures, employs tools, occupies himself with his customary practices and expresses originality by changing such practices. Unlike the characters in Kierkegaard's 'narrative portraits', his 'inner' life is not subject to Wittgensteinian scrutiny.

The theme of shadows is important to my work on Kierkegaard. I attempt to conjure up the shadows of females within the gaps in these philosophical texts. There are shadowy females troubling the subjectivity

of the males, unvoiced but suggested, changing the meaning of his 'narrative portraits'. My technique is to attend to these shadowy females, often on the edge of the main beam of philosophical argument, in order to conjure a different symbol of the self from that prevalent in masculine philosophy. In this my starting point is Battersby's re-reading of Kierkegaard in her account of feminist metaphysics in *The Phenomenal Woman* (Battersby, 1998). Battersby provides a feminist re-reading of Kierkegaard's *In Vino Veritas*, which is itself derived from Plato's *Symposium*.

My project is to bring together the figure of the pregnant woman and the imaginary rounded creatures from Aristophanes' tale in Plato's *Symposium*. Aristophanes relates:

the shape of each human being was a rounded whole with back and sides forming a circle. Each one has four hands and the same number of legs, and two identical faces on a circular neck. (Plato, 1999, 190a)

They are imagined by Plato's character Aristophanes to create a bizarre picture of human beings who are physically dependent on each other as a consequence of their love for each other. The old habit of apprehension which I challenge is that of seeing the rounded creatures as part of a Platonic downgrading of physical love. In inserting the mother into this tale, I continue Cavarero's approach of seeking the remaining traces of the mother who has been so largely forgotten in philosophy.

John Wisdom demonstrates how a new analogy can make us see an object differently, even if the object of comparison does not completely physically resemble the object under discussion. (1964, p. 248) Aristophanes' 'rounded whole' and the figure of the pregnant woman are not hugely similar, but the shapes suggest each other. Through drawing the analogy with the pregnant woman, I insert a new perception of physical love. All the features of Aristophanes' creatures are apparent now, as before, but the analogy with the pregnant woman makes them appear differently. This presentation raises an alternative symbol of the mother. I insist on the bodily relation between mother and child. Such a symbol shows not autonomy but interdependence, not a strict division between inert matter and a moving spirit, but an active body which can give birth and nourish. Such a body is illustrated in Kierkegaard's evocation of the biblical figure of Sarah in *Fear and Trembling*. I close this chapter by suggesting that the text is not enough. The figure of the mother is not comprehended in a skein of words.

Throughout my thesis, I interject and interpolate narratives as a means of mediating the experience of mothers. Towards the end of his lectures John Wisdom notes that a problem for psychoanalysis, and for metaphysical reflection, is that 'there exists already a way of telling the story which selects, emphasises and assembles things in certain constellations.' (1964, p. 262) He writes of a 'determined attempt' to change the story of a person's experience in such a way that the new narrative is more acceptable than the accustomed one. I end, in Chapter 6,

Narrative Identity?, by examining narratives of mothers, thus simultaneously examining a form which I have used constantly. In a paper entitled 'Narrative and Meaning in Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table*' (2004) Michael Bell explored the searching analysis of narrative in relation to experience in Levi's 'life-story'. I select from his paper points relevant to my presentation of the mother.<sup>18</sup>

My approach resembles that outlined by Bell in that I see the 'supreme significance of narrative' and yet I am 'suspicious of it'. Bell notes that the concept 'narrative' overlaps ambiguously with myth, fiction and poetry. I use examples from all three genres. Expressing his suspicion of narrative, Bell moves against the tendency to read life teleologically. Stories may form a whole, but not a whole of beginning, middle and end. Whilst I have found MacIntyre's concept of virtue helpful, I have resisted his idea that a narrative teleology is necessary for the intelligibility of one's life. (MacIntyre, 1981, Chapter 15) I contest MacIntyre's claim in countering it with the disjunctions of female narratives. I do not presuppose that the intelligibility of one's own life is a problem. I show women and mothers using narrative in their endeavour to understand the situation in life in which they are placed. Bell refers to the unstable

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<sup>18</sup> In the first two paragraphs of this section quotations are taken from a conference paper by Bell, Michael (2004) 'Narrative and Meaning in Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table*'. In the final 2 paragraphs my ideas were stimulated by questions put after the presentation of the paper by Christine Battersby and by Georgina Paul.

‘alchemy’ of narrative.<sup>19</sup> Through engaging with Levi’s practice of storytelling, Bell discusses the idea that the meaning of the events will not be captured in the narrative of them. The reality of narrated events is over before they can be written: ‘Perfection belongs to narrated events, not those we live.’ (Levi, 1984, p. 180) As a character is written, that character becomes a representative figure, a distilled substance, whose reality eludes writer and reader. My aim in the stories I choose is to re-present, re-project the mother, not to capture her reality.

In finding the narrative form useful to approach the figure of the mother, I recognise that the ambitions of narratives are necessarily modest. The therapy provided by narrative is not a stripping away of outer skins to attain the truth. It lies in the transformational power of the story which

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<sup>19</sup> In *Literature, Modernism and Myth* Bell also refers to Levi’s *The Periodic Table*. Bell states that Levi’s ‘image of the *Scheidekunst*, the separating of the gold from dross, applies to his (Levi’s) own combined activity as protagonist and story-teller running time through his fingers with an eye constantly alert to the precious grains of significance to be won from it.’ (Bell, 1997, p. 177) Such alchemical activity is seen in Levi’s presentation of Müller who was, either in fiction or in reality, his former director in the laboratory at Auschwitz. Within the narrative of *The Periodic Table*, the ex-prisoner, Levi, is nervous of meeting Müller again after the war as he knew the ‘real person will be incommensurate with his own significance.’ (p. 177) Although Levi does pursue Müller, this is a feint. ‘The historical Müller does slip through his fingers, but Levi retains his meaning in the secret substance of fiction disguised as history.’ (p. 178) The meaning of the pursuit is the transformation of the historical Müller into ‘a fiction, a representative case’ of those who committed evil acts, and yet had all the petty worries and ordinary vanities of any man. (Bell, 1997)



enables us to accept experiences, even as we recognise that the stories set the truth free rather than capturing it. Barnes writes introducing her autobiography:

words distort even as they reveal, what is lived can never be the same as what is told. The most I can claim, and this I do affirm, is that the fictional character portrayed here, at least in my eyes, is a true reflection of what I reflectively see. (Barnes, 1997, p. xix)

Both Barnes' caution and her affirmation speak of the value of telling narratives.

The meanings of narratives are not restricted to the stories told. The silences in the stories of mothers, whether ineffable, or the willed silences of secrets, and the gaps in between narratives, contribute to the meaning I present. I place these female silences in the context of how mothers are perceived or overlooked, in the majority of the narratives of philosophy. I show how the male framework imposed, quiets, but does not extinguish, the female voice, the mother's voice.

I begin with a debate of fundamental importance, in different ways, both to Wittgenstein and to feminist philosophy: the problem of essentialism.

## **Chapter 2: Difference, Essence and Essentialism**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I explore the philosophical problem of essentialism. I accompany my work on the large problems of essentialism with developed examples, which narrow the focus of my discussion. I build towards my argument for a significant place for the language games of mothering in language games around women. To use a phrase from Scheman, I bring Wittgenstein into my world. (Scheman 2000, p.18) In order to highlight the power of a Wittgensteinian approach, I draw on his ideas in a context which is relevant to my philosophical problems, and find his ideas helpful, despite his lack of interest in the content of my concerns.

This chapter is structured into two parts. In my first part, Essentialism as a Sickness, I work through the positions taken by Wittgenstein, and by Naomi Scheman, drawing elements from each to create my own position. I begin by outlining Wittgenstein's early essentialism, and his later reaction to his position. I demonstrate Wittgenstein's 'family resemblance' approach, which is crucial to my argument. However, like Scheman, I have problems with Wittgenstein's idea of a form of life which acts as a 'given', 'underlying' language games. From Wittgenstein, Scheman takes the idea of language games in 'family resemblance' to each other; but she highlights the dilemma of

those who are unable to 'match' their experience to language, whose form of life does not underlie the language games available. I bring together Scheman's ideas, and Luntley's contention that the Wittgensteinian agent is capable of being the 'author of patterns of similarities'. (Luntley, 2000, p. 9) Thus I establish the usefulness of employing the family resemblance approach, and signal potential problems of employing it in describing the language of mothering, which I address in the following chapter.

In the second part, *The Feminist Debate on Essentialism*, I move on to argue for both the usefulness of Wittgenstein's ideas in the feminist debate on essentialism, and their lack of fit with the feminist debate. This leads to an acknowledgement of the dilemma of feminist theory in this area of thought, and of the desirability of a model of which goes beyond the same/different binary. I consider and critique Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblances' as a theoretical model providing 'sameness-in-difference'. Here I introduce Scheman's Wittgensteinian notion of a shifting centre to language games. Scheman employs this idea to explore how we can understand the term 'women' via an exploration of what the term could mean for transsexuals and 'how they were able to mean it.' This example introduces reading resemblance theory into language games of embodied sexual difference. Again my position is influenced by Scheman here, as I agree with her argument for a shifting centre (and shifting margin) to the concept 'woman' and a blurred boundary to the concept.

## Essentialism as a Sickness

Wittgenstein's engagement with the 'great question' (P.I.65) of essence pervades the *Philosophical Investigations*. For him it was a great question as the error of essentialism arose from misguided Platonic idealist metaphysical assumptions and from the characteristics of logic. (P.I.107-8). Below I discuss Wittgenstein's position, drawing on Hallett's *Essentialism: A Wittgensteinian Critique*. (Hallett, 1991) Although Hallett's book was published at the height of the feminist debate, women are not mentioned in his text, except as housewives (in 1991!), who are listed with those who are happy to use language inexactly.

Hallett views essentialism as a cancer, to use his own frequent, rather chilling metaphor, in philosophical thinking. It has many causes, varying aetiologies, varying symptoms and may be latent rather than evident. His aim is to identify this cancer, to explain it and to provide a therapy for it. Wittgenstein acts as both a patient and a therapist in that he suffered from the disease of essentialism in the *Tractatus*. He wrote on Moritz Schlick's copy, 'Every one of these sentences is the expression of an illness.' (quoted in Hallett 1991, p. 147) Wittgenstein provided a therapy for essentialist thinking in the *Philosophical Investigations*. I select from Hallett aspects of his exegesis of Wittgenstein's critique which are relevant to the discussion of essentialism in questions of sexual difference.

Moving rapidly between epistemological questions of the nature of knowledge, and ontological questions of universals, Hallett begins by spelling out the traditional Platonic sense of essences as:

core properties of clusters of properties present, necessarily, in all and only those things which bear the common name. Knowledge is one thing; language is one thing; beauty, meaning, humanity, life, law, justice – each is a single invariant reality, present in the most varied instances, or in a separate realism of forms. (Hallett, 1991, p. 2)

Wittgenstein uses Plato's dialogue *Thaetetus* (1992) as an example of the epistemological and ontological views he is opposing.<sup>20</sup> Socrates rejects the varied instances of knowledge cited by Thaetetus insisting that he (Socrates) did not ask for many things, but for one thing 'knowledge.' Hallett uses an image of colour to clarify the meaning of Socrates' question:

It is as though justice, or the word justice, were a coloured bit of glass that might be placed here or there in different mosaics without affecting its hue: ... If it is not – if one notes any variation of shade from one spot to another, one can be sure that the two bits are not the same. They cannot both be justice – or knowledge. (Hallett, 1991, p. 47)

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<sup>20</sup> Plato (1992)*Thaetetus* appears in P.I.46, P.I.48, P.I.518.

The mosaic piece of the true colour is analogous to the Platonic Idea, the universal against which the instances are measured. Essentialism thus relies on the idea of universals, which exist in the realm of ideas and are entirely different from the instances of these universals that we find around us. Meaning is a mental act by which we check the instances against the ideal.

By the time that he wrote the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein regarded this metaphysics as mistaken:

When philosophers use a word—‘knowledge’, ‘being’, ‘object’, ‘I’, ‘proposition’, ‘name’—and try to grasp the essence of the thing, one must always ask oneself: is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? (*seine Heimat*<sup>21</sup>)—

What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use. (P.I.116)

Wittgenstein’s focus on use challenged the traditional idea of meaning as something beneath or beyond language, an abstract idea in a separate intellectual realm. His criticism is that the language of essence and universals had wrenched words from where they belonged, and placed them in alien surroundings. We understand ‘knowledge’ not through a metaphysical quest, but in seeing how the term ‘knowledge’ is used – where the term is at home, where it belongs.

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<sup>21</sup> The term ‘*Heimat*’ is discussed below.

His most famous remark on essence is: P.I.371 *Das Wesen ist in der Grammatik ausgesprochen*. The English translation ‘Essence is expressed by Grammar’ does not quite capture the sense of *aussgesprochen* — meaning ‘spoken out’: ‘Essence is spoken out in grammar’ is clumsy but more exact. ‘Grammar’ may be interpreted as rules of language-games. As concepts are used in language-games so their essence appears. There is no a priori essence; there is only an essence made up from, ‘spoken out’, in use. This instantly places the idea of ‘essence’, and the essences of ‘knowledge’, ‘being’, ‘object’ in a shifting linguistic pattern. ‘The meaning of a word is whatever we learn or explain when we learn or explain the word’s meaning; but what we then learn or explain is not an object, say, but the word’s use in language’. (Hallett, 1991, p.63) We do not need a reflective understanding of our language in order to use language. Essences disappear from use, since we use words without needing to know their essences.

In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein sought essences, for example he writes:

It is clear that *only* what is essential to the most general propositional form may be included in its description—for otherwise it would not be the most general form. (T. 4.5)

His later reaction was to emphasise differences. As shown in his example of games, he demonstrates that here is no single similarity common to all, which can account for the common label ‘game’. (P.I.66) There is no essence to games or to justice against which to measure instances of

games or justice. There are instead resemblances between uses of the word 'game' or uses of the word 'justice'. He writes in the *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*, 'An internal relation, one might say, lies in the essence of things.' (Wittgenstein, 1976, p. 76)

In the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein criticises his own earlier stress on the purity and exactness of thought in the *Tractatus*, as for example in T. 5.5563:

In fact, all the propositions of our everyday language, just as they stand, are in perfect logical order.—That utterly simple thing, which we have to formulate here, is not a likeness of the truth, but the truth itself in its entirety.

(Our problems are not abstract but perhaps the most concrete there are.)

His later view is that:

We are under the illusion that what is peculiar, profound, essential, in our investigation, resides in trying to grasp the incomparable essence of language. That is, the order existing between the concepts of proposition, word, proof, truth, experience, and so on. This order is a super-order between—so to speak—super-concepts. Whereas, of course, if the words 'language', 'experience' 'world' have a use, it must be as humble a one as that of the words 'table', 'lamp', 'door'. (P.I.97)



Here we see how the later Wittgenstein refuses the search for essences, and moves away from searching for purity and exactness. He looks at everyday language and finds it functioning without the need for essences.

Hallett discusses sources of essentialism in the history of philosophy. The first is the deceptive analogies in language. He writes: 'No surface parallel is closer, more evident, or more universal than that between instances of one and the same word and its repeated occurrences.' (Hallett 1991, p. 127) We see many leaves and to each attribute the label 'leaf', as if it were a proper name:

This roughly means, we are looking at words as though they all were proper names, and we then confuse the bearer of a name with the meaning of a name. (Wittgenstein, 1969a, *The Blue Book*, p. 18)

Proper names designate single referents and this use stands out more clearly than use of general terms. Hallett points out that philosophers have a 'penchant for generalisation' and prefer sharp and univocal terms. If the question posed in the *Thaetetus* had been 'What are knowledges?', the corresponding answer would have signalled variety and diversity rather than univocity. Hallett notes William James' remark that the philosopher is temperamentally attracted to the ultra abstract. (Hallett 1991, p. 160). The desire for a unified systematic understanding favours essences on which a rigorous and exact structure can be built. There is contagion from the prestige of the exact sciences such as mathematics to philosophy. The early Wittgenstein, in common with Frege and Russell, was steeped in

mathematics and logic. He had to step outside the Cambridge climate, in which the weighted question ‘What exactly do you mean?’ was all-important. The austere Wittgenstein also had to abandon his own early passion for simplicity<sup>22</sup> to realise that ‘Only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning.’ (Wittgenstein, 1967, Zettel 173) The meaning in the stream of thought and life is not clear-cut, but has ‘blurred edges’. Instead of a crystalline structure of ideas there is a diversity of concepts, criss-crossing over each other.

The following remark expresses Wittgenstein’s anti-essentialism, but it also poses a problem for those whose experience is not wholly (or even partly) captured in language:

*Es ist uns, als müßten wir die Erscheinungen durchschauen: unsere Untersuchung aber richtet sich nicht auf die Erscheinungen sondern, wie man sagen könnte, auf die ‚Möglichkeiten‘ der Erscheinungen. Wir besinnen uns, heißt das, auf die Art der Aussagen, die wie über des Erscheinungen machen. (P.I.90)*

We feel as though we had to *see through*,<sup>23</sup> phenomena: our investigation, however, is directed not towards phenomena, but towards the *possibilities* of phenomena. We remind

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<sup>22</sup> ‘The solution to all my questions must be extremely simple.’ (Wittgenstein (1979) *Notebooks 1914-1916*, p.7)

<sup>23</sup> In the sense of grasp.

ourselves, of *the kind of statement* that we make about phenomena. (P.I.90)

In focusing on the kind of statement, what is said out (*Aussagen*) about phenomena, Wittgenstein blends language into phenomena without gap or residue. Experience of phenomena emerges *in* language. Thus, there can be no acknowledgement of difference in experience which is 'written out' of the language used. Keeping and seeking words in their original home allows no space for resistance by female language users whose experience may match ill with the language used, whose experience is suppressed, rather than being socially mediated through language.

Naomi Scheman explores difficulties with the concept of a form of life, which is important to Wittgenstein's resemblance model. She describes 'unease' in language, focusing on internal diversity in forms of life. (Scheman, 1996, discussed below) She links the incapacity to say what one means to powerlessness. The language game does not measure up to differentiated experience. Scheman writes of differences within the form of life through a narrative of grieving, showing the different locations of a homosexual and a heterosexual. This sense of a differentiated relation between language and experience, which I develop below, is lacking in Wittgenstein. I examine Wittgenstein's resemblance theory to see whether because of this resemblance theory entails conservatism about social concepts. If I accept resemblance theory as a sound alternative to essentialism, have I made any space for change and evolution which are important to the feminist project?

A problem with resemblance theory is what might be termed a ripple outward effect. If there is no essence at the centre, what is there to hold a language game together? Although Wittgenstein does not spell out the relation between language games and forms of life, a good candidate for the task of holding language games of phenomena together, is the form of life of the language-user. I ask whether the form of life of the language-user is an unquestioned pre-theoretical given, or whether this would be an excessively quietist understanding of Wittgenstein's idea of a form of life.

As part of his attack on essentialism, Wittgenstein advises us to ask 'is the word ever actually used in this way in the language-game which is its original home? (*seine Heimat*).' (P.I.116) The word '*Heimat*' has many layers of meaning. The idea of the 'home' of words *may* seem to be returning words to the form of life to which they belong in a way that takes a step in the conservative direction. Wittgenstein's phrase '*seine Heimat*' carries a more intense sense than the phrase 'his home'. The word '*Heimat*' carries a sense of belonging, a sense of affiliation. For everyday use, the phrase for going home is '*gehen zu Haus*'. A '*Heimat*' might be a home country thought of from abroad, or a native land. It carries very much the English idea of 'home' as contrasted with 'house', but this is more marked in German. The idea of a '*Heimat*' is linked to notions of 'homeland' and to the German Romantic tradition. It also contains the sense of environment, for example, plants thrive best in the correct '*Heimat*'. '*Heimlich*' also means 'concealed' or 'secret', whereas its opposite '*unheimlich*' is generally translated as '*uncanny*'. (I explore

the connections between the home and secrets in my chapter on narrative identity.) The little acknowledged tensions in our ideas of 'home' and 'homely' are built into the term '*Heimat*'.

Wittgenstein's criticism is that the language of essence and universals had wrenched words from where they belonged, from their proper environment and placed them in alien surroundings. Wittgenstein's attachment to the idea that words are best used where they are at home creates a problem. The original home may not be the cottage with roses round the door, but may be a restricting environment. Like many women I am suspicious of ideas of 'house and home' as being inherently traditionalist, and of nostalgia for home concealing nostalgia for an authoritarian order.<sup>24</sup> The artificially restricted environment that is the

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<sup>24</sup> In her essay, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a Theme', Iris Marion Young provides an excellent philosophical discussion of the ambiguous value of home, drawing on, *inter alia*, Heidegger, Irigaray and de Beauvoir. She discusses experiences and values of the home, exploring how the home is part of the cultural condition of the feminine. She concludes 'Home is a complex ideal .... I agree with those critics of home who see it as a nostalgic longing for an impossible security and comfort, a longing bought at the expense of women and of those constructed as Others, strangers, not-home, in order to secure this fantasy of a unified identity. But I have also argued that the idea of home and the practices of home-making support personal and collective identity in a more fluid and material sense, and that recognising this value entails also recognising the creative value of the often unnoticed work that many women do. Despite the real dangers of romanticising home, I think there are also dangers in turning our backs on home.' (pp.153-4) Throughout the essay Young demonstrates understanding of the female at home, but she focuses mainly on the home as a site of the interaction between a man and

'home' of the concept 'woman' might well be a traditionalist female biology or 'female nature'. My problem is to avoid conservatism while still retaining the usefulness of resemblance theory as an alternative to essentialism.

## **Scheman**

Naomi Scheman's 'Forms of Life: Mapping the Rough Ground' (Scheman, 1996a) addresses the question of changes in meanings, and the possibility of a worrying conservatism in resemblance theory. She explores 'unease' in language, focusing on internal diversity in forms of life. Scheman asks:

If it is only against the background of shared practices and shared judgements that doubt can be intelligible, (how) can we register, let alone argue for, disapprobation of a form of life, whether it be one in which we are enmeshed (making our attempted critique self-refuting) or one to which we are alien (making our critique, referentially, off the mark)?  
(1996a, p. 384)

As Scheman notes, feminist theory, in particular the work of Elizabeth Spelman (1996), has taught wariness of a generic 'we', such as she herself

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a woman, or a woman and the house in which she dwells. Although she is herself a mother, in her autobiographical interlude, Young writes as a daughter, telling of her mother's difficulties in maintaining a family home, rather than on herself as a mother at home. (Young, 2005, pp.123-154)

uses in the quotation above, as the generic 'we' has often disguised the generic masculine. Those marginal to the dominant tradition in masculinity are not included. As she points out in a cogent criticism, this 'we' means little to 'those who stand little chance of being heard or who have to choose between saying what they mean and saying what those in power can understand.' (Scheman, 1996a, p. 389) Her crucial phrase is the idea of disapprobation of a form of life. On the reading of Wittgenstein that a form of life is an unquestioned pre-theoretical given, patently it is impossible to register disapprobation of it. Scheman's essay investigates dis-ease, or unease in language games, and inquires whether such discomfort can fall within a Wittgensteinian approach. She writes:

We can come to identify our sense of dis-ease with what we do as calling not for a repudiation of human practice in favour of something independent of it, but for a change in that practice, a change that begins with a politically conscious placing of ourselves within, but somewhere on the margins of, a form of life. (p. 387)

She now makes clear that the work of expressing disapprobation of shared practices and shared judgements is a political task, but one that Wittgenstein did not see it as his duty to undertake. Although, Scheman states, Wittgenstein may be considered a marginal figure in that he was Jewish and homosexual,<sup>25</sup> and also self-exiled from his native Austria, he

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<sup>25</sup> Perhaps Scheman is missing a more complex picture. Monk's biography gives a more nuanced version, including an account of his romantic friendship with Marguerite

did not explore the viewpoint of the marginalised. (Perhaps he did not regard this as part of his philosophical work.) Whereas privilege and marginality are often opposed, Scheman's strategy is to create an alternative 'we' by creating a position of privileged marginality, in order to consider changing the 'homes' to which words need to be brought back. Thinking from the margins of a form of life enables one to take a critical attitude to the 'homes' of words within that form of life. Her approach of finding different locations in a form of life aims at acknowledging sameness-in-difference without invoking essence. I am in sympathy with Scheman's emphasis on the dis-ease or unease that we often feel in forms of expression.

As an example, Scheman investigates the form of life which includes grieving for the dead from such a privileged marginal position. Drawing on Harvey Fierstein's film *Torch Song Trilogy* (Fierstein, 1988), she explores the grief of a mother and her homosexual son. In the film, the wife grieves for her husband. In the same cemetery, with the same ritual words and gestures, her son, Arnold, grieves for his homosexual partner, Alan, but his mother is 'furious' at the son and 'at what she correctly perceives to be his sense of commonality in their losses.' (Scheman, 1996a, p. 392) The film points up the similarity between a heterosexual character grieving for a lost partner, and a homosexual

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Respinger. (Monk 1990, pp. 238-40) As Wittgenstein did not describe himself as homosexual, I am reluctant to agree with Scheman's description.



character, grieving for a lost partner, against the background of the mother's lack of acceptance that this is the same grief.

The film illustrates the internal diversity of the form of life of grieving. This internal diversity is not evident in the spoken or acted ritual of grieving but is evident in Arnold's practice. Arnold 'parses marriage and family differently, and, in so doing sees the same.' (Scheman, 1996a, p. 395) He follows different grammatical rules for the meaning of 'marriage' and 'family', but in so doing still sees the same relationship between himself and his lover, as between his mother and her husband. Scheman suggests that to recognise what Arnold feels as grief, the pattern we need to attend to is not the pattern of the ritual at the cemetery, but the pattern created by the background, history, context, and the 'stage-setting' of his grief. The space of the form of life which includes grieving for one's partner has margins from which the observer can see the pattern which emerges through the mother's practice, but also a differentiated pattern emerging from Arnold's practice. Wittgenstein brings us to see that 'Grief describes a pattern which repeats (*wiederkehrt*), with different variations, in the tapestry of our life (*Lebensteppich*)'.<sup>26</sup> (P.I., p. 174) Scheman accepts that there are different variations on the pattern of grief, but she insists that there is more to grief than variations.

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<sup>26</sup> My translation, '*Teppich*', tapestry or carpet, relates to the verb '*steppen*' to stitch or to quilt. Anscombe's translation, 'a pattern that recurs in the weave of our life' conveys the activity of stitching, but loses the technical sense of a pattern-repeat in a piece of material.

But there are occasions on which it can be important not to accept that we differ, but to argue about which set of attitudes is in some way better or more appropriate. The set of attitudes the film presents as to be preferred is that which does not require a minimising of differences as the price for a recognition of commonality. (Scheman, 1996a, p. 396)

For Scheman, it is inappropriate to seek consensus on this – rather from her position of privileged marginality she wants to unsettle the sense that there is a ‘we’, a consensus which may or may not recognise Arnold’s grieving. She does not want to bring the idea of grieving for one’s partner home, rather she wants to disrupt the home to which grieving is brought. Her political solution is to recommend a ‘diasporic conception of home’:

There are no other homes for our words than the ones we create in and through our practices, nor any predetermined ways of specifying what it is to have gotten those practices right, but that does not mean that there is no sense to the idea that we might not be going on as we should be. (Scheman, 1996a, p. 402)

If we think of ourselves as ‘outsiders within’ our forms of life we can engage in the ‘work of world repair’, and make new diasporic homes for our words. In bringing in the idea of the outside and inside of a form of life, she introduces the notion of a central usage of words in a form of life. But, importantly for Scheman, a centre can be a shifting, diasporic, centre. Such a notion may involve a notion of ‘essence’, but such an

'essence' could be a shifting essence. Thus, Scheman claims that her political reading is responsible to the later Wittgenstein, but is not identical to that which she finds in Wittgenstein.

Luntley's paper, 'Patterns, Particularism and Seeing the Similarity', provides a reading of resemblance theory which is helpful here.<sup>27</sup> (Luntley, 2002) I explore some points from this paper before reconsidering Scheman's problem of grief. Luntley begins by acknowledging that there are patterns in language use. (Luntley, 2002, p. 3) The patterns form when we see similarities between phenomena which appear in language. The seeing of similarities does not entail a ripple outward effect because there is normativity to patterns of word use. The normative patterns of correct use of words emerge from the activity of seeing similarities. There is a correctness about use of words but this correctness does not come from a transcendental standard, but is immanent in our practices which underpin our use of words. Engaging in practices and seeing similarities are integral to each other. We cannot articulate the patterns which drive the seeing of similarities, but 'this is not ignorance', what we know is, for example, that these and similar things are called games. We create the pattern for the use of the word 'games' as we play games and use the word 'games'. (Luntley, 2002, pp. 5-6)

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<sup>27</sup> All further quotation from Luntley is taken from this paper. The paper I have used precedes a shorter published version of these ideas, in a section entitled 'Spontaneity in Particular Circumstances', pp. 83-88, in Luntley (2003) *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Judgment*.

Since there is no general rule, the seeing of similarities in particular instances must be self-authenticating. How do we know that what we see as similar is, in reality, similar? Wittgenstein undercuts the question by averring that 'to use a word without justification does not mean to use it without right.' (P.I.289) So the normativity drawn from the practices which make up the form of life of the agent holds the pattern together, but holds it as a web which can be spun into different shapes, not a gladiatorial net which entraps us:

the language user is in charge, for it is the language user with the capacity to see similarities, to make wise discriminations and find saliences in things that is the source of the patterns of language use. This is still realism about patterns, but the condition for the possibility of patterns of correct use is not the existence of transcendent patterns, it is the existence of active language users, judges with the capacity to see similarities in things. (Luntley, 2002, p. 10)

The agent within her form of life may judge that two things are similar and create an addition to the pattern. She is not simply responding to established practices, obeying set norms; she is also creating the norms in her practices. We think of Wittgenstein as being opposed to the idea of interpretation,<sup>28</sup> but this opposition is to the form of interpretation that is

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<sup>28</sup> P.I.201 concludes 'But we ought to restrict the term 'interpretation' to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another.'

akin to measurement against a rule. If we free the idea of interpretation of reality from the measure, and think of it more as seeing similarities which are not given in advance of our practice, then there is still a place for interpretation. Language does not dictate how we see reality. To use Luntley's expression, we 'couple with' our form of life, our environment, our practices.<sup>29</sup> (p. 12) As beings with will, we couple with an environment without will. The next step in the argument is to make a division between 'acquiring a technique' which implies stasis and conservatism, and learning correct judgements which is more malleable and open-ended. (p. 13) Wittgenstein writes:

what one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgements. There are also rules, but they do not form a system and only experienced people can apply them right. (P.I., p. 277)

Learning to make judgements is a cognitive virtue that does not come from learning how to follow a rule. Making judgements brings experience to bear on patterns that exist in a form of life. This will be shown in my continuing example of grief.

Wittgenstein says:

'Grief' describes a pattern which repeats, with different variations in the tapestry of our life. If a man's bodily

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<sup>29</sup> Luntley's phrase 'couple with' has perhaps connotations of sexual coupling, and mastery, that are not helpful to his argument.

expression of sorrow or joy alternated, say with the ticking of a clock, here we should not have the characteristic formation of the pattern of sorrow or of the pattern of joy.

(P.I. p.174 corr.)

When I grieve, or identify someone else as grieving, there are patterns of words that I use, expressions I adopt, practices in which I engage. I am not at a loss to make this identification in my own case, or somebody else's, because in my society there is a normal way of behaving, of speaking, of acting from which emerges my understanding of the term 'grieving'. I could point out to a child who was unfamiliar with the pattern, features of grieving – but there would always be more manifestations of grief that I did not cover, more varieties of the pattern which emerged as society changes. If the child did not understand me, I might say she was too young to understand, that she was too young to catch on to what is meant by grieving. Equally I would know that the child had caught on to the meaning, if she did not expect instant cheerfulness, a change as rapid and automatic as the ticking of a clock, from someone recently bereaved. Once the child has caught on, she knows what is normal and can make a pattern of meaning from various aspects of behaviour, which is all I can do. The instances are self-authenticating to anyone who has caught on to the pattern.

Yet the child's learning is not an automatic response. As a human, she has a purposeful will, and already is attuning her agency to her experience. The pattern is not fixed. This is not a process of correction in

which expressions of grief are first at home, and then change as a result of criticism. We cannot desire a new pattern of language use before it emerges from our experience. Expressions of grief are always potentially changing, but this capacity for transformation may be ignored. Patterns of grieving may sediment and become familiar. The process of sedimentation is not however a process of solidification. Expression is fixed only temporally, as the conventions making up a form of life are intrinsically arbitrary.

The problem which faces Arnold in Scheman's filmic example of *Torch Song Trilogy* is precisely the problem of justification. His mother does not think that he is justified in the language he uses. She says 'I'm reciting Kaddish [the important Jewish prayer for the dead] for my husband; you're blaspheming your religion.' (Scheman, 1996a, p. 392) When the son replies that he is doing what his mother is doing, she does not see the similarity that he sees. For Arnold, the heterosexual community has enabled him to develop the learned responses of grieving, he has caught on to what it is to grieve, but the community is not constitutive of his responses. Arnold engages in a transformative activity. A new pattern emerges as he mourns, in what he says and does. He is empowered as a speaker-agent. His decision to recite the Kaddish is not a result of training in the form of life of his community. He is attuning his agency as a language-user to a new context of public Jewish mourning for a homosexual lover. As he makes his willed judgement the practice itself transforms. He exercises a more discriminative form of attention to his

own situation. His perception is honed so that he can attend to similarities between his grief and his mother's. He makes a judgement against that of the heterosexual community of the time, and, for most of us, in the distance since 1988, when the film was made, the son's judgement is right.

Yet in the film, Arnold is unable to justify himself before his mother. The mother is measuring her activity against a scale of 'true grief'. She is applying a technique, rather than exercising judgement, not in that she is adopting a ritual, but in that she is not looking at the history, the context, the background of Arnold's grief. She is not looking at the loving practices in which he has been engaged, she is simply measuring him against the heterosexual norm of acceptable religious practices of grief. She is seeing him, and indeed herself, as markers within the environment in which they exist, rather than looking at the practices of their lives from which their griefs emerge.

For Arnold, as for Wittgenstein, 'to use a word without justification does not mean to use it without right.' (P.I.289) He places himself as 'author of patterns of similarities'. He does not accept a passive role towards the criteria of grieving. His self-authenticating novel practice of reading Kaddish for his homosexual lover is bringing in what Luntley calls 'the activity of interpretation' (Luntley 2000, p. 9) to the rule of what constitutes grief, of what are the appropriate grieving practices. In failing to recognise this, the mother places herself as lacking in experience, or of deriving less meaning from her experience. She has taken the rules to form a system, a system which excluded the real grief of



her son for his lover. By contrast, Arnold demonstrates the ability to draw from his experience. His experience leads him to extend the range of the rule. In Luntley's terms, the son is keeping the community at bay, trusting his judgement of similarities. Patterns of grieving are part of our form of life. Learning through experience to make judgements is all that we have to enable us to discriminate between expressions of grieving. Arnold extends the practice of grieving beyond what is accepted by his mother. Once the rule is malleable and open-ended there might be the objection that any minor loss could be described as grieving. The answer is to return to practice. The agent herself, who makes discriminations in her affections, is the brake on endless open-ness. The task of the agent is to pay attention to word use so that meaning does not sediment becoming either too narrowly fixed, or too widely applied.

To return to the problem of disapprobation that Scheman poses. In my reading influenced by Luntley, expressing unease with or disapprobation of patterns of language is part of the activity of using language. The concept of attunement is important. The better-judging agent is more attuned to her own and others' experience. Norms of use are not fixed. They are immanent to use, but the use is changing, as experience changes. A form of life is an evolving set of practices. Integrally, our use of words is elastic enough to evolve. The agent is not trapped in the similarities that others see, nor trapped in a conservative given. The agent who may make more or less creative judgments, who

may be discriminating and perceptive, who is more or less attuned to her experience, is integral to resemblance theory.

Still, there is an inversion here. Scheman writes from her position of 'privileged marginality' to offer a space for those who are not so much at home in language, whose inchoate experience cannot and does not always find a home in language. In her version she places Arnold as less at home, and the mother as occupying the 'home' of language, acting within convention. Arnold is unable to explain his mourning to her, unable to explain his sameness-in-difference, but he is able to mourn through reciting the Kaddish. My new reading changes their positions so that Arnold becomes the well-judging agent, evolving language use, and the mother becomes the weaker agent, deludedly taking arbitrary rules to form a system which she cannot contravene. She is the one barred by a sense of difference from sympathy for her son. Maybe now the inchoate experience is hers. The practices of her family life and her religion are rocked by the sight of Arnold reciting the Kaddish. Her role has been to maintain these familiar practices (to safeguard the sedimentation) and her response to the transformation is anger. In focusing on Arnold's changing use of language, we should not lose sight of the form of life of the mother, to whom stability and well-worn practice may be valuable. In virtue of her many years as a mother, her attunement to her society is, in this instance, at odds with her son's. She wills continuity of mourning practices whereas he wills change.

My position follows Scheman in that I agree that patterns of language use are as fluid and shifting as the sets of (normative) practices which give rise to them. Her 'political' reading introduces a problem of speechlessness within forms of life, which Wittgenstein overlooked, but which is important to my re-instatement of the language games of mothering. I continue my engagement with Scheman in my exploration of the language games of embodied difference later in this chapter.

### **The Feminist Debate on Essentialism**

I move on to trace some moments in the essentialism/anti-essentialism debate within feminist thought,<sup>30</sup> before explaining a Wittgensteinian family resemblance approach, and showing how Scheman makes use of such an approach.

For some time feminist theory has seemed caught on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, there are those who – recognizing differences amongst women – end by denying any form of female identity. On the other hand, there are those who – supposing male/female difference overrides other differences – look for a female 'sameness' or 'essence' based either on nature or on shared work or life practices. (Battersby, 1998, p. 16)

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<sup>30</sup> Alternative approaches can be found in, *inter alia*, Ahmed (1998), Alcoff (1993), Assiter (1993 and 2003), Barker (1997) Fuss (1989).

The role of the consciousness raising groups in the early stages of what Shulamith Firestone (Firestone, 1970), in an essentializing move, called Second Wave Feminism, may be seen as an insistence on the universal female, and an emphasising of the contrast of this universal with the universal male. The political, legal and educational recognition of the different experiences and desires of the newly articulate women reinforced the sense of the universality of their experiences, placed in opposition to male experiences. The white middle-class feminist is (unfairly) portrayed by anti-essentialists as projecting her experience of her conflict with patriarchy and her desires for liberation as essential to women. Some of the great texts of Second Wave Feminism, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan, 1963), Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (Daly, 1978) were, in a sense, offering an answer to the question, 'What is a woman?', understood on Platonic lines as requiring an answer revealing essence. As DiQuinzio points out, although feminist writers of the 1960s and 1970s rely on different theoretical frameworks, their critiques of mothering are similarly essentialist, based on the viewpoint of the white middle-class mother seeking more individual 'freedom'. (DiQuinzio, 1999, p. 63)

Cavarero criticises this move:

Adding woman to Man, however, means duplicating the representation of the universal without freeing oneself whatsoever from its abstract valence, without abandoning whatsoever the ancient error of metaphysics ... woman can still be nothing but *all* women precisely because it is none of them. (Cavarero, 2000, p. 49)

The 1970s also saw the birth of 'difference feminism' which changed the emphasis of difference while keeping within the essentialist paradigm. It explained the meaning of differences between men and women in terms of the depths of women's oppression. For example, Carol Gilligan showed how female responses to moral dilemmas were ignored and unheard in male evaluations of moral development, and how this led to an undervaluing of 'female' moral qualities such as the ability to care for others. (Gilligan, 1990)<sup>31</sup> In addition, a further variety of feminism, standpoint feminism suggested that a woman's viewpoint gave her a privileged and valuable insight into society.<sup>32</sup> This form of feminism emphasised the value of local, situated knowledges.

As ever with essentialism the problem was exclusions. Lesbian, working class, women of colour felt silenced by a theory of themselves as women to which they felt alien. The accusation was that the experiences of privileged white women were taken as normative and universal thus repeating the gesture of the universal man who actually told the story of the 'straight, white, Judeo-Christian, heterosexual man of property ...'.(Spivak 1997, p. 19) bell hooks (hooks, 1984) raised issues of exclusion and marginality in her critique of Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*. (cited in Heyes, 2000, p. 21) Her telling example was the American white women's enthusiasm for abandoning childcare in

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<sup>31</sup> Carol Gilligan first published *In a Different Voice* in 1982. She produced a revised edition in 1990. She changed from use of the term 'female' to 'feminine', indicating that the term 'feminine' can include men.

<sup>32</sup> Standpoint feminism is also discussed in Chapter 6.

favour of employment, which involved the continuing subordination of black women, and prevented them from fulfilling their desire to spend time with their children. Another important voice for the differing history and experience of North American black mothers is Patricia Collins. She insists on the neglected importance of the mother's struggle for her survival and that of her children, emphasising social structures of racial domination and economic exploitation. Her intention is to shift the predominantly white context of feminist theory so that feminists become more aware of the history from which feminist theory emerges, and so as to prioritise accommodating diversity. (Collins, 1994, pp. 49-62)

Elizabeth Spelman's *Inessential Woman* (1988) offered a critique of earlier feminism, and engaged with anti-essentialism. The anti-essentialist position espouses recognition of internal differentiation between women. It disowns the idea of core properties and sees identity as shifting and fluid. *Inessential Woman* made clear that the concept of an essence to the female, to which were added attributes such as that of class or race, was a failure of the philosophical imagination. For Spelman, gender is always inflected by other differences among women. She satirised identity politics as 'pop bead' metaphysics, in which individual identity was seen as a composite of the separable elements of gender, race, class, sexuality. (cited in Heyes, 2000, p. 23) Anti-essentialism is against uniting on the basis of shared identity, whatever that identity might be. Anti-essentialist feminism is a feminism which claims to displace 'woman-as-different-from-man' by the notion of internally

differentiated and historically instantiated women. (Schor and Weed, 1994, p. 45) Some feminist theorists, such as the lesbian theorist, Shane Phelan, have responded to this by insisting on their marginal identity. (Phelan, 1989) This is itself controversial as other writers, such as Simone de Beauvoir, were publicly heterosexual, but privately lesbian. There is a danger of an endless multiplication of voices so that feminism as a widespread movement is deprived of political force.

An influential example of anti-essentialist critique is Lugones and Spelman's 'Have We Got a Theory for You! Cultural Imperialism, and the Demand for "The Woman's Voice".' (Lugones and Spelman, 1986) They agree with the feminist contention that women are systematically silenced. But they think that only those women who feel secure in other aspects of their identity such as their race or class are likely to conceive of their voices as expressing 'woman's voice'. In her *Hispana* voice, Lugones asserts that feminist theory does not account for the split she feels between a concern for herself as a woman and concern for herself as Hispanic, a displaced person. For her, theory is only useful if it relates to the location the subject finds herself in, and only if it offers opportunities for resistance and change. She emphasises that white/Anglo feminist theorists need to learn the text of the many different cultures they have disrupted, criticised and scrutinised; need to understand varying lives in diverse communities of which they are not part. The feminist theorist needs to abandon her ready-made theories in order to 'have a stake in us and in our world'. (Lugones and Spelman, 1986, p. 19) The importance of this article lies in

its stress on the multifariousness of identity, the differences between women, and diversity of contexts for learning about women. Heyes describes this as looking 'for commonalties and differences *from within* our own socially situated frameworks of understanding'. (2000, p. 29) Instead of thinking of 'woman' as a powerful concept with which to attack patriarchy, theorists are urged to see the value of a 'humble use.' (P.I.197)

Feminism became seen by post-modernists as an outdated 'modern' project to end the oppression of a human subject. This same would-be autonomous subject was critiqued as phallogentric or logocentric, and women had the doubtful privilege of being placed as 'other' to the subject. Woman became thus the negative of a discursively constructed and multiple, fragmented subject.

### **'Family Resemblances'**

As described above, through encountering diversities of thought and life, feminist theory had to take stock and reform itself. I make a parallel here between Wittgenstein's reform of his views, and the reform of feminist theory. Both changes were stimulated by noticing how language is used in the 'stream of thought and life.' (Wittgenstein, 1967, *Zettel*, 173) For Wittgenstein the abstract, general ideas of the *Tractatus* gave way to the emphasis on differences which marks his later work. In his 'family resemblance' approach he changed our understanding of the logical relationship between universals and particulars.



Whereas nominalists claimed that only words are universal and that things themselves are singular and individual, Wittgenstein got rid of the notion that words and names function as universals – at least in the majority of cases.

(Battersby, 1998, p. 32)

The universal ‘woman’ is one such synthesised universal formed from a series of family resemblances. Anti-essentialist thinking took account of diversity at the cost of a dispersed de-politicised concept of woman; and failed to express any sense we might have of ourselves as women leading female lives. To address this problem there is a need for a theoretical model which welcomes diversity but acknowledges a sameness: a model which enables thinking beyond the same/different binary. The aspiration is towards thinking which recognises the strength of the idea of essence, but is sensitive towards, and pays attention to differences between and ‘within’ women. Neither the sameness nor the diversity is more fundamental.

The fact of difference amongst women is not, as such, grounds for denying essence, since what “essence” provides is a model of thinking sameness through difference. (Battersby 1998, p. 32)

Battersby advocates a fluid essence, and a morphic identity which emerges from changes in essence.

Wittgenstein does not write on men and women. The debate on Wittgenstein's anti-Platonic critique of essentialism takes place in mainstream philosophy with little recognition of the feminist debate on essentialism. Yet Wittgenstein is useful to the feminist debate in that he provides an alternative to the language of universals and particulars, i.e. an alternative to the idea that all phenomena share a universal essence of which the varying particulars are instances. In an ontological shift, he replaces this classic framework with the language of 'family resemblances.' The empirical world is replaced by a real world of resemblances '*vorstellt*', represented in a non-mimetic way, in language. He thought that empiricism suppressed the differences of particulars which resemble each other but are not identical. Thus through using Wittgenstein we may find an alternative to the idea that all women share a universal essence, a necessary and sufficient condition for membership of the class 'women' of which individual women are instances. In Wittgensteinian terms, what we can learn about essence we can learn from seeing how such concepts as 'female' or 'mother' are positioned in language.

Wittgenstein weaves together images of games, of colours, of ropes, of boundaries. Wittgenstein writes:

Here we come up against the great question that lies behind all these considerations.—For someone might object against me: You take the easy way out! You talk about all sorts of language-games but you have nowhere

said what the essence of a language-game, and hence of language, is: what is common to all these activities, and what makes them into language or parts of language. So you let yourself off the very part of the investigation that once gave you yourself the most headache, the part about the *general form of propositions* and of language.

And this is true.—Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all,—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship or these relationships, that we call them all ‘language’. (P.I.65)

Here Wittgenstein’s interlocutor makes the move of seeking something in common to language-games, supposing that whatever he finds in common will be the desired essence. Wittgenstein changes the way of seeing in his reply. He uses the example of games. He immediately substitutes the idea of relationship between language games for the idea of a series of distinct features of phenomena. He moves on to suggest that the interlocutor has a mistaken attitude to the problem. He is thinking, not looking (*denk nicht, sondern schau* P.I.66). Wittgenstein adopts the voice of a friendly adviser. He seeks to persuade the reader as a child or friend is persuaded. The interlocutor is supposing there ‘*must* be something common (*gemeinsam*) or they would not be called ‘games’.

Wittgenstein says the interlocutor must *look and see (schau)* that there is nothing in common but a series of similarities, relationships.

This seemingly simple instruction to the interlocutor actually carries a weight of meaning. Wittgenstein is remarking that we impose on games a universal essence which is not apparent in the phenomena themselves. Because the same word is used for various games we think that there *must* be something the same about them. Our habits of thought lead us away from what we see. Wittgenstein offers instances of very many different games. He writes of classes of games: board-games, card-games, ball-games, round-games; and also reminds us of instances such as chess and noughts and crosses. He says that looking will not reveal anything in common. What we find instead, if we change our way of looking, is a 'complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.'

(P.I.66)

In P.I.67 he introduces the new image of the family:

I can think of no better expression to characterise those similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way.—And I shall say 'games' form (*bilden*) a family.

The verb '*bilden*' is important here. '*Bilden*' means to shape or form, as an education, '*Bildung*' might shape or form a person's mind. So in Wittgenstein's image of the family resemblance one point is that the resemblance forms, shapes itself as we see the family members. There is no essence to the family features; there is not a physical or psychological trait which can be sought out. Rather in looking at the family members the resemblance which denotes the relationship emerges, as it were, before our eyes. Wittgenstein wants to extend the way we might 'pick up' a similarity between a niece and her aunt to our way of 'picking up' language-games. We have no preconceived idea of the similarity. It strikes us, as we say, as we see the two together.

Stern explains this as 'sporadic resemblances' or a 'polythetic method' in which members of the same class share a number of common characteristics, without any of these being essential for membership of the group or class in question. (Stern, 1992, p. 368) Wittgenstein moves on to the image of a rope:

in which the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres. (P.I.67)

There is nothing holding together the various uses of the word 'games', except the overlapping and criss-crossing between the various uses. Wittgenstein thus makes a case for understanding the relationship between universals and particulars differently. Our error is to seek out particulars in order to create a universal out of what the particulars have in common.

Classes of games are limited universals in the sense that particular games can be grouped under them, but the grouping comes from resemblances, not common properties.

In looking for resemblances we make redundant the idea of sharp boundaries (*Grenzen*) between concepts. The concept of a boundary has a significant place in the language games of feminist theory. Feminists have attempted to change the boundary between men and women (Friedan, Firestone); have insisted on this boundary (Gilligan); have felt themselves excluded by the boundary of white middle-classness (bell hooks); have insisted in the boundary of themselves as black (Hill Collins) or lesbian (Phelan); have opposed the idea of a boundary of the self (Spelman, Schor).

Wittgenstein attacks the presupposition that boundaries are fixed in advance and rigid. If we need a definition of something like a game we can make one, for a 'special purpose'. (P.I.69) We are able to use the word 'game' quite well without a sharp definition. We are able to continue a series; judge what counts as a game and what does not; have a rough and yet adequate sense of the meaning of the term. We do not pin the word 'game' exactly edge to edge to the concept 'game', we see likenesses (*Ähnlichkeiten*) between phenomena and use the term 'game'. It is a concept 'with blurred edges'. (P.I.66) We do not 'know the boundaries because none have been drawn.' (P.I.69) The lack of exactness does not deprive the language of meaning. There is no deeper level of exactness, though we may be exact for a special purpose. Being exact for a special

purpose might be part of an empirical investigation. The danger of the empirical investigation is that it deals in generalisations and has a 'contemptuous attitude towards the particular case.' (Stern, 1992, p. 369) Wittgenstein thought that the empirical denied differences between particulars, and that it also occluded resemblances in favour of an exactness desired for the purpose of empiricism.

In P.I.72 Wittgenstein returns to the idea of '*Seeing what is common*', using the image of colours:

Suppose I shew someone various multi-coloured pictures, and say: 'The colour you see in all these is called "yellow ochre"'.—This is a definition, and the other will get to understand it by looking for and seeing what is common to the pictures. Then he can look *at*, can point *to*, the common thing.

Compare with this a case in which I shew him figures of different shapes all painted in the same colour, and say: 'What these have in common is called "yellow ochre".'

And compare this case: I shew him samples of different shades of blue and say: 'The colour that is common to all these is what I call "blue".'

These examples are teaching us about different ways of seeing. In the first instance Wittgenstein teaches the meaning of 'yellow ochre' by

ostensive definition. The interlocutor casts her eye all over the picture and is guided to the labelling of one colour by Wittgenstein. After this she can pick out yellow ochre. In the second example, which differs only slightly from the first, the yellow ochre is not distinguished from other colours, but is a constant feature of changing shapes. Here the interlocutor's eye is directed not at making differences between one colour and another, but at noticing the aspect of colour and ignoring the aspect of shape. Here the interlocutor is instructed in what not to notice. In the third example, Wittgenstein is showing how we form the idea of a universal. Wittgenstein shows the interlocutor various particular shades of blue. He points out that what they have in common is that they are called blue. In P.I.73 he goes on to show how having made this step, we are inclined to mislead ourselves.

One is now inclined to extend the comparison: to have understood the definition means to have in one's mind an idea of the thing defined, and that is a sample or a picture.

We create for ourselves an abstract idea of blue, or an essence of blueness. Language places the particulars of the world under general terms, shades of blue into blue, different leaves into leaf. We invent for ourselves the idea of a pure green for a leaf, an essence of green, an abstract idea of leaf. There might indeed be a pure green, but the point is the use of this imagined sample of green, or of leaf.

In response to an imagined critic who uses the (Kantian) notion of schemata to explain what is going on, Wittgenstein replies that the sample



could 'be understood as a *schema*' which provides a rule for dealing with instances of green or of leaves. But, for Wittgenstein rules are not invented but come out of practice. Kantian schema are rules for the application of images in such a way as to bring them in line with our concepts. However, in P.I.73, Wittgenstein insists that 'schemata' do not provide the solution.

When someone defines the names of colours for me by pointing to samples and saying 'This colour is called "blue", this "green".....' this case can be compared in many respects to putting a table in my hands, with the words written under the colour samples.—Though this comparison may mislead in many ways.—One is now inclined to extend the comparison: to have understood the definition means to have in one's mind an idea of the thing defined, and that is a samples or a picture.

We choose to regard or treat certain abstract images as rule-guiding schema. We then mistakenly attribute an abstract idea of essence to these images. Wittgenstein makes clear that this is not his idea in continuing his discussion by insisting on blurred contours.

If someone were to draw a sharp boundary I could not acknowledge it as the one that I too wanted to draw, or had drawn in my mind. (P.I.75)

The green in the sample is not sharply divided from other shades of green, as it would be if it contained the essence of ‘green-ness.’ We do not check an instance of green against an abstract idea of green, but see resemblances between greens. Such practices of employing samples are so common and so obvious that they go unremarked, but the relationship becomes clear when there is a misunderstanding. We see the relationship but we move from one practice to another without noticing the resemblance.

In the Preface<sup>33</sup> to the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein writes:

*Und dies hing freilich mit der Natur der Untersuchung selbst zusammen. Sie nämlich zwingt uns, ein weites Gedankengebiet, kreuz und quer, nach allen Richtungen hin zu durchreisen.*

And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction.

The German perhaps conveys more the sense of ‘travelling through’ (*durchreisen*) and of the untracked nature of the quest over a daunting space (*ein weites Gedankengebiet*). The English manages to convey a sense of command over the route, while the German suggests more a long travail. Wittgenstein provides a sense that there are many more examples

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<sup>33</sup> The Preface pages are not numbered.

not given, that there are many paths left untaken. Some resemblances appear even as the differences seem to cancel them out. An understanding cannot be reached by a process of eliminating differences, but rather by seeing relationships between differences in aspects of practice.

Wittgenstein's 'family resemblance' approach is useful in changing the schema for relating universals and particulars. An essentialist approach to my problem might place the figure of the mother as the abstract idea of women, and particular women would be measured against this essence, to see if they had a common feature of likeness to the mother to allow them to be classed as women. This schema would lead to invidious comparisons and exclusions. A Wittgensteinian schema allows me to retain the (limited) universal 'mother', but rather than measuring particular women or mothers against an abstract idea, to find resemblances amongst them. This schema offers sameness-in-difference.

I now provide a Wittgensteinian re-reading, or undermining, of an example of influential language games about women. Such language games play into essentialist thinking about women.<sup>34</sup> My example is the language game by which female bodies are distinguished from male

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<sup>34</sup> The changing history of the demarcation of humans into two sexes is explored in Allen (1985).

bodies, which leads to the essentialist idea that women can be defined as women by a biology which opposes our bodies to male bodies.<sup>35</sup>

As men and women are so diverse, a sense of shades of difference and similarity is more helpful than a search for opposites. If we allow Wittgensteinian 'blurred boundaries' between the sexes we avoid the search for opposites that is of a piece with the essentialist gesture of exclusion. In Wittgensteinian terms women are not essentially sexed as women, but one of the webs of resemblance which humans bear to each other is the web of sexuality. Wittgenstein uses the notion of 'webs of resemblance' in language games metaphorically. The 'web of resemblance' concerning sexuality has a more uncertain ontological status. The web of resemblance leaves the question of sexual demarcation open and fluid. I examine the predicament of transsexuals as described by Scheman. Her work blurs the boundaries between language games of sex, gender and sexual preference.

Scheman uses a Wittgensteinian approach to question 'privileged selfhood' in 'Queering the Center by Centering the Queer' (1997). She presents a challenge to 'the stable cartographies of center and margin.' (p. 127) As explained above, for Scheman, the centre is not stable, but shifting, so a fixed way of mapping centre and margin is inappropriate.

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<sup>35</sup> Foucault sees the legal action over hermaphrodites as important evidence in the construction of the sexual binary. By the nineteenth century individuals were assigned one of two sexes. Hermaphrodites were no longer tolerated. (Foucault, 1980)

The essay demonstrates the truth of Wittgenstein's remark, P.I.108: 'The *pre-conceived* idea of crystalline purity can only be removed by turning our whole examination around.' Scheman explores her difficulty in understanding the claim of male-to-female (MTF) transsexuals to be women:

My inability to understand seemed to come from the fact that, despite my own unshakeable sense of being a woman, there was nothing I could point to as constituting my gender identity when I abstracted from a lifetime of unambiguous gender ascription on the part of others and an unambiguously female body .... if there was something independent of social role and body that male-to-female transsexuals could recognise as their gender identity, I should be able to find whatever it was in my own sense of identity – but there simply didn't seem to be anything like that here ... .Whatever they meant when they said they were women, it didn't seem to be what I meant. What, then, did they mean? And how, to put a Wittgensteinian spin on the question, were they able to mean it? (Scheman 1997, p. 134)

Scheman reminds herself that Wittgenstein points out that a reason we find other people puzzling is that we assume that we, who are doing the puzzling, are clear to ourselves.

Because Scheman felt secure in her female identity she did not originally question it. When she started to question herself as a 'woman-born-woman', the advantages of a non-essentialist understanding of the concept 'woman' emerged. She shifted the question from the meaning of being a woman to the question of who gets to decide who is a woman, and on what grounds.

Meaning cannot be a private matter: A word means what it does not because I have joined it in my mind to an idea or image ... but because there exists a set of social practices in which I participate, in terms of which I can get the meaning right or wrong. (Scheman,1997, p. 139).

This shift enables us to see meaning as a practice, not something to be discovered by introspection. She claims that she knows she is a woman from 'natal assignment' – being named female around the time of birth; by chromosome testing or ultrasound visualisation beforehand; by visual inspection at birth, or by surgical correction shortly after birth. (p. 141). Thus the born-body is normally a permanent marker of female or male ascription.

Viewing our identities as ineluctable, as constitutive of who we are, as something about ourselves we cannot change, is to say something about how certain experiences are socially constructed; it is not to be committed to essentialism. (Scheman,1997, p. 143).

The choice of female markers, and the time of ascription may be socially decided, but still female marking is constitutive of how we live our lives. The importance of natal assignment is not to divide real women from others but rather to 'note that there would be no categories of the sort that genders are if some people were not assigned to them at birth.' (Scheman, 1997, p. 145)

It would be extraordinary to deny that a woman-born-woman, who remains a woman, was a woman, and yet it seems that we women-born-women have only a fluid idea of what it means to be a woman. If, as women-born-women we find the category of woman ambiguous and hard-to-pin-down, we provide an opportunity for solidarity with MTF transsexuals that does not appear in a sharp-boundaried concept of being woman. Such a concept places women-born-women at the centre, and MTF transsexuals at the margin. If there is a fluid essence, without clear boundaries, to being female, being female can be a more diasporic concept, and thus more receptive to MTF transsexuals.

Ironically, it is the fact that some women are born women that provides one of the strongest arguments against attempts to police the boundaries of womanhood. (Scheman, 1997, p. 146)<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> A report in *The Guardian*, 7<sup>th</sup> May 2004 gives evidence of such policing by the police themselves. A male-to-female transsexual is only allowed to join the Yorkshire police force after the Law Lords have ruled that she is a woman. Baroness Hale of Richmond,

Thus for Scheman the concept of being a woman is not an essence which is unclearly exemplified in its instances. It is not like, to use Hallett's example referred to above, a blue bit of glass that can be placed here or there across different women in order to see whether they match up to the sample. It is not a fixed rule or schema for handling instances. Scheman does not suggest that transsexuals are ruled in or ruled out of the category 'woman', as a turquoise might be ruled in or out of the category 'blue'. Rather being a woman is a blurred concept. The rules of the category are capable of shifting. As such, what being a woman means is preferably understood in terms of solidarity with an oppressed group. Scheman writes of the dangers of expert policing of identity boundaries by doctors, and those in positions of power and privileged, certain selfhood. (Scheman, 1997, p. 149) Acknowledging the ambiguity of the meaning of the concept 'woman' is a means of resisting this policing which depends on the falsely essentializing tendencies of this language-game. Scheman's ideas can be extended to bear out Wittgenstein's image of a rope

in which the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres. (P.I.67)

The strength of women does not reside in one category of women.

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the only woman judge on the panel said: 'Ms A. has done everything that she could possibly do to align her physical identity with her psychological identity. She has lived successfully as a woman for many years. She has taken the appropriate hormone treatment and concluded a programme of surgery. She believes that she presents as a woman in every respect.' (p. 2)



## Conclusion

I draw together the two conversations –which overlap only in part – that of the traditional philosophical debate on essentialism; and that of the feminist debate on essentialism. Hallett's exegesis of Wittgenstein's anti-essentialism thus becomes useful for approaching problems of essentialism besetting feminist thinkers. My aim in working with a Wittgensteinian schema is to bring in sameness-in-difference. I follow Scheman both in finding problems with the idea of a form of life holding together language games, and in finding that Wittgenstein's schema can be applied to ideas important to feminist philosophy. Using resemblance theory, Scheman brings in language games of homosexuals, transsexuals and women. She strategically uses a diasporic concept of home as a way of keeping within Wittgenstein's schema, whilst insisting on inclusiveness.

Scheman's ideas are extremely helpful to me in her Wittgensteinian engagement with issues important in feminist philosophy. In Wittgenstein's own writing, there is an underlying (and often hidden) pre-theoretical given which holds language games of phenomena together, namely the form of life of the language-user.<sup>37</sup> In writing of woman, or any other social concept, basing use of language on such a given can entail conservatism. The 'given' of the concept 'woman' might well be female biology, or 'female nature'. The problem for a feminist writer is to avoid

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<sup>37</sup> Wittgenstein's concept of a form of life is discussed further in Chapter 4.

conservatism while still holding together the language game of the concept. In Scheman's chapter, 'Forms of Life: Mapping the Rough Ground' (Scheman, 1996), she highlights the problem of the inability to express oneself within a form of life, thus engaging with the 'problem' of silence which often besets women and mothers. In 'Queering the Center by Centering the Queer' (1997), she employs Wittgenstein's model of a shifting centre, and shifting margins in a way that brings in the embodied individual and allows an open understanding of the concept 'woman'. Scheman's idea of a centre is an idea of an essence as shifting and fluid. In Scheman's version, essentialism is not necessarily a vice, as it entails neither exclusions nor fixed boundaries. Scheman's idea of a 'diasporic' concept of the homes of words loosens Wittgenstein's concept, and moves against a conservative understanding of Wittgenstein. Scheman thus moves Wittgenstein into the arena of feminist debate. Below I draw on Scheman's ideas as I argue for a parallel concept of the 'mother' as one with a shifting and fluid essence.

### **Chapter 3: The Mother as a Holding Point in Language Games**

My aim in this chapter, brief because it is a positioning chapter, is to establish that the language games of mothering form a holding point for the language games around women. Following Scheman, I find a way of keeping to a family resemblance approach and of keeping to the idea of a shifting centre, but I change the model in bringing in the analogy of the type specimen method from botany. This allows me to show the significance of the language games of mothering without being trapped by essentialist claims with their concomitant exclusions, nor by the 'ripple outward' effect of the Wittgensteinian family resemblance approach. I complete this chapter by turning to Adriana Cavarero who insists on the embodied sexually differentiated individual. She changes the emphasis of my inquiries on essence by explaining the shifting fluid essence of the individual in narrative form, and by focusing on uniqueness rather than resemblance.

John Wisdom points out that:

features of the picture may be brought out by setting it beside other pictures; just as the merits of an argument may be brought out, proved, by setting beside it other arguments, in which striking but irrelevant features of the original are changed and relevant features emphasised; just

as the merits and demerits of a line of action may be brought out by setting beside it other actions. (1964, p. 160)

My strategy is to provide a different picture of the debates around essentialism and around family resemblances through building on such debates in order to place the mother in female language games.

Before trying out the concept 'mother' as a holding point, I note that this is a treacherous area in which to write. Since we all have mothers, and since most of us have related, or relate, more or less closely to our mothers, writing on the mother is bound to be emotionally charged. Similarly, mothering children requires emotion of some sort, as does living as a woman and not mothering children. My aim is that the emotion should be both recognised, and set aside. Expert in this *techne* is Adriana Cavarero, whose ideas I will explore further at the end of this chapter. The temptation to use the language of a (restricted) universal mother and particular essence-bearing instances of mothers is strong. Each of us comes from a mother, and yet the language of universals and particulars is as liable to sharp boundaries, exclusions, and misleading essences, as described above, in this case as in any other.

Being a mother is so very common amongst women that it is difficult both to avoid generalisations, and to do justice to the prevalence of this female condition. The problem is to present the mainstream

mother, without restricting the range of variation among mothers.<sup>38</sup>

Writing about mothering cannot claim to be emancipating the view of a marginal group, and yet the mainstream mother makes infrequent appearances in feminist theory. The normative figure of the mother is important to society. I understand the idea of a norm as a pattern or template, which is capable of shifting and changing. Ignoring this normative figure means failing to describe the very many women who constitute it, and are glad to constitute it. Keeping too closely to the norm means erasing the significance of mothers who diverge from the norm, either in corporeal aspects of being a mother, or in the relational aspects.

Incongruous as it may at first seem, my solution is to offer an alternative taxonomy, adapted from botany. My schema here differs from Wittgenstein's schema. I provide a method of describing sameness-in-difference without either prototypes and conservatism, or a ripple-outward effect which diminishes the significance of the mother. I use the schemata warily. I agree with John Wisdom that:

the comparisons we make are at once valuable and dangerous. Without them we cannot bring order into

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<sup>38</sup> Wittgenstein explored this problem in relation to the language games around thinking. 'He urged the ... strategy of treating as the primitive instance of having a thought the case of someone's articulating his ideas in a conversation or discussion. This is not the paradigm of thinking, but rather a centre of variation for describing a field of varying examples.' (Baker, 2004, p. 170) Baker directs the reader to Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1988) *Wittgenstein's Lectures on Philosophical Psychology, 1946-7, notes by P.T. Geach, K.T. Shah and A.C. Jackson*, p. 142.

bewildering flux, but with them we may in the interests of unity blind ourselves to the diversity of the individual.

(Wisdom, 1964, p. 274)

Having outlined the botanical system, I explore the language games around mothers in the society of which I am part. I draw on my experience as a born woman living as a woman and a mother to describe these language games, both those involving the body of the mother; and those involving maternal work and life practices.

The type specimen method is designed in order to assist classification in the system of botany. This is helpful in two ways. The method distinguishes clearly between the functions of classification and naming, and thus allows a variety in the natural world, while retaining the usefulness of a stable nomenclature. This develops beyond the Aristotelian ideas of species. In the mid-eighteenth century, Linnaeus developed a new system for classifying plants<sup>39</sup> which required a long description of the species. The basis of the categorisation was, as today, the sexual system of plants. The concept of a species was broader than it is in modern times, and allowed more variation between members of a species. From 1900 the concept of a species was narrowed in the interests of exactness, and the type specimen method was developed. Charles Jeffrey explains in *Biological Nomenclature* that the process of classification precedes naming. (Jeffrey, 1989, Chapter 5) Classification

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<sup>39</sup> I do not discuss Linnaeus' classification of animals, although the principles remain broadly similar.

is based on the occurrence of living organisms as series of similar individuals showing certain common features. The individuals are not identical with each other; they always vary but retain some similarities. Such series of individuals are known as species. The system of classification is continually changing, and being finessed, as more organisms are discovered, and as our knowledge of biological structure and function deepens. DNA analysis has affected classification, as has pollen structure revealed by the electro-microscope. The classification leads to a *hypothesis* of natural units, which include all organisms that exhibit the appropriate group-defining features. Since the classification is subject to flux, and the aim is nomenclatural stability, a system of establishing a type specimen is used. This resolves the problem of the conflict between the need for stability of nomenclature and the inevitable changeability of classification.

Specimens that are types are merely those which happen to have had names associated with them, and for the purposes of classification are treated like any others. As a result a type falling within the range of variation of a taxon may stand at one extreme of that range. Nevertheless, the name to which that type is linked will apply to the taxon and may well be the name by which it should properly be known. In other words, the nomenclatural type associated with the name by which a taxon is properly known is not necessarily typical of the taxon in terms of range of variation. It is not the purpose of a type to be typical in the variational sense;

the purpose of a type is to provide a fixed point associated with a name in the range of variation of organisms so that no matter where discontinuities are found to occur and boundaries between taxa drawn, the application of the name can be objectively and unequivocally drawn. (Jeffrey, 1989, p. 22)

Jeffrey provides the example of the pine genus *Pinus*. In this example, the type specimen is the *Pinus sylvestris*, the first example of the *Pinus* genus described by a botanist. Other pines within this species are *Pinus pinea*, *Pinus cembra*, *Pinus strobus* and *Pinus taeda*. The *Pinus sylvestris* is not typical of the species in variational sense, but it does provide a fixed point in the variation of pines. Any of the last four mentioned examples of the species may be at an extreme of the range of variation from *Pinus sylvestris*, but once the type specimen has been named they remain within the species *Pinus*.<sup>40</sup> (Jeffrey, 1989, p. 22)

A type specimen is not just a written description, which is too capable of ambiguity and misinterpretation. It is a physical manifestation of the description. A type is designated to fix the application of a name. There is no expectation of a lack of variety in the examples, but the examples must resemble each other, and crucially resemble the type

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<sup>40</sup> Linnaeus' concept of the genus *Pinus* was, according to Jeffrey, too wide. He included *Pinus cedrus*, *Pinus larix*, *Pinus picea*, *Pinus balsamea*, and *Pinus abies*. After the introduction of the type specimen method, these were separated into their own genera. (Jeffrey, 1989, p.22)



specimen. The type specimen holds together the taxonomy of the species not through words but through its physical presence. The name is published, and thereafter invariant.

I suggest that the type specimen may be seen as a holding place of the species to which it belongs. This is not a point that divides the centre from the periphery. It is more like a cartological point that offers a perspective on the lie of the land. It is a point from which the viewer can start to make sense of what is seen. The value, to me, of the type specimen approach, is that it avoids a classification which requires a true inner essence to mothering, but denotes a significant place of the language games of mothering in language games about women. It allows a grouping of the categories 'women' and 'mothers'. The analogy I make is between the flux of classification of the varied category, 'mother', and the way in which we refer to the category in language. Being a mother is not the fixed essence of being a woman. A mother is certainly not more essentially a woman than a non-mother. But in her potential, whether or not fulfilled, to conceive, to gestate, to deliver and to breastfeed a child, to form a lasting bond with a child, the mother has characteristic practices which form a stable point. Whereas the named plant is still and lifeless pressed upon the page, the mother is so named in recognition of her maternal practices. However much the classification of women may change, this point of nomenclatural certainty forms a limiting case to the flow of variation between women. It denotes a *hypothetical* natural unit. As Jeffrey is at pains to point out above, the type specimen is not typical

in terms of range of variation. It is crucial to register this point as ignoring it leads in the direction of the mother seen as prototype with all the conservatism and invidious comparisons that this entails. This is not a method seeking purity and exactness with correlative exclusions. Many women do not want to be mothers. Many want, more or less desperately, to be mothers but do not become mothers. Amongst some groups of women, the mother may be at one extreme of the range. Yet the name forms an emblematic point in the language of resemblances between women. I now make some suggestions as to who can be identified as a mother, in the language games of mothering, showing overlapping series, and resemblances of features.

The first definition of the term 'mother', given by the Oxford English Dictionary, is 'a woman who has given birth'. This definition highlights straightaway that being identified as a mother involves uniquely female practices of the body. Language describing our experience of our bodies is socially mediated. Femaleness is important to mothering in that the bodies of mothers are female. Although mothering is not always embodied, there is a necessary relation to embodiment in the concept.

'Giving birth' denotes a series of activities, amongst which fall giving birth with more or less help from a midwife, and giving birth by caesarean section. It is extremely rare for a woman to give birth alone; giving birth is, usually in our society, a co-operative event. The lore of midwives is that each birth is different. Other practices of the body which are characteristic of mothers are conceiving a child, gestation, and

breastfeeding a child. Conceiving a child is again normally a co-operative event, either between a woman and her partner, or between a woman and some combination of medical personnel, who assist conception by In-Vitro Fertilisation, or other methods. This is the area in which there is currently the greatest flux in reality, and the area which receives most media attention, and some philosophic attention.<sup>41</sup> The language game of gestation is curious in that although gestation is a female activity, it often is portrayed in ways that shade into female passivity. A woman is pregnant. Her hormones are fluctuating. She is carrying the child. The language here downgrades the female energy put into the process. A pregnant woman may be often extremely tired because her energy is going into gestation. She may be often unwell, feeling sick, fainting, suffering cramps, irritable, uncomfortable, because she is engaged in an extremely demanding activity. Surrogate motherhood complicates, without negating, gestation as a marker of mothers. The language games around breastfeeding are complex. The historical use of wet-nurses, and the use of bottle-feeding mean that keeping a child alive cannot be counted as a marker of the mother. Yet the milk flows in only to the individual woman who has given birth, only she experiences the pain and the benefits of breastfeeding. Feeding a child from her own body is a practice which is not a marker of a specific mother of a specific child, but is still a marker of the mother. A relatively recent scientific marker of the mother is shared DNA with the child.

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<sup>41</sup> An example is Guenther Lisa (2005) 'Unborn Mothers: The Old Rhetoric of New Reproductive Technologies'

If language games around the body of the mother reveal the complexities of identifying who may be termed a mother, the language games about the relationships of mothering reveal even greater internal and external differentiation. The relationship between mothers and their children is a multi-coloured weave in which those who engage in the virtues of mothering do so in myriad ways.

The term 'mother' denotes relationality, but this relationality is patterned differently. For many women who have given birth to the child, she and the child exist in a relationship of mutual love, which is central to the virtue of mothering. Mother and child bring a great deal of happiness and heartache to each other. As a mother, a woman lives through and with some form of dependence. She lives among 'inequalities in power relations'. (Battersby 1998, p. 8) Being a mother who lives in such a relationship with her child, involves attentiveness to the child, but the form of this attentiveness can vary from a twenty four hour concern to an intermittent focusing. Adequate mothering involves prioritising the child, but the manner of prioritising varies. For many women in my society, it involves devoting time to the child's health, educational, nutritional needs, in intensely practical ways – waiting at the doctors, waiting outside the school, endless cooking and clearing up, but also enjoying being with the child, and enjoying the child's achievements. Similarly the degree of dependence stretches between the woman who withdraws entirely from society and from the labour market in favour of mothering, through innumerable intermediate stages, to the woman who does not allow

motherhood to affect her 'own life'. Given economic pressures, and women's interwoven responsibilities to themselves as women, only at the extreme end of the spectrum of concern for her 'own life' could a woman be said to lack the virtue of the mother. There is an overlapping series of degrees of dependence of the child on the mother, in that childcare is often shared with a male or lesbian partner, family member, friend or paid carer. This web of relationships may involve the mother in further dependence which she may welcome as a sharing of the workload, or may not welcome in that further demands are placed on her.<sup>42</sup> In most scenarios in our culture, the work of mothering involves resistance to a society that is reluctant to recognise dependency as normal.

Relationality is central to mothering. Within the language games of relationality come the language games of adoption, fostering, mothering a partner's children. Such mothers are identified as mothers by virtue of their care for their children, and by virtue of the social and legal recognition of their status as mothers. Recognising that this is a different language game, the same *reasoning* can be applied here as Scheman applies in the case of MTF transsexuals above. If we have a more differentiated and fluid understanding of what identifies a mother who has

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<sup>42</sup> Collins uses the term 'motherwork' to describe this co-operative activity in caring for children in her community. (Collins, 1994, Chapter 3) In my model the term mother is restricted to females, and the co-operative work becomes a form of gender-free parenting.

given birth as a mother, solidarity with those who do not have the physical markers of being a mother is easier to achieve. These groups of mothers do not, of course, stand in need of a sex-change operation, to become mothers. But like MTF transsexuals sharing in the attitudes and life-practices of women, this group of mothers shares in the work, social attitudes, and life-practices of women who have given birth. The existence of this group of mothers both reinforces our sense of the importance of embodiment to mothering, and our sense that mothering involves an entire set of practices, beyond the bodily practices of the mother of an infant.

Here my position differs from that of Sara Ruddick, who argues for ‘conceptually separating birthing labour from mothering.’ For Ruddick, being female is not a necessary condition for engaging in mothering. The female body plays a relatively minor part in Ruddick’s ideas. She ‘minimises the importance’ of birthing labour, and regards pregnancy, birth and lactation as brief episodes in years of mothering. (1989, p. 48-49) Ruddick’s project is to advocate a distinctive kind of maternal thinking, which grows from maternal practices of protection, nurturance and fostering growth. (1989, Chapter 4) According to Ruddick, such practices require a specific kind of reflection, knowledge and capacity for reason. Mothers, men and women who are not biological mothers, are all able to engage in such (social) practices and such thinking.

My strategy is to retain the significance of pregnancy, birthing, and breastfeeding while arguing for a blurred border around the concept

'mother'. Thus, for me, mothering is, emblematically, a female activity. However, as in the language games of describing plants there can be variations from the type specimen of a plant, when describing varied members of the species, so there can be variations in the language games around the figure of the mother when describing others engaged in the activities of mothering. I do not claim that such activities give rise to a specific form of thinking.

An important group engaging in maternal practices, in our society, and thus part of a blurred border around the language games of mothering are fathers. In a welcome shift of labour, men in heterosexual partnerships have increased their share of caring for children from around 19% in the 1960s to 32% today, according to a survey reported in *The Guardian*. (August 17, 2005) Single parent fathers, together with homosexual male adopting and fostering couples also engage in maternal practices, and these activities can be described within the language games of mothering. Such males are part of a blurred border in that their male relation to embodiment moves them away from the emblem of the mother, as I have described it.

If we think of the mother as a type specimen, the internal diversity and differentiation towards which I gesture, giving a far less than exhaustive series of examples, can be accepted, as the constitutive variation of a plant species is accepted. Nevertheless, the female relation to embodiment is presented as crucial to language games of the 'mother'.

I close this chapter by bringing in Adriana Cavarero who stresses embodiment, and also stresses differences rather than resemblances.

## **Cavarero**

In the work of Adriana Cavarero there is recognition of the embodied difference which I suggest in my work on the mother. For me embodied difference is vital in forming a holding point in a series of resemblances; Cavarero's point is that embodied difference leads to uniqueness. I focus here on her work on essence and discuss her ideas on narrative fully in Chapter 6. For Adriana Cavarero there is an essential and originary difference between man and woman:

by essential and originary difference I mean that, for women, being engendered in difference (*l'essere sessuate nella differenza*) is something not negotiable; for each one who is born female, it is always already so and not otherwise, rooted in her not as something superfluous or something more, but that which she necessarily is: female.

(Cavarero, quoted in Lauretis, 1989, p. 32)

motherhood, and the maternal function, which far from being reduced to a support of patriarchy, is turned into a structuring or foundational site for the empowerment of women. (Braidotti, Foreword to Cavarero 1995, p. xvi)

Cavarero insists being born means being sexed. The mark of sexual difference appears at birth, and its acclamation is the speech of birth. If



birth is taken as the focus rather than death, this instantly and irrevocably gives sexual difference a signal importance. It also changes the tenor of what is said thereafter. According to Cavarero, universal man is never born, but simply exists:

But every human born, male or female, is always born of a woman, who was born of a woman, who, in turn, was born of another woman, and so on, in an endless backward movement toward our origins. (Cavarero, 1995, p. 60)

Every living person can trace back a female line. For the sexually differentiated embodied person, thinking of nothingness disappears into reflection on the female line, the line of mothers that the person comes from and the line of those who will be born. Cavarero's ideas on essence not only enable but insist on a difference between men and women. As women are essentially female at birth, so they live female lives and create female stories. Female experience is different from male experience.

Whereas a Wittgensteinian anti-essentialism leads to an indeterminate individual, and does not draw a sharp boundary round the sex of the individual, Cavarero's individual, by contrast, is bounded by her sex and by her narrative, and finely drawn in the narrative she creates. The story is neither abstract nor universal. A different kind of thinking, neither essentialist in the traditional sense, nor anti-essentialist, is needed for the feminine art of narration. Karen Blixen's story of the stork is important to Cavarero:

A man, who lived by a pond, was awakened one night by a great noise. He went out into the night and headed for the pond, but, in the darkness, running up and down, back and forth, guided only by the noise, he stumbled and fell repeatedly. At last, he found a leak in the dyke, from which water and fish were escaping. He set to work plugging the leak and only when he had finished went back to bed. The next morning, looking out of the window, he saw with surprise that his footprints had traced the figure of a stork on the ground. (Cavarero 2000, p.1, drawn from Blixen, 1954, pp. 213-5)

Cavarero's story places ideas of a fluid essence in narrative form. Rather than looking for an 'inner' essence to the man who lived by the pond, she looks at how the stork emerges from our actions. Our stories are evolving as long as we live, and are only complete on our deaths. We are able only to glimpse our stories as we live them out. We are making a pattern, which we do not see. The story illustrates that the events and accidents of our lives shape our stories but do not determine them. There is in this fable the idea of resistance to the benign and malign contingencies of life; the man continues drawing his stork regardless of events. There is also a stress on a hidden unity. The pattern exists as the individual exists and has a potential completeness. The pattern makes sense. The stork is recognisable.

Yet perhaps the outline of Cavarero's drawing holds the individual too tightly. Although like Scheherazade we escape the text, in a way we are trapped by the listener to our story: the watcher, the 'self', who sees the outline of the stork. Blixen hides herself as much as she reveals herself in her autobiographical *Out of Africa* (1954), and in her stories. Moreover we see her merged with the force of the African landscape, and with the Kikuyu with whom she surrounded herself. The Kenyan scene merged with the uniqueness of Karen Blixen as she fell in love with the country and the people.

Cavarero's stress on uniqueness changes the emphasis. She focuses on the differences integral to a Wittgensteinian schema working with resemblances, as distinct from identical sameness. For her, the unique emerges relationally. Whereas I write on mothers as a loosely related group, and therefore think through resemblances, Cavarero here writes on the individual, and on uniqueness. Both aspects are part of the picture.

## **Conclusion**

My strategy is to adopt Scheman's methodology while introducing a new element: the role of the type specimen. I add in to the debate the type specimen approach from botany. Adopting this approach enables me to avoid a classification which requires a true of inner essence to mothering, and provides a way for me to denote the significant place of the language games of mothering in language games about women without

restricting the range of variation among women and mothers. This blurred and flexible concept of the mother underpins my remaining chapters.

I argue for the practices of the embodied mother as an emblem of the female. Such an emblem provides a Wittgensteinian changing norm that can act as a rule for handling instances. In closing the chapter with Cavarero's ideas, I reinforce my insistence on the embodiment, and move towards a shifting essence expressed in narrative. Blixen's pattern of the stork, described by Cavarero, is not decided in advance. The story tells us how the stork comes into being. The narrative form, integral to my thesis, has a valuable fluidity and open-ness.

Having made clear my position on the concepts 'woman' and 'mother' I turn to the tasks of reading women and mothers into the writing of Wittgenstein in Chapter 4, and of Kierkegaard in Chapter 5. Through investigating the language games of Wittgenstein and of Kierkegaard, I find philosophical spaces for a changing, flexible figure of the mother.

## **Chapter 4: Absence in Wittgenstein: Difference in Wittgenstein**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I resist Wittgenstein's omission of the female, and continue to show how his ideas can offer resources for a different pattern in understanding the figure of the mother. I interrupt Wittgenstein by

interposing Cavarero's vivid retelling of the Demeter myth to highlight an alternative symbol of the mother, and to emphasise the importance of Cavarero's method of reading against the grain to find the meaning of the symbol 'mother' trapped outside the text. I find spaces that women might inhabit, and I continue to show how a Wittgensteinian approach could be useful for finding the new understandings necessary to feminist philosophy.

Chapter 4 is structured into four parts. I begin in Wittgenstein's *Account of Language: A Critique from Within*, by explaining and agreeing with Wittgenstein's account of language. However, at the same time, by adopting the strategy of 'reading as a woman', I bring to light the absence and exclusion of women and mothers from Wittgenstein's accounts of language learning and examples of language usages. I suggest that Wittgenstein's naturalism is conjured by his allusions to children's learning and playing. I find that Wittgenstein's exclusions make his account of language damagingly incomplete. My second part is entitled *Wittgenstein's Concept of a Form of Life*. For Wittgenstein language games arise from shifting practices that make up forms of life. Although Wittgenstein used the phrase 'form of life' sparingly, it is important to his thinking as a form of life holds together the language games of those who inhabit the form of life. I examine the origins and meaning of 'form of life' in Wittgenstein as a step towards introducing female forms of life, and thus female language games. In my third part, *Female Forms of Life*, I focus particularly on maternal language games

with immanent changing norms. As I have argued in Chapter 2, the Wittgenstein agent is the author of patterns of language use, and I introduce Cavarero's writing on Demeter as a different pattern of language, which re-symbolises the 'Great Mother'. In my fourth part, Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, I argue that Wittgenstein's thinking is able to accommodate and welcome difference. I introduce this text to show how Wittgenstein stretches our awareness of differences within the human and challenges conventional ways of understanding the world in Western societies. I make a strategic use of Wittgenstein's re-presentation (*Darstellung*) of different forms of life to focus on female differences, developing his examples.

### **Wittgenstein's Account of Language: A Critique from Within**

Although, as I have demonstrated, a Wittgensteinian methodology is useful for feminist purposes, the fact remains that Wittgenstein does not write about women.<sup>43</sup> Equally he does not write about tortoises. The first omission matters while the second does not, and this is primarily because women are language users. Inasmuch as Wittgenstein is writing about the 'multiplicity of the tools in the language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence' (P.I.23) his account is incomplete if it should turn out that women deploy language differently from men. Since Wittgenstein is silent on the question of female forms of life, including the mother's form of life, his account of the different forms

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<sup>43</sup> As I have indicated in earlier chapters, my use of the terms 'women' and 'mothers' does not entail a traditional essentialist approach.

of language seems incomplete. I indicate the shaded nature of women's relation to language, and suggest female language games that are missing.

The problem might be described as Wittgenstein giving with one hand what he takes away with the other. Wittgenstein's writing has always been explored and discussed by women. He included women amongst the select band of his pupils at Cambridge<sup>44</sup> and from Elizabeth Anscombe on there has been a succession of female commentators. His biographies<sup>45</sup> demonstrate his total unease within the philosophical establishment of his day, and his strenuous efforts to disassociate himself from it. He fled to Skjolden or Wicklow as a feminist philosopher might flee from the philosophical hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> Viewed as an ordinary language philosopher, who was reaching out to the everyday, Wittgenstein may be read as suggesting, but not engaging with, the language games of women whose history has been that of confinement to the ordinary. He provides an opening for an engagement with women's language games, but does not refer to them. The description of language use given by Wittgenstein applies to women. Recognition of the concept of a language game is possible for women. This raises a set of questions. When Wittgenstein writes on language is he excluding women, or is the language of women

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<sup>44</sup> Ambrose, Alice Ed. (1979) *Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930-32, from the notes of Alice Ambrose, Margaret Macdonald.*

<sup>45</sup> Monk, Ray (1990). McGuinness, Brian (1988)

<sup>46</sup> I do not discuss Wittgenstein's personal attitude to women. To assume that Wittgenstein was a misogynist seems too swift. Ray Monk provides some discussion of this in his biography. (Monk, 1990)

subsumed in language as described? Is there anything distinctive about the language of women? Do mothers have a particular relation to language?

As I have already demonstrated, I recognize the importance of differences between women, and the danger of ethnocentric and class-based generalizations. I recognise that there is a multiplicity of styles of speech and writing. What matters here is not what women have in common but the variety of language games not addressed. In writing of women as a group, I emphasise that neither men nor women can ever be situated outside language. My aim is to cast a light on women's different relation to the universal, language. This difference may be occluded when a woman reads male texts. Battersby describes the shift in awareness involved between simply reading a text, and reading 'as a woman' without interpreting reading 'as a woman' in a straightforwardly biologist or essentialist way. (Battersby, 1989, pp. 9-10) She traces how women develop through their education a way of 'blinking out' sexual difference. Noticing sexual differences requires 'a new pair of glasses'. Reading Wittgenstein 'as a woman' means becoming aware of female forms of life and female language games. It means resisting the ignoring of sexual and gender differences. My gestalt shift came in a group discussion of 'seeing the schematic cube as a cube' (P.I., p. 213). A female member of the group started referring to sugar cubes. Cubes are not only geometric diagrams; they play a part in the language game of making tea. Assisted by Wittgenstein's surrounding metaphors of blindness and notion of 'seeing as', I became aware of the limitations of Wittgenstein's range of



examples. Once one example had unravelled, others followed suit. Once one silence had been broken, others started to fragment. The concept of a language game is neutral vis-à-vis the emancipatory concerns of feminist philosophy. Yet, my claim is that both Wittgenstein's style of expression, and his allusions make his work difficult of access for women who are reading 'as women'.

Wittgenstein claims: 'It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of words.' (P.I.5) By this he means that we are in our everyday lives so immersed in language that we are unable to see clearly how language works. His particular target for a mistaken view of language is surrogationalism: the view that words 'stand for' objects, name objects. He thinks that this misleads us both as to the relation of language to the external world, and as to the relation of language and thought.

The surrogationalist account of language is found in St Augustine's *Confessions* where Augustine is describing how he learnt language as a child:

'When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved toward something I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out.' (*Confessions*, 1.8 cited in footnote to P.I.1)

Here, Wittgenstein quotes Augustine at some length and suggests that Augustine's view places learning the names of objects as central to language learning.

The idea of words standing for objects in the external world goes back to Plato's *Cratylus* (Plato, 1977), and is also found in Aristotle. My reading of the passage from Augustine reminds the reader of the context of this description of language learning. When Augustine goes on to write of 'intention shewn by bodily movements' he describes this in a way that recalls the close attention with which children sometimes watch the activity of adults. Augustine's last sentence adds the facility of using words in their proper places, and the training of the 'mouth to form these signs.' This passage reads as a short narrative, in which Augustine is reaching back from his adult self to his childhood simplicity. He is moving outside his current use of language to imagine an earlier state of language use. The adult Augustine is gathering to himself the naturalism of childhood.

In opposing the surrogationalist position, Wittgenstein has to ensure that his description does not leave language floating free of thought and the world; and to ensure that language is embedded in the human community. Wittgenstein's strategy is at once to defamiliarise us with our language, and to retain the conviction of familiarity. To achieve the former, he introduces Builder A and Assistant B, who are like pin-men, invented to perform a specific function. His technique might be compared to someone who simplified a complex drawing of a machine by providing

a diagram of the main elements. They are delineated as sparingly as possible. To achieve the latter, he keeps up a counterpoint of examples from the world of children who bring with them the necessary naturalism. This point is developed in my critique of Wittgenstein below.

In the imaginary language used by Builder A and Assistant B there are only four words: 'block', 'pillar', 'slab' and 'beam'. For this language Augustine's picture (as quoted by Wittgenstein) is correct, in that naming the materials is the only use to which the language is put. Naming allows differentiation. Naming does not, however, establish a direct relation with the external world. Naming the materials is a necessary and sufficient condition for allowing them to be used in building. Wittgenstein replaces the surrogationalist theory of language by his description of the working of language explained by the analogy of a game. Words do not (only) stand for objects, they play a part in a series of interlocking and overlapping games. In P.I.3 Wittgenstein first mentions the idea of a game, showing that the diagram of the builders is like moving pieces on a board game. In P.I.5 he first mentions a child, and goes on to show that learning names and learning the purpose of pointing are part of how children are brought up.

In P.I.7 he demonstrates the learning of naming and of repetition, before introducing the term 'language-game', which is to become central. Earlier, in the *Philosophical Grammar*, worked on in 1931, Wittgenstein had used the term 'calculus' interchangeably with language-game: 'The meaning is the role of the word in the calculus' (Wittgenstein, 1974, p.

63). However, by the time of *The Brown Book* dictated in 1934-5, the preliminary studies for the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein had decided that: 'Our language conforms to this standard of exactness only in rare cases'. (Wittgenstein, 1969, p. 25) The metaphor of a game had become more flexible.<sup>47</sup> (Harris, 1988, Chapter 1) One striking aspect of Wittgenstein's introduction of the term is his immediate departure from the mathematical symbolism introduced by the term 'calculus' to link his concept with the game 'ring-a-ring-a-roses'. This suits his purposes exactly as it is a use of words in which the naming of the ring is combined with, and repeated into, the action of going round in a ring, and the roses move the use of language well away from the labelling Wittgenstein is opposing. The idea of a game is appropriate for Wittgenstein because a game contains a play of inter-related parts as language does. Each element in a game depends on the other elements. As Harris expresses it:

Language is not a set of relations between independently given sounds or marks on the one hand and independently given features of the external world on the other. To view language thus is both to isolate words from the linguistic system to which they belong and, simultaneously to isolate

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<sup>47</sup> As Harris demonstrates, in the 1930s games had a new status. He points out that both Saussure and Wittgenstein, who had no knowledge of each other's work, assume a European understanding of the metaphor of a 'game'. He suggests the intellectual climate was responsive to the idea of 'the game'. (Harris, 1988, Chapter 1)

the language user from the linguistic community. (Harris, 1988, p. 17)

The linguistic system is explained by Wittgenstein by means of the most familiar of all series: the letters of the alphabet. As each letter differs but is part of a series, so each word differs but is part of a series.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein's next important point is that language is use. To explain this, Wittgenstein introduces the analogy of the box of tools. As tools have different functions so do words. A functionless word is a nonsense word. A meaningless word is a nonsense word. He elaborates this point by showing how the builders' language uses the word 'Slab'. The builder is not just attaching names to slabs, beams and so on. He is also using a system in which the word 'Slab!' gives rise to the action of moving the slab as this is the agreement on the use of this word in his linguistic community of Builder A and Assistant B. There is no need to assume that the builder thinks or means the words 'Bring me a slab!' The agreement, by convention, in this community, is that 'Slab!' is followed by a slab being moved. This is the agreement about the use of this word. Words have different uses as tools have different uses.

In P.I.23 Wittgenstein brings together the concept of the language-game and of language as use in his concept of 'a form of life'. Wittgenstein is opposing the view that language is simply a naming of the external world, and needs to prevent language from floating free by

showing how it is integrated into our daily activities. Of course it is integrated in a multiplicity of ways. Wittgenstein's choice of examples demonstrates the form of life with which he was surrounded:

Giving orders, and obeying them—

Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements—

Constructing an object from a description (a drawing)—

Reporting an event—

Forming and testing a hypothesis—

Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams—

Making up a story and reading it—

Play-acting—

Singing catches—

Guessing riddles—

Making a joke; telling it—

Solving a problem in practical arithmetic—

Translating from one language into another—<sup>48</sup>

Wittgenstein closes with the more every day examples:

Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

—It is interesting to compare the multiplicity of the tools in language and of the ways they are used, the multiplicity of kinds of word and sentence, with what logicians have said

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<sup>48</sup> Ellipses in original, P.I. 23

about the structure of language. (Including the author of the  
*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus.*) (P.I.23)

Wittgenstein reminds us of the different uses of language, and draws us away from the labelling approach. 'Description', which might have been thought a close cousin of labelling, is now shown to be something much more subtle:

Think of how many different kinds of thing are called  
'description': description of a body's position by means  
of its co-ordinates; description of a facial expression;  
description of a sensation of touch; of a mood. (P.I.24)

The co-ordinates are measurements: the facial expression might involve a metaphor as in 'a far-away smile'; the touch might be expressed by gesture as a shrinking away; the mood might be an image such as an autumnal sadness. The concept of the form of life brings back Wittgenstein's naturalism, 'Commanding, questioning, recounting, chatting are as much a part of our natural history as walking, eating, drinking, playing.'(P.I.25)

In P.I.27, children are introduced talking to their dolls. Wittgenstein's point here is that the very activity of naming is a natural part of our form of life, as children naturally name their dolls and talk to them. As many mothers would recognise, naming a doll is not a separate activity from playing with a doll. Naming a doll can be a mode of playing with a doll. Finding names is playing the language-game of naming.

Wittgenstein placed a gulf between his philosophy and linguistics. Harris discusses this in the context of the attitude of Wittgenstein to scientific status. Wittgenstein is clear that 'Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences.' (T.4111)<sup>49</sup> He claimed his interest was in studying the working of language, providing a description, not an explanation, of language. Hacker (1986, quoted in Harris, 1988, p.161) makes the distinction that for Wittgenstein 'the linguistic investigation receives its purpose from conceptual problems in philosophy, not from empirical problems in linguistics.' Harris is not convinced by this:

Words are at the same time cultural facts, metalinguistic posits and conceptual tools. Hence to draw the empirical/non-empirical distinction for language within the framework of that [scientific] paradigm becomes intrinsically problematic. It involves the paradoxical enterprise of trying to go beyond and yet keep within the limits of language. (Harris, 1988, p. 126)

Patently Wittgenstein's work was not empirical in the sense of recording and analyzing language. Neither did he, in his philosophical work, have the ambition to change or 'improve' spoken or written language use in a way that could be empirically worked out and put into practice, though he did engage in precisely this activity in his spelling book for schoolchildren.(Wittgenstein, 1977) Both these sets of activities fall

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<sup>49</sup> T.4.111 indicates the number of the remark in Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1990) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.



within linguistics rather than philosophy. Where his conceptual problems do rub shoulders with empirical work, however, is in his emphasis on practice and activity as 'tools' of language. Here, his choice of examples to carry his meaning is a cultural fact. The examples bring a culture along with them. They are particular practices and activities, which are part of a form of life.

I now consider the silencing of women; and show that Wittgenstein's contexts are male-specific in a way that denies female meanings. My suggestion is that there is a masculine form of life implicit in the languages imagined at the start of the *Philosophical Investigations*. As indicated above, Wittgenstein places language use firmly within our natural history. His strategy here is to introduce children learning language, along with his 'purely imaginary' language games. Each time he mentions children he is suppressing the predominantly female context in which most children start learning language.

He most often writes simply 'the child learns'. The figure who is present, but suppressed in this account, is the woman (usually) who, to express it formally, introduces the child into this community, or to express it informally, who holds the children's hands and sings, or picks up the doll and starts the conversation. These are both private exchanges, both are female contexts. The female meanings are suppressed as the figure of the woman is suppressed. The language-games Wittgenstein evokes serve his purposes. Ring-a-ring-a-roses provides doing/saying; naming dolls shows creative language-use. The language-games which are lost are the

joyful exchanges and encouraging words with which women thread through these times of play.

At the start of his 'Lectures on Aesthetics' Wittgenstein writes:

One thing we always do when discussing a word is to ask how we were taught it. Doing this on the one hand destroys a variety of misconceptions, on the other hand gives you a primitive language in which the word is used. Although this language is not what you talk when you are twenty, you get a rough approximation to what kind of language game is going to be played. (Wittgenstein, 1966, p. 2)

Here, he elides the ideas of a primitive language and a child's language. He makes clear the importance of being taught. We are not born into language; we are born into the necessity of being taught language. When he instructs us to discuss how we were taught words, presumably he is not asking us to call on a vast repertoire of childhood memories. He is instructing us to approach the word use *as if* we were children. This is not a memory testable by tape recordings. It is a rough approximation of a memory. The world of childhood is shoring up Wittgenstein's naturalism. His interesting example is the language game of dreams. Obviously the child cannot learn this through ostensive definition, but only through talking, on awakening, with the person present (usually the mother), who dresses, and gets breakfast for, the child. Wittgenstein goes on to emphasise the significance of learning facial expression and gestures –

again placing himself as a child intently concentrating. Maybe these interlocutors of children are not to Wittgenstein's purpose, but maybe his purpose is incomplete without them. He is resting his naturalism on shadows of women, who, for him, shadow-like, do not speak.

I interpose a female version of Wittgenstein's 'primitive' language game used by the builders, to highlight the male nature of Wittgenstein's example:

Let us imagine a language for which the description given by Augustine is right. The language is meant to serve for communication between cleaner A and assistant B. A is cleaning with cleaners: there are soaps, pumices, scourers and brushes. B has to pass the things, and that in the order in which A needs them. For this purpose they use a language consisting of the words 'soap', 'pumice', 'scourer', 'brush'. A calls them out;—B brings the thing which she has learnt to bring at such-and-such a call.—  
Conceive this as a complete primitive language.

Perhaps the potential for comedy (explored in the Wittgenstein version in Tom Stoppard's play, *Dogg's Hamlet* (1980)) remains, but my version would generate a different comedy scarred by the stereotype of the garrulous cleaner in her knotted headscarf.<sup>50</sup> The comedy would be partly

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<sup>50</sup> Commercial cleaning is increasingly done by men as well as women, but cleaning remains a stereotypically female activity.

created by the clash between the august figure of St Augustine and the cleaners. Yet the cleaners' materials, like the builders materials, are differentiated by shape, and theirs too are to be used in sequence for a specific purpose, and need fetching and carrying in the same way. This might be called a primitive language. If it will not serve to defamiliarise us from our ordinary language, it is because cleaning is too familiar, too domestic. (As I write in this August library I am surrounded by female cleaners in their striped overalls.) If the image of cleaning does not carry the creative force of the image of building, it is because cleaning is, as de Beauvoir notes, like the torture of Sisyphus, always to be done again. (Beauvoir, 1999, p. 470) Not all cleaners are women. Not all builders are men. Still, it is difficult to deny that in this word game the gendered prototype is in play.

It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle.—Or a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering yes and no. And innumerable others.—And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life. (P.I.19)

So a language limited by expressions such as 'Ready!' 'Fire!' 'Six stretchers immediately!' brings to mind the necessity for obedience and clarity on the battlefield, and the urgency of communication. The second language Wittgenstein suggests reminds one of a catechism, where authority is a given within the system of thought; or of a tough authoritarian structure, such as a strict school or a prison regime. Others

that one might imagine are the language of the birth delivery room, which might be limited by expressions such as 'Push', 'Fully dilated', 'Heartbeat normal' where again obedience, clarity and urgency are paramount; or the language between many GPs and their female patients in which the language serves to place symptoms in a scientific category. Wittgenstein shows how we find our place in the ancient city of language. The words do not necessarily denote objects; they enable us to orientate ourselves in a particular context. Wittgenstein advises the reader not to be troubled by the fact that his imaginary languages consist only of orders and are therefore incomplete, since language is incomplete. He does not consider that the whole process of giving orders may itself be alienating for the female reader who has traditionally been in the position of obeying orders rather than giving them.

In agreeing with Wittgenstein's account of how language works, I also point out that Wittgenstein does not engage with either the learning of language games from the mother, nor with a child's language games in a social context. I have argued that such absences become visible when 'reading as a woman.' My claim is not that Wittgenstein's philosophy cannot provide space for specifically female language usages, simply that it does not.

I make suggestions for additions to Wittgenstein's account from Simone de Beauvoir and from John Wisdom. I begin by examining de Beauvoir's early reservations about language. She shows that women may

not emerge into language as Wittgenstein says we do. Her account in *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* provides a marked contrast both with Augustine's confident engagement, in which his private experiences are matched on to the world, and with Wittgenstein's projection of the child as game-player learning how to see, and to name, the world. Secondly, I draw from John Wisdom who, again in contrast to Wittgenstein, explicitly brings the mother into his exploration of how a child enters into language games. John Wisdom introduces an intelligent mother into his demonstration of the usefulness of reasoning by reference to analogous or parallel cases. (1991, pp. 46-47) His *Proof and Explanation* is a transcription of lectures recorded at the University of Virginia, in 1956-7, only eleven years after Wittgenstein completed the *Philosophical Investigations*. I demonstrate how both these authors provide accounts of understanding how language works emphasising aspects which are ignored by Wittgenstein, but which make for a fuller account.

De Beauvoir suggests that in learning to describe the world, women are setting aside part of what they would name, as the general language of men has no need for these names. 'The use of language as it is passed down to her can seem to falsify a woman's experience, and present an obstacle to discussing it authentically.' (Hornsby, 2000, p. 88) In face of the recognition that Simone de Beauvoir's autobiography, fiction and philosophy have spoken when so many other women were silent, and have spoken throughout my life, her early unease with language becomes the more striking. De Beauvoir learns to see the world differently, in a female

way. She puts forward a more personal view which exposes a felt gap between her experience and the social world she enters:

I saw greys and half-tones everywhere. Only as soon as I tried to define their muted shades, I had to use words, and I found myself in a world of bony-structured concepts. Whatever I beheld with my own eyes and every real experience had to be fitted somehow or other into a rigid category: the myths and the stereotyped ideas prevailed over the truth. (Beauvoir, 1987, p. 19)

In engaging with language she experiences a sense of loss, of the rigidification of experience. She suggests that there are aspects of a woman's experience that are non-nameable. Her sister saves 'her daily life from silence' in that she provides a way of talking in which 'words had a meaning yet did not weigh too heavily upon us.' (p. 44) The intimacy of her relation with her sister provides her with modes of interaction which are not linguistic. This provides a way of speaking otherwise excluded, from which she moves to a position in language. As a female child, de Beauvoir has a vexed, emotional relationship to the customary words of public life. There is an attraction to the idea that there is a female arena, which does not touch and cannot be touched by 'public' language. The Wittgensteinian insistence that such private meanings are mythological: that we have only the meanings which can be transmitted, thought a second time, maintained as the meanings they are, by use, does not address the issue. The issue is a desire for a less alienating alternative

which welcomes the 'greys and half-tones'. Having passed all her exams, de Beauvoir relegated her desire to childhood sentiment, and became a prolific writer. In de Beauvoir's fiction, her own early unease is set aside. Her women engage confidently with universal philosophical problems. Yet such engagement is not widespread. The shift from private unease to a public voice reflects de Beauvoir's hard-fought move from oppression within her family to a position of public authority.

John Wisdom's introduction of the mother begins with some instances of reasoning by analogy. He argues that a centaur is analogous to a horse in that it had hooves, and that therefore we may call this fabulous beast a horse. Turning to a different field, he argues that we might support a claim that an action is dishonest by stressing the similarity of cases which we have granted are dishonest, so that, in all consistency the action under discussion must be called dishonest. He makes clear that the kind of cases with which he is concerned, like those cited, are those which cannot be settled by acquiring further information.

In response to the challenge from an imaginary interlocutor that reasoning by analogy does not offer 'real proof', Wisdom introduces a 'young boy' who, faced with an arithmetic problem, 'cannot see that a certain suggested answer is the right answer'. (1991, p. 47) To show how the boy may be led to see the right answer, John Wisdom brings in the boy's mother. The arithmetic problem involves computing the number of ways there are of flying from England to France in one airplane and



returning in a different airplane. The answer is six times six. The mother's strategy of encouraging her child to see the right answer has two parts. Firstly she sets him simple multiplication problems. 'And they go on in this way for a long time.' (p. 47) Then she moves on to a problem exactly analogous to the airline problem but involving just two ferries. After this the child is able to see the right answer to the airline problem. The mother has thus shown understanding of the difficulties the child was encountering, but unable to describe, and has shown understanding of the pedagogic power of reasoning by analogy.

The role in which John Wisdom places the mother here is remarkable in a philosophic text – the mother is numerate and has a grasp of the structure of the argument needed. What is even more remarkable is that he goes on to compare the mother favourably with the father. The father attempts to teach the boy by beginning: 'Look here, if there are  $N$  things of sort  $X$ , and for each of these  $N$  things of sort  $Y$ , there are  $N$  times  $N$  things of sort  $Y$ '. (Wisdom 1991, p. 47) It is not hard to imagine the young boy's perplexity. As John Wisdom points out, in this case argument from a general principle is not enlightening, and the father, when pressed, is forced to resort to reasoning by analogy as a support to his general principle.

John Wisdom's example stands out clearly from Wittgenstein's lack of examples which acknowledge the role of the mother. Moreover, this particular example reminds me of a remark Wittgenstein made in *Lectures on the Foundations of Mathematics*:

Similarly one can show a child how to multiply 24 by 37, and 52 by 96, and then say to it, 'Now multiply 113 by 44 analogously.' The child may then do one of many things. If he can't justify his action, we should go through it again and again, until we converted him to doing the same as us. The only criterion for his multiplying 113 by 44 in a way analogous to the examples is his doing it in the way which all of us, who have been trained in a certain way, would do it. If we find that he cannot be trained to do it the same as us, then we give him up as hopeless and say he is a lunatic.' (1976, p. 58)

I recognise, of course, that some children do not have the mental capacity to operate with series of numbers. Still, perhaps the child would not be given up as hopeless if, in Wittgenstein's world, his mother were allowed an opportunity to teach him. The example that Wittgenstein provides is of a fairly complex calculation. In John Wisdom's example, the mother moves the child successfully from easier to more complex calculations.

John Wisdom's second reference to the mother comes later in the same lecture. (Wisdom, 1991, pp. 53-56) He gives a series of lively and imaginative responses to the audience who are questioning the relative strengths of ostensive and verbal definitions. He demonstrates that those who regard ostensive definition as stronger may fail to see the complexity involved in grasping an ostensive definition. John Wisdom refers to

Wittgenstein's point that in understanding ostensive definition you must first understand pointing. (P.I. 34-35) This illustrates what 'a tremendous amount of past proceeding is latent in the successful pointing out of a single instance'. (1991, p. 54)

The figure of the mother then appears teaching the child the meaning of the terms 'poodle' and 'greyhound'. She shows the child a variety of poodles, and a sample greyhound. The child makes the mistake of calling a whippet a greyhound. The mother replies that the whippet is too small. John Wisdom takes the child's part in showing that the child may have learnt mere size is irrelevant in this classification. He suggests that the child's questioning and mistakes make clear to the mother the complexities of the classification. In a perceptive insight, he identifies the reciprocal intellectual stimulation that mothers and children may gain as the child learns language as he notes that:

What the child does, surely, is take mother back over her own procedure with the classificatory word in question, and other words that may be involved besides. (Wisdom, 1991, p. 56)

Many mothers find their children's constant questioning about the world tiring – but alongside this many find the whole process of acquainting their children with the patterns and vagaries of language delightful. The child with no preconceptions of groupings of words, significant features of phenomena, or sense of context, is apt to ask funny and provocative

questions about language games, so that, as in the case John Wisdom cites, the mother learns as she teaches. Although he does not draw specific attention to the work of mothering, John Wisdom's examples show that he is aware of the major role that mothers play in teaching children how language works.

To conclude my critique from within Wittgenstein's account of language in this part, I emphasise that I am not making suggestions as to how we might use Wittgenstein for a distinctively feminist philosophy of language. My more restricted claim is rather, that for historical, contingent, and maybe personal reasons, Wittgenstein places the limit of his language outside the familiar language of women. In neglecting our practices Wittgenstein is integrating his description of the working of language only partially in the culture to which he belongs. If what 'belongs to a language game is a whole culture' (Wittgenstein, 1966, p. 8), a whole culture is missing in Wittgenstein's selection of language games. Female voices and maternal voices are missing from Wittgenstein, even when this philosophy describes ordinary language, and learning to use language.

This matters because women are language users. Wittgenstein is perpetuating the harmful metaphor of the silent, or silenced, woman. If women suffer a disadvantage with respect to language it is not that we do not speak or write. The practice of feminist philosophy continually affirms female language games. In drawing in the interlocutor, 'Imagine' 'if we look' 'Let us now look', Wittgenstein invites a form of active

listening which is stressed within feminist philosophy, but his excluding examples do not draw in the female reader reading as a woman. He consults the reader, but he consults her on his terrain.

Not accepting this exclusion, feminist philosophers are increasingly in dialogue with Wittgenstein. However, as is demonstrated in my review of *Feminist Interpretations of Wittgenstein* (2004), although feminists draw Wittgenstein into a range of issues with which he did not engage – ‘questions about the environment, or racism and colour, of “coming out” as gay, and child abuse’, (p.97) the figure of the mother does not appear in these dialogues. There is only one mention of mothers in this volume, and here the point is not central to the contribution.<sup>51</sup> Seemingly, feminist philosophers who write about the mother do not write about Wittgenstein, and those who write about Wittgenstein do not write about the mother. My strategy is to remain in a Wittgensteinian framework looking at language, as a way of working towards a new presentation of the figure of the mother. To use the openings provided by Wittgenstein I have to take him at his word and ‘keep the multiplicity of language games in view’. (P.I.24) My view, of course, differs from Wittgenstein’s view.

### **Wittgenstein’s Concept of a Form of Life**

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<sup>51</sup> The chapter is Sandra Churchill, ‘Big Dogs, Little Dogs, Universal Dogs: Ludwig Wittgenstein and Patricia Williams Talk about the Logic of Conceptual Rearing.’ (Scheman N. and O’Connor P. eds, 2002, pp. 305-321)

It is inadequate to restrict the meaning of female difference to engagement in alternative language games, so through exploring Wittgenstein's concept of *Lebensform*, I approach the problem of how to write of female practices in such a way that the meaning of female difference becomes apparent. I investigate Wittgenstein's concept of a form of life as a means of introducing female forms of life, and female language games. I begin by investigating the definition. There are two major strands of definition in the meaning of *Lebensform*: the first strand claims that '*Lebensform*' means pattern of living set over time. There is also a transcendental reading which regards forms of life as all that lies within the limits of what can be spoken of. Although Wittgenstein used the phrase 'form of life' sparingly it is important to the body of his thinking. Hence,

It is easy to imagine a language consisting only of orders and reports in battle.—Or a language consisting only of questions and expressions for answering yes and no. And innumerable others.—And to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life. (P.I.19)

Wittgenstein makes clear that language and living are inextricably intertwined. The language that we use and what we do in our life are interdependent. A fighting life has a language. A catechism has a language. The way we live constitutes our language. As there are innumerable forms of life, so there are innumerable languages. In understanding the one, we understand the other. Hence his grammatical

investigations. Wittgenstein has a broad use of the term 'language' to include activities and bodily expressions.

As Wittgenstein favoured the 'ordinary' use of words I begin by drawing on E.F.Thompkins who traces the history of the term '*Lebensform*.' (Thompkins, 1990, pp. 67-68) He demonstrates that in the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* (1885) the examples given by the brothers Grimm, from 1838, interpret *Lebensform* in a biological sense and stress the multiplicity of forms of life. The biological sense is that all creatures of each biological species necessarily have the same *Lebensform*. Different biological species have different *Lebensformen*. By 1967, Wharig's *Das Große Deutsche Wörterbuch* gives the following definition: *Lebensform: die Form, Art, sich sein Leben einzurichten, sein Leben zu Gestalten*, which Thompkins translates as 'the pattern, manner, of organizing one's life, shaping one's life'. A later edition of the same dictionary re-introduces, as an addition, the biological sense of form of life. These dates show that the meaning of the term was changing during Wittgenstein's lifetime. Thompkins goes on to assert that Wittgenstein would have used the term in the 'pattern of living' sense, since he was averse to the scientific approach and would not be interested in empirical differences between creatures.

Pattern of living was certainly important to Wittgenstein, but the double meaning of the term survives in his usage. He keeps a number of meanings in play in his use of the term. He explicitly favours ambiguity:

A picture is conjured up which seems to fix the sense of the term *unambiguously*. The actual use, compared with that suggested by the picture, seems like something muddied...

In the actual use of expressions we make detours, we go by side-roads. (P.I.426)

In my view, Wittgenstein did intend to indicate different ways of shaping one's life, but he also meant to gesture towards, though not insist on, the limits of our human life. He asks if, and how, different biological species lie outside the limit of our human life:

One can imagine an animal angry, frightened, unhappy, happy, startled. But hopeful? And why not?

A dog believes his master is at the door. But can he also believe his master will come the day after tomorrow?—And *what* can he not do here?—How do I do it?—How am I supposed to answer this?

Can only those hope who can talk? Only those who have mastered the use of language. That is to say, the phenomena of hope are modes of this complicated form of life. (If a concept refers to a character of human handwriting, it has no application to beings that do not write.) (P.I., p. 174)



Here Wittgenstein suggests there is perhaps a boundary around animal states – those of being angry etc. – which might show the boundary of human states. His interrogative tone makes clear that he is raising this possibility rather than firmly endorsing it. A dog's 'beliefs' are limited, but we cannot be entirely sure how limited; a human's beliefs are more extended, but we are not sure how to make the contrast with animals. Hoping, talking and handwriting are human activities and seem to indicate to us what it is to be human. Important to being human is using our language. Thus, the biological meaning may find an indirect successor in the transcendental meaning. The enlargement in the meaning of the term '*Lebensform*' which took place during Wittgenstein's lifetime is evident in his use. The ambiguity of Wittgenstein's use of the term brings into question *Lebensform* as a transcendental limit to human activity, and *Lebensform* as a description of a loose grouping of activities which maintains itself over time in a society.

Michael Luntley (2000)<sup>52</sup> works with Wittgenstein's stress on the limit, and suggests that the self at the limit of the world is a self with an attitude to the world. He suggests that in his later work Wittgenstein changed to a more dynamic, fluid conception in which language has a shaping role. Thus a *Lebensform* (among a variety of *Lebensformen*) is a practice of engaging with reality in which the language is both shaped by the reality and shapes it. The practices which compose the *Lebensform* are

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<sup>52</sup> Material from lectures given by Michael Luntley in Autumn 2001, University of Warwick

more than the habits of the community as described. The condition for the possibility of meaning is that the practice has unity over time, and is normative. This takes the emphasis of the argument away from the subject and places it on the practice. Subjectivity is revealed in what the subject does. This is not denying inner states and replacing them with externals. Wittgenstein is endorsing subjective states but his conception of the inner is as fully integrated with the outer. Norms of use are not transcendent to practice but immanent to practice. The norms of use are not necessarily apparent in use. They make themselves manifest as we see resemblances between one practice and another, one set of practices and another. There is no core feature which indicates the heart of a practice. There is a series of likenesses which lead us to accept a set of practices as a way of life. Seeing the likenesses comes to grasping the immanent norms. Agents are not just points in a shifting pattern. In acting we create, sustain over time, and shape the norms of our usages.

In the following passage from *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Wittgenstein suggests that forms of life are patterns of activities:

Instead of the unanalysable, specific, indefinable: the fact that we act in such-and-such ways, e.g. *punish* certain actions, *establish* the state of affairs thus and so, *give orders*, render accounts, describe colours, take an interest in others' feelings. What has to be accepted, the given—it might be said—are facts of living. (1980, 630)

Von Wright, as editor, notes that 'forms of life' is given as a variant here for 'facts (*Tatsache*) of living.' Wittgenstein shows us what we agree on, alongside our conflicting or harmonious opinions. The community is significant as a source of agreement in judgements (norms) which make up our form of life.

### **Female Forms of Life**

Let me now tell another story, introduce another form of life. I counterpoint Wittgenstein's examples of practices which make up a form of life with examples of female practices. An example of an aspect of a female form of life which meets the descriptions given above is the practice of engaging in female friendships. In my society, older female friends often shape reality for each other. In relating encounters with the worlds of work or public life, and side-stepping masculine authority of various types, we create a norm of a more free engagement with society. We agree in our judgements for coping with a society which is not arranged for us. The very talking through of situations and engaging with them within the ambit of the friendship makes a form of life which lies alongside that of the dominant members of society. The immanent norm is a mutual supportiveness, which is revealed in a continuing conversational review of events, and interactions. The attitude to the activities of the friendship is an important feature of the selves engaged in the friendship. The pattern of activities may include expressing concern over the reversals of life and celebrating minor successes. As the majority of older women are mothers of grown-up, or teenage, children, the pattern

frequently includes exploring together the current life of the young generation. In this way older mothers help each other to understand a form of life that is probably different from their own experience of youth. The inevitable rows between mothers and children may be less painful to the mother when seen through the lens of a friendship with a woman for whom one's role as a mother is only part of the story of the friendship. The pattern of interaction is sustained over time, and becomes immanent to practice, while informing and mediating practice. There is no special feature which is crucial to the practice of friendship, but the overlapping pattern of conversational activities make up a supple and flexible form of life.

Wittgenstein stresses the importance of everyday practices which make up a form of life. Yet he ignores a central human practice: the practice of mothering. In the mothering I see around me, caring for a small child is a practice with many overlapping variations. An example of this practice is making a judgement that the child is OK. In the variation with which I am familiar, she talks with the child or gets her ready for bed with both child and mother immersed in the activity. The mother may be stressed, impatient, and hurrying the child, or may be calm and patient. The outcome of this practice is that she will be able to say whether the child is healthy enough and happy enough. She need not display an intellectual attitude to the activity, and might not give her reasons in terms of cause and effect. A Wittgensteinian view might be that attending to the customs of feeding, bathing and talking to the child is a form of life with

immanent norms. The judgements which the mother makes are integral to her form of life, and to the society of which she is part:

what one acquires here is not a technique; one learns correct judgments. There are also rules, but they do not form a system, and only experienced people can apply them right. (P.I. p. 227)

She monitors the child's body, appetite and frame of mind. An external view of the practices of the mother provides an understanding of her attitude to the child. Her vigilance is acted out, symbolised in these domestic rituals. The vigilance shown is an example of a virtue of mothering. Whilst any mother can have a lapse of attention, or interest in her child, lasting for a certain time, such customary vigilance is part of the expression of this virtue. So a mother expresses her responsibility for the child, and to the child, and to herself as a mother. The good and experienced mother engages in practices which ensure the well-being of the child.

However we need to remember the ever-changing nature of Wittgensteinian immanent norms, (discussed in Chapter 2) demonstrated in the practices<sup>53</sup> I detail below. Women who achieve motherhood through medical intervention of various types act to change the norm of 'natural' conception. The many women who conceive through In-Vitro

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<sup>53</sup> Of course, the norms of fatherhood are also changing. I do not discuss these for reasons of relevance to my main project, and for reasons of space.

Fertilisation techniques move against the conventional picture of the mother's body as the passive receiver of the male sperm. Different IVF mothers may find this process untroubling, or extremely emotionally and physically demanding. The mother who engages with a medical Assisted Conception Unit makes a definitive turn towards motherhood through engaging in a course of treatment prior to conception and in the luteal phase. 'Natural' conception is not a fixed point but a blurred area stretching from conception after heterosexual intercourse, through intercourse timed to meet a woman's fertile period, to medically assisted conception. Women in lesbian, gay or bi-sexual relationships who become mothers are part of this blurred area. In opposing discrimination against their desire to become mothers, and engage in the practices of mothering, all such women promote changes in mothering. In these language games, as in so many others, the conventional concept of what is natural is damaging to women's interests, and matches ill with women's diverse life experience.

In contemporary Britain, women are hedged in by the public norms, which demand of women both economic work and motherhood. Challenging this, many mothers move away from the traditional role to display originality in the work of mothering. The increasing norm of working at home encompasses both the poorly paid home-worker, often working in the clothing industry, (as described for example in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (Ali, 2004)); and the better-paid workers of various

levels who sit at computers while children sleep, play around their feet, or watch DVDs.

Single mothers challenge the norms of women's role in everyday maintenance of family life combining traditional female tasks such as getting the washing done, with traditionally male tasks such as ensuring financial viability (if not stability.) Teenage mothers often manage motherhood successfully combining motherhood with work or study and managing older family members as well as their children. (Phoenix, 1991) Among the changing practices of single mothers is the sharing of childcare with the father and other male or female partners in childcare. As divorced and separated parents have become so common, and fathers have become more involved in the everyday life of their children, strict allocation of access time to mothers or fathers has given way, in some cases, to shared parenting in separate homes. A mother's or father's subsequent partner, or partners, may also play a large part in childcare. Recognition of the changing practices of mothering prepares the way for an alternative symbolisation of motherhood.

### **Demeter**

Adriana Cavarero offers such an alternative. (Cavarero, 1995, Chapter 3) Cavarero brings to the surface the power of Demeter, evident in her creativity and in casting the curse of infertility on the winter months. She shows the huge force of the love between mother and daughter. These female strengths are understood by being seen together

with the accepted version of the myth, which focuses on Demeter as nurturer, and on the drama of her daughter's abduction. Cavarero relates the female meaning, occluded in male post-Platonic re-tellings, to the familiar meaning and so deepens understanding. My aim is to re-consider the mother as a female symbol. Lucy Goodison is interested in the relationship between symbols and power:

I will take issue with those who would derive symbols from a universal, absolute or primordial language or from innate patterns in the human mind. I am more interested in exploring the relationship between symbols and the power structures in society. I will suggest that it is no coincidence that relatively powerless groups in our society are associated with less powerful, or negative symbols. I will suggest it is a mistake to confuse patriarchal symbols with universal symbols. (Goodison, 1992, p.11)

Cavarero's retelling of the Demeter myth replaces the symbol of the mother who is diminished in power by the power of Apollo, with the symbol of the mother as a creative force.

Cavarero presents the figure of Demeter, the goddess of generation, whose daughter, Kore, was abducted by Hades and taken to the Underworld. Demeter grieves by turning the earth arid, so Apollo agrees to reunite the mother and daughter for six months of the year. Cavarero claims that the myth of the great mother who has the secret of life and fertility is lost in Western thinking. Demeter and Kore symbolise



light and life; female regeneration and birth. The mother and daughter need the reciprocal visibility of the horizontal gaze (*theorein*) on birth. The oppositional categories are darkness and death; masculinity and dying. The world is opposed to the Underworld. A different view shows the conflict, the violence of the abduction, the encroachment upon female power. Irreducible, but in need of re-presentation, within the myth is her power to bring the sterility of the winter months, to prevent regeneration, as her vengeance on the superior power of the male gods. Cavarero's presentation focuses on this power. The rituals described in the myth are part of an overlapping series which go to make up a maternal form of life.

Cavarero demonstrates the Italian feminists' particular desire to resymbolise motherhood and birth. She re-examines the male view of a history of female practices of caring, nurturing, tending, and shows how the focus on these practices has occluded a clear understanding of the myth of Demeter. Cavarero places new aspects of the myth alongside familiar aspects. She shows Demeter is not a tame creature of the seasons, the spirit of the growth of summer, she is the creator of the seasons, winter and summer, death and life. The simplicity and familiarity (P.I.130) of motherhood has hidden the truth from us.

Cavarero shows a way of understanding Demeter which is continuous with a 'primitive' understanding of the power of motherhood. She removes the layers of comfort from the history of the concept of the mother, and reminds us of the mother as creator. In creating an alternative symbol of Demeter, Cavarero shows how the practices of motherhood

have been cast in the shadows, neglected and misunderstood. Goodison writes:

It is a question of moving away from symbols which trap and restrict us towards those which enable us to ask new questions and articulate, in turn, new symbols which reflect more closely the phenomena of our experience. (Goodison, 1992, p. 145)

Demeter and Kore do not instantiate universal forms of mothers and daughters. It is more that in understanding their story we may find a route to understand our own. If we look for a single feature in common between all mothers and daughters and Demeter and Kore it is as though as Wittgenstein said, to 'find the real artichoke we divested it of its leaves.' (P.I.164)

### **Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough***

In my final part, I move on to show how Wittgenstein offers a way of understanding differences within the human. I turn to the *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, reading a female version onto Wittgenstein when relevant. Here Wittgenstein makes a response to J.G. Frazer's, *The Golden Bough*, (1987), first published in 1890. Frazer was a Victorian anthropologist who produced an extremely influential, many-volumed study of the mythological lives, and the magic of primitive peoples. Frazer also produced an abridged edition, which Wittgenstein used in

1936 as the basis for his later *Remarks on Frazer*.<sup>54</sup> Frazer is interested in the many varieties of primitive myths. He presents a broadly Romantic picture of primitive myth and magic, pointing out the differences between the primitive mentality and the mentality of his time. The book is named after the golden bough in the sacred grove at Nemi, near where Rome now stands. Frazer's universalist view is that humans are essentially the same, but the Western races are more developed than the members of primitive tribes. Elaborating on Frazer, Wittgenstein presents the practices of primitive societies in order to make their form of life manifest, and to make our human form of life in our society manifest by showing resemblances and differences. Wittgenstein's *Remarks* move through examples of different tribes described by Frazer. Wittgenstein aims to correct Frazer's 'error' in writing of primitive practices. He criticises Frazer's version of 'primitive' lives as demonstrated in their symbolic practices. He suggests that Frazer presents such practices as 'pieces of stupidity'. (R.F., p. 119) In this he is unfair to Frazer whose classic study

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<sup>54</sup> In 1931, Wittgenstein read and commented on Volume 1 of Frazer's twelve volume study of magic and religion with Rush Rhees. In 1936, Wittgenstein received a personal copy of the much-abbreviated one-volume edition. He then made 'pencil notes on scraps of paper referring to particular pages in this abbreviated edition'. (Editors' Introduction to Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1993) *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. p.115) As the pencilled notes were inserted throughout Frazer's book, Wittgenstein remarks in the space of a few pages on 'primitive' societies, different in time and place, which Frazer had described.

shows the power and variety of primitive myths in a way that is understandable to those who have no experience beyond their own society. Wittgenstein re-presents Frazer, and what Frazer took to be the task of anthropology. Wittgenstein writes against the Romantic tradition of seeing the primitive as enticingly strange, and shows overlapping features of human life. He is showing us a form of life different from our own in a way that makes us reflect on our form of life. I suggest that in writing on 'primitive tribes' and primitive practices, Wittgenstein was going up to the limit of our form of life to enable us to reflect on both familiar and unfamiliar practices from a different, human and humane viewpoint. He shows the inner lives of the tribe through their outward rituals, and provides an alternative to Frazer's account of their inner lives.

Wittgenstein's description is rooted in his concept of forms of life as composed of groups of interwoven rituals. He writes of actions and ceremonies as well as of speech. The secrets of a culture can only be understood by close attention to all the practices which make up that culture. The symbols of which Wittgenstein writes are both seen and heard. His writing does not involve hidden generalisations, but series of *aperçus*. There is no hidden essence of being, for example, a Nemi, which is instantiated by particular rituals. Instead there are overlapping particular rituals which indicate a particular way of life within the universal human form of life. Thus the universal has no essence, but there are a series of overlapping resemblances between humans which give us the idea of 'the human'.

Much of Wittgenstein's revision of Frazer's meaning lies in the placing of his remarks. Wittgenstein writes in brief suggestive notes and aphorisms. In *Philosophical Finesse*, Warner writes:

the most obvious characteristic of the aphorism is its brevity, its ability to enable the reader to grasp the matter in question 'at a glance'. The juxtaposition of many such fragments, encouraging a sequence of such 'glances' within a coherent but non-deductive framework, is ideally suited to those operations of *l'esprit de finesse* which bring it about that, 'Light dawns gradually over the whole.' (*On Certainty*, Wittgenstein, 1969b, quoted Warner 1989, p. 187)

Warner here aptly describes Wittgenstein's task in *Remarks on Frazer*. The 'whole' which is in question is the relation between two different patterns of activity that of the primitive, and that of the technologically advanced, within one human form of life. In P.I.23 Wittgenstein writes: 'Here the term "language-game" is meant to bring into prominence that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life.' I begin by showing how Wittgenstein provides arguments against Frazer, and then suggest how to find the '*path* from error to truth'. (R.F., p.119)

Wittgenstein wishes to avoid a traditional metaphysics which divides the spiritual from the material. At the start of the *Remarks on Frazer*, one of Wittgenstein's earlier rejected ideas is printed: 'I think now that the right thing would be to begin my book with remarks about

metaphysics as a kind of magic.’ (p.vi). Perhaps he thought of suggesting here that metaphysics *is* a form of magic; or that forming an understanding of magic may be an alternative to adopting a metaphysical viewpoint, providing instead an attitude which still allows a grounding in the material, or as he puts it, a ‘personification’ of the material. In his presentation of primitive practices, Wittgenstein shows the reader a different attitude to the world, a different form of life from that prevalent in technologically advanced societies. In this different primitive form of life the spiritual and the material are openly united. In our form of life the material and the spiritual are divided by our habits of thought. The material world is perceived in terms of the laws of causation. The spiritual world is not touched by these laws. As well as showing us the differences between ideas of cause and effect, and ideas from magical thinking, Wittgenstein is reminding us of the continuity of human thinking about the world. The sharp turning towards rationality of the modern age has not expunged our understanding of the pre-rational.<sup>55</sup>

Wittgenstein is teaching us to ‘take’ our experience differently. He is teaching us to draw on our memories and a more ‘enchanted’ understanding of ourselves. For Wittgenstein, Frazer’s error is to misunderstand the form of life of primitive people so that although he records their activities, he does not understand the *way* that they speak, the

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<sup>55</sup> Aspects of Wittgenstein’s inheritance of the Jewish and Hebrew tradition, which may be linked to his interest in the pre-rational, is being explored by Naomi Scheman. She stated in *Women’s Philosophy Review* 23 (2000, p. 23), that she is working on a volume of essays: *Shifting Ground: Margins, Diasporas and the Reading of Wittgenstein*.

form of life that they lead. His attitude to the form of life of 'the savages' is a mistaken attitude. For Wittgenstein, Frazer has a false theory of magic. Frazer supposes that primitive tribes are engaged in instrumental or effective action to achieve certain ends. He assimilates their practices to the practices of his own scientific society, which explains actions in terms of cause and effect. Wittgenstein quotes Frazer endorsing theoretic-explanatory reason, but seemingly ignores the final phrase which links the errors of the 'primitive' tribe with the errors any of us might make:

"their errors were ... simply hypotheses, justifiable at the time when they were propounded, but which a fuller experience has proved to be inadequate. It is only by the successive testing of hypothesis and the rejection of the false that truth is at last elicited. After all, what we call truth is only the hypothesis which has been found to work best. Therefore in reviewing the opinions and practices of ruder ages and races we shall do well to look with leniency upon their errors as inevitable slips made in the search for truth, and to give them the benefit of that indulgence which we ourselves may one day stand in need of."(Frazer, quoted R.F., p. 120 n.1)

Against Frazer, Wittgenstein argues that those who pray to a Rain-King in Africa do not expect their ceremony of the Rain-King to produce the effect that rain comes 'otherwise they would do it in the dry periods of the year when the land is "a parched and arid desert." ' (R.F., p. 137) They

clearly do not have the hypothesis that the ceremony of the Rain-King will cause rain to fall. That they perform the ceremony in March when the rain begins, regardless of the supposed divine intervention, defeats this instrumentalist interpretation. Wittgenstein points out that 'it never does become plausible that people do all this out of sheer stupidity (*Dummheit*)'. When the 'savage' needs to use instrumental action he does so:

The same savage, who stabs the picture of his enemy apparently in order to kill him really builds his hut out of wood and carves his arrow skilfully and not in effigy.

(R.F., p. 125)

If the 'savage' needs to use the law of cause and effect, he does so. He brings about the effect that the hut is built and that the arrow is sharp by interacting with the material world. This means it is incredible that 'primitive man' understands the world so little that he thinks that rain can be produced by the ceremony of rain-making in the same way that sharp arrows can be produced by the action of the law of cause and effect. Skill in managing practical life is not likely to be successful in some cases, and entirely mistaken in others. When the member of the tribe needs to be practical, he can be practical.

The ceremony of the Rain-King is instead part of a religious attitude to life-threatening events such as the absence of the rain. The religious attitude is to accept God's power and to pray within the grain of things.



The timing of the ceremony indicates that the member of the supposedly 'primitive' tribe is aware of Wittgenstein's insight that:

*How*<sup>56</sup> things are in the world is a matter of complete indifference for what is higher. God does not reveal himself in the world. (T.6.432)

The coming of rain is an expression of God's power which the primitive tribe rightly expect in the rainy season. Frazer's view could be compared to the supposition that the fruits collected for the Harvest Festival in Christianity are placed in church to ensure that food should last through the winter. It is absurd to us to think that a religious gesture could be interpreted in this way, but this is how Wittgenstein suggests Frazer interprets the religious gesture he describes. Wittgenstein shows how such practices overlap with our own and so fall within the human. To understand the intention of those who pray to the rain-god we need to understand that:

An intention is embedded in its situation, in human customs and institutions. The activity of intending demonstrates a human form of life. In seeing the customs in which intending is embedded, we see the varying norms for the activity which expresses the intention. (P.I.337)

To show us the road from error to truth, Wittgenstein uses '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*'. He writes:

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<sup>56</sup> Italics in original.

*Der begriff der 'übersichtlichen Darstellung' ist für uns grundlegender Bedeutung. Er bezeichnet unsere Darstellungsform, die Art wie wir die Dinge sehen. (Eine Art der 'Weltanschauung' wie sie scheinbar für unsere Zeit typisch ist. Spengler.)*

*Diese übersichtliche Darstellung vermittelt das Verständnis, welches eben darin besteht, daß wir die 'Zusammenhänge sehen.' Daher die Wichtigkeit des Findens von Zwischengliedern.<sup>57</sup>*

For us the conception of a clear view is basic.<sup>58</sup> It denotes the form of our representation, the way we see things. (A kind of 'World-view' as it is apparently typical of our time. Spengler)

This clear view makes possible that understanding which consists just in the fact that we 'see the connections'. Hence the importance of finding *connecting links*. (R.F., p. 133)

I follow Wittgenstein in taking '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*' as basic to writing and seeing things – and in this case, to the reading of his text. I

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<sup>57</sup> Wittgenstein goes on to discuss briefly '*Zwischengliedern*', 'intermediate links' as used in evolutionary theory (R.F., p. 133)

<sup>58</sup> Corrected, usually translated 'perspicuous presentation is fundamental'.

note that he uses the simple word '*Dinge*' to show that this approach can deal with what is not understood in 'ordinary life'. His emphasis on '*Zusammenhänge*', the way things hang together, and '*Zwischengliedern*' intermediate links, shows the necessary skill in putting things together in such a way that our understanding is changed. This requires an accurate selection and presentation.

I have provided an explanation of '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*' in my introductory chapter. I now expand this by differing examples which suggest the layers of meaning of this term, which is very important to Wittgenstein. An academic paper may be preceded by an '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*'. This would be a preliminary paragraph which gives a clear synopsis of the area to be covered in the text. The '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*' would be well-structured, visually clear, and well-presented. A cognate use is the '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*' in mathematics, in which the relationships of symbols and definitions may be presented as equations, algebraically or as diagrams. The phrase may also be used for items on display, but not normally for items in general museums. It is more likely to be used in a science museum, where the exhibit demonstrates the working of the object displayed. In an anatomical display the strata or layers of a human might be displayed showing the inter-connections between skin, muscle, blood vessels, and bones. In a display of mechanical objects, there might be an '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*' of an internal combustion engine. In such a model, the cylinders are replaced by a see-through layer to make visible the sequence

of the combustion cycle. On show are the pistons working up and down as the exhaust and the inlet valves open in succession and the petrol is ignited by the spark plug. My examples show how the phrase is useful to Wittgenstein in that it draws attention to connecting links – *Zwischengliedern* – which are crucial to Wittgenstein's idea of how language works. Wittgenstein's '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*' shows the relationality between language games, gestures, rituals and practices which forms our overlapping lives. His disaggregation of language is analogous to, and yet differs from, Kierkegaard's breaking up of the self into an interior view which shows series of forming and reforming relationships.

Wittgenstein also uses the word '*Weltanschauung*' – world-view or philosophy of life. In mentioning Spengler he links his work to the contemporary ideas of the decline of the West, and the sense of a specific historical period for his writing.<sup>59</sup>

I select two examples of Wittgenstein helping us to see our way about: his remarks on photographs, and burning in effigy; and his remarks on the female practice of adoption. The effigy and the picture Wittgenstein writes of are shadows of the reality of the subjects; the practice of adoption is a shadow of the practice of giving birth. The shadowy double is the symbolic idea which is manipulated. Here the effigy and the photograph, the doubles of the subjects, are manipulated. (R.F., p. 123)

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<sup>59</sup> These ideas are explored by Clack (1999, Chapter 9).

The symbolisation works to 'model' the projected action. The symbol carries the performance, as I show below. Equally the history of a practice works as a 'double' of the practice, creating the atmosphere which gives meaning.

Wittgenstein does not give an 'interior' view of the practices of 'primitive' tribes but presents their practices and the symbols they use in a way aimed at changing our understanding through demonstrating relationality. He gives what might be termed an external view in order to show us how life might be for them understood through how life is for us. Ways in which we can persuade someone to see something differently include bringing new aspects of things to a person's notice, 'placing the problematic thing alongside an object of comparison, by setting it in different surroundings.' (Clack, 1999, p. 61) If a practice with which we have become unfamiliar is brought into a familiar ambit, we will see it differently. It will lose some of its exotic quality and become more everyday, not assimilable to our everyday practices, but not entirely different from them. The skill is to choose the object of comparison which indicates to the reader which quality of the exotic thing is being clarified. Wittgenstein places the practice of burning in effigy in relation to the practice of kissing the picture of a loved one. (R.F., p. 123) He states that neither of these gestures can be understood as instrumental actions aimed at achieving an effect on an object. Rather the aim is inward towards the person investing the object with the attributes of the person loved or hated: 'we act in this way and then feel satisfied.' Kissing the picture of a loved

one is the more familiar gesture. The action of kissing the picture is not based on the belief that this will have an effect on the loved one, nor on the picture. It is a performance of affection, an expression of affection. Looking at a picture of a loved one denotes affection. Many people have photographs of their loved ones around them at home or on their desks at work. Kissing the picture is a more intense action of affection, which aims at satisfying a need to act the love. The history of this practice can be traced to the kissing of religious icons as an act of faith.

Burning in effigy is a more powerful and dramatic practice that we prefer to associate with a primitive form of life. Yet this is selective memory. It indicates how we class as 'primitive' practices that are uncongenial to our modern sensibility. These primitive practices survive. On President Bush's visit to London in 2004, an effigy of him was toppled in Trafalgar Square, as a response to the toppling of a statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. In October 2003 effigies of gypsies in a caravan were burnt in Firlie in Sussex. In Lewes, four miles away, in 2001, a straw Osama Bin Laden was burnt. An effigy of the footballer David Beckham was lynched after his sending-off in the World Cup 1998. Effigies of Guy Fawkes are burnt on Bonfire night. The 'primitive' custom is not unknown to us. We understand the gesture. Here the performance is of hatred. There is no belief that actual harm is done to the person burnt in effigy. The gesture of hatred is the hatred displayed. The burning of Guy Fawkes seems a mere joke since he died four hundred years ago, and yet the survival reminds us of the time when the burning of a man (or, more

commonly, of a 'witch') was an accepted punishment, and even a cause for noisy celebration. The night processions in Sussex, the 'lynching' of the sportsman, the effigy in London, show how fresh to the memory are such enactments of hatred.

The history of this practice creates the atmosphere of fear around it, as the history of the practice of kissing the icons creates an atmosphere of faith around kissing the picture. Wittgenstein writes:

The representation (*Darstellung*) of a wish is, *eo ipso*, the representation (*Darstellung*) of its realization.

But magic brings a wish to representation (*Darstellung*); it expresses a wish. (R.F., p. 125)

The display of love is in itself the love which is felt. The gesture of love is the love performed. The display of hatred is the hatred felt. The gesture of hatred is the hatred performed. The 'magic' lies in personifying the lifeless objects, or attributing to them the desired attributes. The magic is the acting out of the wish. It is expressed in gesture. The way that the person with the picture or the effigy 'takes' her experience of the kiss or the destruction is what gives the action meaning. Relating the gestures of love and the gestures of hatred brings us to a clearer view of both passions; and a clearer view of our interaction with the material world. Such practices may strike us as irrational in that they are not purposive acts aiming at particular ends. But Wittgenstein is persuading us not to let us be confined by rationality – to make an imaginative leap in

understanding, and thus to move towards understanding some of our own actions.

Wittgenstein's focus on gesture is amplified in his remarks on adoption. Here Frazer and Wittgenstein are focusing on a female practice. 'In the ancient rites we have the use of an extremely developed gesture-language.' (R.F., p.135) In seeing the actions of primitive peoples as gestures, Wittgenstein re-presents Frazer's account of unfamiliar practices. He challenges the differentiation between primitive societies and technologically advanced societies by showing the force of the symbolic in both.

Frazer writes:

'a woman will take a boy whom she intends to adopt and push or pull him through her clothes; ever afterwards he is regarded as her very son, and inherits the whole property of his adoptive parents.'<sup>60</sup> (Frazer, quoted in R.F., p. 125)

Wittgenstein writes:

Baptism as washing.—There is a mistake (*ein Irrtum*) only if magic is interpreted scientifically.

If the adoption of a child proceeds in such a way that the mother draws it from under her clothes, it is surely insane

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<sup>60</sup> This refers to a practice which, according to Frazer, took place in Bulgaria and among the Bosnian Turks. (R.F. p.125, n. 3)



to believe that an *error* is present and that she believes she has given birth to the child. (R.F., p. 125)

According to Wittgenstein, Frazer supposes that the adoptive mother thinks that pulling the child through her clothes causes the child to become her natural son. Wittgenstein demonstrates the symbolic nature of the act by linking it to Baptism. In Christianity, the gesture of Baptism symbolises the washing away of original sin. It is a religious performance which enables the child to belong to the family of God. Christ was baptised in the river Jordan at the start of his ministry. There should be no question of anyone believing the child is actually being washed by the baptismal water, as there should be no question of the adoptive mother believing that she has given birth to the child. As those present at a Baptism should accept the symbolic meaning of the gesture, so should the adoptive mother.<sup>61</sup> The ceremony in which the child is pulled through the *clothes* makes explicit that the child is not part of the adoptive mother's body, but is part of her apparel in life, she can now present herself as the mother of the child. The ceremony allows the child to become part of her family. Wittgenstein exhibits the relation between the practices. As the reader sees the relation, she sees the ceremonial nature of our gestures of acceptance into the Christian community, and the ceremonial nature of the

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<sup>61</sup> Those who belong to the Baptist church believe that immersion of those who are old enough to make a personal profession of faith in Jesus Christ has the symbolic function of setting the seal on this faith.

‘primitive’ gesture of acceptance. Learning to understand a form of life other than our own, is learning to understand our form of life. Wittgenstein is showing us how we relate to exotic practices, what it is about these practices that impresses us what we share with ‘primitive peoples.’ (Clack 1999, p. 95-6)

Wittgenstein writes:

So you are saying that human agreement (*Übereinstimmung*) decides what is true and what is false?”

—It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions (*Meinungen*) but in form of life (*Lebensform*).

(P.I.241)

The word ‘*Übereinstimmung*’ contains the word ‘*stimm*’. An initial meaning here is ‘right’, as in ‘*stimmt so*’ – ‘that’s right’. Beyond this, it also refers to the key, or tone of speech, indicating harmony with prevailing opinion. Humans are not just agreeing. They are agreeing to tune in to each other, to speak in a certain way. This is not just agreeing in what they think, (*meinen* – to think), but agreeing in mood, or frame of mind, agreeing in a voiced pattern of living. (*Stimme* also means voice.) Within the history of philosophy, ‘*Übereinstimmung*’ is a word used for the Renaissance idea of harmony with the spheres. If we find something beautiful, we concur in a sense of beauty. There is harmony of judgement. For Wittgenstein the harmony indicated is not with an imaginary community, but with an actual community.

Here, human beings may say true or false things about the practices of baptism and adoption. *Pace* Wittgenstein, Frazer may falsely say that the mother believes she has given birth to the child. A non-Christian may falsely say that the point of Baptism is to wash the child. The agreement in *language* is agreement in the use of gesture and ceremonial to indicate acceptance. Engaging in rituals is part of our attitude to life, to each other – ‘the characteristic feature of ritualistic action is not at all a view, an opinion ...’.(R.F. p. 129) Opinions are inept here, as Wittgenstein shows in his ‘Lectures on Religious Belief’ :

Why shouldn't one form of life culminate in an *utterance*<sup>62</sup> of belief in a Last Judgment? But I couldn't say either 'Yes' or 'No' to the statement that there will be such a thing. Nor 'Perhaps', nor 'I'm not so sure.' (Wittgenstein, 1966, p. 58)

Wittgenstein's responses given here, and rejected, are examples of the expression of opinions. The *speaking* of a belief in the Last Judgement is a part of a form of life, as is the performance of the ceremonies of adoption and of Baptism. The adoptive mother need not have the erroneous beliefs ascribed to her by Frazer, but she does have the belief which is part of her form of life, namely the belief that meaning may be symbolically expressed. Those attending the Baptism ceremony have the same belief. Both ceremonies are 'utterances' in the way that

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<sup>62</sup> My italics.

Wittgenstein uses this term of the Last Judgement. They are culminations of patterns in related forms of life.

Today in England, the naming ceremony may well take place in the Registry Office rather than at the Baptismal font. The change in the outward trappings of ceremony leaves its central core untouched. The telling of so many anecdotes of parents arguing until the last instant evidences the importance of the occasion. The naming of the child is a powerful ritual performance. In engaging in naming, in providing an official record of the child's existence, the mother or the parents start her engagement in the form of life of our bureaucratic society. Uttering the name is inescapable, and once named, the child becomes enmeshed in practices surrounding her as a named individual.

## **Conclusion**

In some orchestral performances one set of stringed instruments is arranged at the front of the stage directly facing another, so that in the course of the piece they sometimes play against each other, sometimes with each other. Both sets contribute to the tensions and the harmony of the music. The relation of my thinking to Wittgenstein's might be so pictured. Female ideas both fit with, and disturb, Wittgensteinian ideas.

Although Cavarero's writing appears in this chapter solely in her representation of the Demeter myth, her influence on my methodology is evident throughout. Her method of reading against the grain to rediscover

the creative force of the mother is a powerful antidote to the forgetting of the mother I find in Wittgenstein. Equally, like Cavarero, I seek traces of female resistance which resist inadequate representation.

Although the beginning of this chapter is negative in that I demonstrate that Wittgenstein did silence and exclude women, I claim that such an exclusion is a contingent feature of, rather than necessary to, his philosophy. My positive strategy is to read his work 'as a woman' and to use some openings provided by Wittgenstein's ideas to affirm the different voices of women and mothers. I investigate Wittgenstein's form of life as a route to this. Since a form of life 'underlies' language games, this concept is important for my project of introducing the language games of the mother. I exemplify female and maternal practices. I interpose a different note to the chapter in Cavarero's re-presentation of Demeter.

Wittgenstein's '*übersichtlichen Darstellung*' has the power to offer an understanding of female differences and typically female forms of life, within the human. Wittgenstein examines the symbolic order to bring to light hidden likenesses, and to disturb accepted analogies, within an overlapping series of features in *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*. The idea of a defamiliarising strangeness plays a part in this. Wittgenstein reminds us, that the: 'aspects of things that are most important to us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity.'<sup>63</sup> (*Einfachheit und Alltäglichkeit*). (P.I.129) Wittgenstein teaches us to see relationships

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<sup>63</sup> 'Everydayness' may be a better translation.

between the familiar and the strange. I supplement Wittgenstein's writing on tribal differences by introducing female differences. Females are not a separate tribe in the way that, for example, the Nemi are a separate tribe. But there are specific female practices, customs and ways of speaking as there are Nemi practices, customs and ways of speaking, so considering Wittgenstein writing on the 'primitive' practices provides an opening to using Wittgenstein to access typically female forms of life. I show how Wittgenstein's approach to differences in practices here, when seen in conjunction with Cavarero's approach, may open up the philosophical terrain to female difference.

In the *Remarks on Frazer*, the 'primitives' are engaged in ritual activities. They are not engaged with each other, but engaged in what they do and say. Wittgenstein contrasts his viewpoint with Frazer's in order to offer a different understanding of what they do and say. I have adopted a parallel method in that I have taken a female viewpoint to emphasise female relationality, and female practices.

In my next chapter, I introduce the philosophy of Kierkegaard. Both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein are concerned with points of view in the texts that I have selected for this thesis. Both Wittgenstein's forms of life and Kierkegaard's existence-spheres show selves shaped by their surroundings and shaping their surroundings. I write in the figure of the mother to their ideas.

## Chapter 5: Difference in Kierkegaard: Spaces for the Mother.

### Introduction

Although Wittgenstein rarely acknowledges philosophical influences, he held a deep respect for the thought of Kierkegaard. Janik and Toulmin relate that in his early preoccupations in Vienna he reminded his contemporaries of the Danish philosopher. He learnt Danish himself<sup>64</sup>, and paid Haecker to translate Kierkegaard's works, presumably so that they would become better known, as he regarded Kierkegaard as the 'most important thinker of the nineteenth century.' (Janik and Toulmin, 1973, p. 26) In this chapter, I explore this influence; and bring in the mother *via* a re-reading of Kierkegaard.

Wittgenstein writes in short aphorisms, at each point forcing the reader back on her own thoughts. Kierkegaard writes seductively, and at length, drawing the reader in to his vivid evocations, but simultaneously making the reader suspect a distancing irony in what is written. Like Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard writes outside the philosophical tradition of his time, paradoxically because his focus is so much on the interior of his characters. The view from the outside is helpful for thinking against the philosophical tradition, as I think against the philosophical tradition, in a different way, in much of my writing on the figure of the mother.

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<sup>64</sup> H.D.P.Lee relates this in his memoir of Wittgenstein, noted by Creegan (1989).

Kierkegaard self-consciously introduces female viewpoints and forms of life into his philosophy, and sketches an alternative idea of the self for both men and women. Having introduced the female *to* Wittgenstein, I now introduce the female *in* Kierkegaard. In this I continue to follow Cavarero's method of seeking out and building on the residual traces of the female in philosophy. My argument here continues my depiction of differences: human differences and sexual differences. The aim of this chapter is to bring points of view, that is, subjectivity, into my discussion, and thus to argue for a different female points of view.

I continue to build towards a different thinking of the figure of the mother through searching out the female in Kierkegaard's works. This chapter works by juxtaposition, comparison and analogy. I use the analogy of shadows throughout, as I seek out shadowy females and a shadowy subjectivity. The starting point for this analogy is the description of the shadows on the wall in Plato's cave. Since a shadow will disappear if a light is directly shone upon it, I do not approach shadowy women and mothers directly. Developing John Wisdom's idea of a hidden pattern of meaning, I show a different pattern which emerges as I introduce and add to female meanings in Kierkegaard. Throughout I discuss the interpretation of symbols, bringing in, and highlighting female meanings.

Kierkegaard writes on women, and so brings women, albeit in a shadowy form, on to the philosophical stage. Mainly Kierkegaard writes on women in relation to men. Whilst the only mother that Kierkegaard



presents is Sarah in the biblical story of Abraham and Isaac, he raises a different symbol of the self in which experiencing relationality is significant. Since I see the mother as a relational figure, Kierkegaard's symbol is important to me. I move towards the symbol of the mother through considering the female subjectivity obliquely suggested by Kierkegaard.

This chapter is structured into three parts. In my first part, I make a transition. In *Moving from Wittgenstein to Kierkegaard*, I start by drawing Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard together by making some points of comparison between them. I return to, a *Gjentagelse* or retake, of the inner/outer distinction. I move on to focus on some specific resemblances and points of difference. My second part, *Kierkegaard's Existence-Spheres*, provides my reading of the idea of an existence-sphere, and focuses on the female in Volume 1 of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or*. My third part, *The Female Relational Self as Mother*, employs Battersby's feminist ontology as a stimulus for my ideas of a relational maternal self. I seek out the submerged figure of the mother in Kierkegaard. I focus here on his reworking of Aristophanes' myth of the 'rounded creatures' in *In Vino Veritas*. I close with my re-reading of the 'Attunement' to *Fear and Trembling*, where Kierkegaard reworks the biblical story of Isaac, son of Sarah.

### **Moving from Wittgenstein to Kierkegaard**

Placing Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard in consecutive chapters makes apparent to the reader a multiplicity of perspectives. It shows

Kierkegaard's focus on relationality between individuals and between aspects of fractured selves; and Wittgenstein's focus on relationality between practices and language games. Through the pseudonyms' points of view, Kierkegaard's characters reveal themselves relating to each other, persuading each other, admonishing each other, and commenting on each other. His characters are not engaged in everyday life, but are shaped by each other. The people whom Wittgenstein describes are engaged in activities.

Kierkegaard shows viewpoints from the 'inside'. He writes of, and within, the subjective attitude of his 'characters' to their subjective lives. From the outside, their placing in their existence-sphere is not apparent. Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith (see below) is not distinguishable from his fellows as he walks home from work. By contrast, Wittgenstein shows viewpoints from the 'outside'. He states clearly: "*Ein 'innerer Vorgang' bedarf äußerer Kriterien.*" 'An "inner process" must have outward criteria.'(P.I.580) Wittgenstein shows the symbols and practices which indicate a viewpoint, or form of life. Given that men and women often use the same symbols and engage in the same practices, it is helpful for me to supplement Wittgenstein's writing with Kierkegaardian insights to introduce a distinctive subject position for women and for mothers. I suggest that Kierkegaard's focus on the individual brings to light an interiority signified by a female presence which may be disruptive of

Wittgenstein's language games. I suggest that Kierkegaard influenced Wittgenstein in his concept of the significance of the viewpoint, or of 'seeing as', as discussed in Chapter 4, but that the earlier philosopher paid more attention to female viewpoints.

The female 'haunts' Kierkegaard as he writes of the torments of mental life. Wittgenstein places such torments at a distance. In Kierkegaard a female presence has a disruptive force. Neither the subjectivity of the female characters nor that of the men who are haunted by them, can be described as 'the given' in a Wittgensteinian way. Rather inhabiting an existence sphere offers a shading of the given. The experience of Kierkegaard's characters is mediated by their situations. Kierkegaard is not suggesting a series of language games but an interiority that he gestures towards in language. For him, language is not always the main determinant. He suggests secrets that cannot be communicated in language, to which language can only point. His men and women do not rationally adopt their frame of mind, it is cast upon them by their passion. Céline Léon points out that Kierkegaard's women are frightening not because they are rejected, but because they disturb the subjectivity of their errant lovers: 'far from being outside the masculine, the feminine inhabits it as otherness, as difference, as disruption or anomie'. (Léon, 1997, p.171)

The forms of life exemplified by Wittgenstein do not pay heed to 'feminine otherness, difference, disruption nor anomie'. For him, we can only develop an inner life through deploying the public criteria of an inner

life, deploying this way of talking and acting. Conflicting emotions, passions, desires, torments do not so much lie outside language games, as lie alongside them unnoticed. For him the individual struggles to emerge from the bewitchment of language, he does not struggle to overcome desires. In Wittgenstein there is agreement in language, learning and dialogue but no consideration of relational dependency, no struggle with a captivating passion, no recognition of damaging power differentials.

### **Specific Resemblances and Points of Difference**

I begin by the symbols used in the approach to the interiority of Cartesian philosophy,<sup>65</sup> which Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard oppose. The Cartesian thinker turns inward to discover truth by the 'clear and distinct ideas' provided by his own reason. He withdraws himself from his body, and from 'the other'. I discuss three symbols useful to Wittgenstein and to Kierkegaard. These are the labyrinth; the physical pressure of intellectual difficulties; and the fisherman.

Kierkegaard describes the isolation of the Cartesian thinker in the early part of *Johannes Climacus or De Omnibus Dubitandum Est*. (Kierkegaard, 2000b) This short piece finds echoes in images of

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<sup>65</sup> Mooney suggests that although Kierkegaard exalts the passions, he does not oppose reason *per se*. Beneath the surface there is always some specific view of reason that is discounted or deflated. Mooney, Edward (1998) *Repetition: Getting the World Back*. Wittgenstein provides the famed Private Language argument to defeat the idea of the truth of the 'inner' realm. I do not here explore the epistemological arguments.

intellectual difficulties and solutions used by Wittgenstein. Kierkegaard narrates the story of an unusual child who grew up deprived of society, and living entirely within his imagination ‘Whenever he suspected a labyrinth he had to find a way.’ (p. 130). The image of a labyrinth appears also in Wittgenstein:

Language is a labyrinth of paths. You approach from one side and you know your way about; you approach the same place from another side and no longer know your way about.’ (P.I.203)

The image of a labyrinth provides an indication that neither Kierkegaard nor Wittgenstein is a system-builder. Neither philosopher aims at finding foundations and building a conceptual edifice. Coming to understand both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein is more similar to learning to know the way around a complicated and uncertain route.

The formative influence on Kierkegaard’s Johannes Climacus was his (Johannes Climacus’) father who knew how to render as his (the father’s) knowledge as ‘unimportant and valueless as possible.’ (Kierkegaard, 2000b, p.131) The philosophical father’s modesty is reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s Preface to *Philosophical Investigations*:

It is not impossible in that it should fall to the lot of this work, in its poverty and in the darkness of this time, to bring light to one brain or another—but of course it is not likely. (Wittgenstein, 2000, Preface)

By contrast, one of Kierkegaard's striking images is helpful in clarifying a picture of the self that is the antithesis of Wittgenstein's picture. Speaking through the pseudonym of the aesthete, a 'character' from *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard writes:

The exterior, then, is indeed the object of our scrutiny but not of our interest. In the same way, the fisherman sits and looks fixedly at the float; the float, however, does not interest him at all, but rather the movements down at the bottom. (E/O, p. 174)

Wittgenstein's focus on the body rather than on hidden 'mental processes', the float rather than the hidden depths, suggests to the interlocutor that Wittgenstein is a 'behaviourist in disguise'. (P.I.307) However, Wittgenstein is not interested in behaviour as such, as the fisherman is not interested in the float, he is interested in meaning, but not A.'s (the aesthete's) hidden meaning, in the depths. The behaviourist, in splitting off behaviour from mental processes, that is the float from the line, has already made 'the decisive movement in the conjuring trick.' Wittgenstein does not accept the picture of the external self and the hidden depths. He does believe that 'the human body is the best picture of the human soul'. (P.I., p. 178) He advises us '*...denk nicht, sondern schau!*' '*...don't think, but look!*' (P.I.66) The verb '*schauen*'- to look, is close to the noun '*schau*' 'show' as in the expression '*etwas zur schau stellen*', to make a show of something. The body is able to express (show) all the meaning there is to those who look.

Another aspect of the comparison of Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein arises from attitudes to the 'outer'. The surface is more favourably seen by Wittgenstein than by Kierkegaard. In his review *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age* (2000d) Kierkegaard contrasts the public, outer life with the life of the individual in modernity. The outer life is the life of 'chatter'. (p. 265) It is a life in which the individual reflects his time, and is subject to a levelling which is 'abstraction's victory over individuals'. (p. 258) In the modern age, the abstraction is the public, which is composed of many individuals, but which relates to none. There is no collective life as in more heroic ages, and thus no community support for the individual. The individual is imprisoned by the reflections of him by his associates and by his own reflection of himself. (p. 257) Kierkegaard contrasts this life with the 'separateness of individual inwardness in the religious life.' (p. 259) The individual who has turned inward 'in quiet contentment' has changed his situation so that although he still belongs to the 'decadent' modern age, he is not preoccupied by the externalities of the age, he has freed himself from its snare. (pp. 265-6) He is preoccupied by himself and his relationship to God.

This review, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and the Present Age* (2000d) published under Kierkegaard's own name, suggests a way of engaging with, and complicating, Wittgenstein's idea of a form of life. Wittgenstein does not commend turning inward. He does not admit the private in the sense of the unspeakable. He writes in the *Tractatus*: 'Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly. Everything

that can be put into words can be put clearly.' (T.4.116) He does not intend to restrict us to reflecting the public sphere in an empty chattering way. The private he denies is a private sphere out of reach of language. In engaging in a form of life we are not, or not necessarily, thoughtlessly reflecting our age. The 'outer' for Wittgenstein is not the 'public' as it is for Kierkegaard in his review. His sense of 'the public' is not a derogatory sense. For him all is open to view (P.I.126) in a helpful way, a way that allows understanding of the human, and of different societies, for those who see 'aright.' The 'outer' for Wittgenstein is what can be seen but this is not a simple seeing, a 'public' seeing. It is an active seeing of what 'lies open'. Seeing a symbol is a distinct form of seeing which leads to a truth shown by the symbol. Seeing a ritual similarly demonstrates a truth about a way of life. The symbolic and the ritual have about them a performativity. It is not that the performance carries the truth. It is more that the performance is a truth which cannot be shown in any other way. In looking at the rituals, symbols, practices, and a multiplicity of language games from the outside, we see what a form of life might be like from the inside.

This is not at all to ascribe Kierkegaardian ideas of subjectivity to Wittgenstein. Wittgenstein's view that 'nothing is hidden' (P.I.435) in grammar is part of his view of the importance of symbols and rituals for expressing meaning. In a form of life humans use symbols and rituals to engage with the world as it is created through their practices. The different viewpoints that Wittgenstein presents are not so inward as



Kierkegaard's. A simple way of expressing this is to suggest that a Wittgensteinian viewpoint is more of an outlook *on* a practice or an activity. It is directed outward, but does not remain 'outer' in a superficial sense.

Returning to the inner, for both Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein the language of gesture and expression is highly significant. They have a similar regard for the power of the secret, hidden in wordless communication. The gesture expresses the secret which lies outside spoken language. In *Fear and Trembling* Kierkegaard emphasises through four retellings that the manner in which Abraham carried out God's command is all-important. He is described as having a fatherly gaze changing to a mien of horror; a silent determination; a thoughtfulness changing to torment; and finally a calm changing to anguish. These retellings are interspersed with the mother weaning the child with a tender look; weaning the child quickly; weaning the child sorrowfully; and finally weaning the child looking towards the future. In each case, the author places the meaning of the retelling in the expression of the face, the way the action is performed. (F.T., pp. 44-48) He shows how religious action depends on the ceremony of the action. In Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* the killing of the priest-king is only religious if performed ceremonially. (R.F., p. 119) Equally, the sacrifice guided by the choice of lots is a valid sacrifice only if the actions of choosing lots are ceremonially carried out. (R.F., pp. 145-51) The performances here display a ceremonial power which carries the meaning.

## Kierkegaard's Existence-Spheres

Kierkegaard's existence-spheres are, in the main, presented through 'narrative portraits' of individuals inhabiting these spheres. (Mooney, 1996, p. 43) Mooney also writes of Kierkegaard's 'concrete poetic-literary portraits (1996, p. xi); and the self in Kierkegaard as a 'narrative centre of gravity' (1996, p. 99). Kierkegaard presents an inner view of the subjects of these portraits by writing 'through' them by the use of pseudonyms. In writing *as*, for example in *Either/Or* Vol.1, the seducer, Johannes' aesthetic existence-sphere, he gives the reader an 'inside' view of his 'take' on life. Kierkegaard's exaggerated perspectivalism alerts the reader to the point of view of the author. Commenting on his writing strategy elsewhere, Kierkegaard ironically diminishes his role: 'I am just as little, precisely just as little, the editor Victor Eremita, as I am the Seducer or the Judge.' (Kierkegaard, 2000a, p. 243) The characters speak for him, illustrating the joys and sorrows of each existence-sphere. The 'characters' interact with each other, and reappear in later Kierkegaard texts. From the Preface of *Either/Or* Vol. 1, where the 'editor', Victor Eremita, draws attention to the curious story of how these papers came into his possession, and throughout the work Kierkegaard continually makes the reader aware of the pseudonymous writer, and thus of the writer's perspective.

The existence-sphere is, as we say, a world to itself. As Kierkegaard's existence-spheres are all spheres of subjective reflection, there is no space for the empirical. Kierkegaard distinguishes between

‘Gestalt’ and form. He does not suggest that we look at the world and see it in a certain way, as it were, but rather he suggests emergent patterning. The ‘characters’ create their worlds as they inhabit them, and reality emerges as the characters engage with their experiences of the world. Events in these stories – the engagement in *Either/Or*, the appearance of the ram as a substitute sacrifice in *Fear and Trembling* – are part of the history of the characters. Kierkegaard shows an inward subjective truth not reducible to the objective truth of what has happened. Each narrative portrait is concerned with how an ‘existing subject *in concreto* relates himself to the truth.’ (C.U.P.<sup>66</sup> p. 201). The truth is not an objective certainty in the world but is a ‘redoubling’ in which the individual reflects back his own existence to himself. The self changes in reflection and in so doing changes what it reflects.

Kierkegaard’s existence-spheres are distinct: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. Each indicates a different point of view, thus suggesting he influenced Wittgenstein in his stress on point of view. Beyond this, each indicates a different way of taking experience, or experiencing life, a different subjectivity. Kierkegaard understands the self as changing through choices, this is a self in process. The stages are not in sequence but are rather placed

not against some easily accessible standard, but in  
openness to one another, in openness to the other’s

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<sup>66</sup> C.U.P. p. 201 indicates the page number in Kierkegaard, Søren (2000a) *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*.

situation and placement, and in critical openness to opposing points of view. (Mooney, 1996, p. 7)

Within Kierkegaardian subjectivity there is an element of repetition. The Danish word for 'repetition', *Gjentagelse*, also means 'retake' as in a cinematic second or third 'take'. From the existence-spheres, I focus mainly on the aesthetic and the religious, which have most relevance for alternative thinking of the self. Repetition comes from actually repeating the experience and confining oneself to the actual as does the aesthete, Johannes with his repeated seductions; or from repeating the experience in reflection before God as does Abraham. The aesthetic or religious meaning comes with the repetition which contributes to the subjectivity of the protagonists. Yet, Kierkegaard makes the idea of repetition more complex by also suggesting that repetition is impossible or paradoxical, since it is out of 'repetition' that the new emerges, and the self emerges or is born. (Mooney, 1996, pp. 28-34)

Kierkegaardian women are in the shadows of their male lovers. A helpful motif for this chapter is the shadows on the wall seen by the bound prisoners in Plato's myth of the cave. Julia Annas provides a useful summary:

Imagine, says Socrates, prisoners in an underground cave with a fire behind them, bound so they can only see the shadows (*eikones*) on the wall in front of them, cast by puppets manipulated on a wall behind them. They think

that this is all there is to see; if released from their bonds and forced to turn round to the fire and the puppets they become bewildered and are happier left in their original state. They are even angry with anyone who tries to tell them how pitiful their position is. Only a few can bear to realise that the shadows are only shadows cast by the puppets; and they begin the journey of liberation that leads past the fire and right out of the cave to the real world. At first they are dazzled here, and can bear to see real objects only in reflection and indirectly, but then they can look at them directly in the light of the sun, and can even look at the sun itself. (Annas, 1981, p. 252)

This works at several levels. In offering an alternative to the main body of Western philosophy, Kierkegaard (like Wittgenstein) was attending to shadows. Kierkegaard's depictions of subjectivity can be read as shadowy interiors of forms of life, but forms of life themselves depend on the shadowy history of the practices which compose them, as I have shown. In projecting existence-spheres Kierkegaard was lighting little discussed arenas of life. At another level, women can be seen as the shadows on the wall, projected as an illusion, and unbearable to the hero of philosophy returning from the sunshine.

The following reading of the existence-spheres highlights the importance of females, and of the viewpoints of the author and the reader. The young women in the aesthetic existence-sphere are in love with men,

and their existence is shaped by this love. Life in the aesthetic existence sphere is thus symbolic of female relational dependency. In 'The Seducer's Diary', which forms a large part of *Either/Or* Volume 1, the seducer, Johannes, is an exemplar of an individual inhabiting an aesthetic existence-sphere. Mackey notes:

Traditionally 'aesthetic' has come to mean pertaining to beauty and the fine arts but in Kierkegaard it retains its original sense of '*aesthesis*', 'sense perception.' He defines what he calls the 'aesthetic' as a dimension of existence and as an overall design for living – by means of the immediate. (Mackey, 1971, p. 3)

Living in the immediate signifies living without reflection, absorbed in the flow of events, always seeking gratification of the latest desire. It is a 'mode of relating (or misrelating) to the world that...is incomplete, its melancholy sheen covering the deep indifference of despair.' (Mooney, 1996, p. 5) Like the Unhappiest Man, also depicted elsewhere in this volume, the aesthetic individual has his being outside himself. He is ruled by his desires. Johannes, Kierkegaard's 'author' of the 'Diary', strives to live in the immediate without reflection. He provides himself with the immediate by attempting to immerse himself in calculated and complex seductions of young girls, particularly Cordelia. Johannes is undialectical in that he does not think about his activities in any other light than that of moving towards the success of his selfish schemes.

For me, the story of Johannes and Cordelia suggests the evanescent nature of female subjectivity when seen from the point of view of male language and male language games, as created by Kierkegaard. Whereas Kierkegaard's 'character' Johannes' thoughts and feelings are vividly conveyed by his diary entries which constitute the whole of *Either/Or* Volume 1, (apart from one letter from Cordelia to her seducer), we only know of Cordelia's thoughts and feelings at one remove, through Johannes' account of them, and through her actions. As Kierkegaard makes us aware of the presence of the writer through his use of pseudonyms, so he makes us aware of ourselves as readers by the same device. Many would be repelled by Johannes' cold calculation of his best advantage, and in being so repelled we realise in ourselves the attraction of what we have read, of the aesthetic existence-sphere. As an author, Kierkegaard leaves the reader free to respond in accordance with her or his own point of view, and indeed, the reader is freed by the many-layered nature of the text.

The evanescent nature of female subjectivity, when seen from a male viewpoint, is again illustrated in Kierkegaard's chapter 'Silhouettes', written by the aesthete, 'A.' in *Either/Or* Volume 1. A's intention is to depict reflective sorrow in written portraits since it cannot be depicted artistically:

it is never really present but is continually in the process of becoming; the exterior, the visible is a matter of unimportance and indifference. (E/O,1, p. 172)

The Danish word used for silhouettes is '*Skyggerids*', literally 'shadow outlines.' The author emphasises that he is showing the dark side of life, which can only be seen when held up to the light, as a watermark on paper is only visible in the light. He aims to present an obscure sorrow for the benefit of the members of the mysterious society he addresses. A. begins by drawing this distinction in that he contrasts sorrow in repose, which is capable of artistic expression, with the reflective sorrow of the 'Silhouettes', a restless unstable sorrow, which is always in the process of becoming. The lack of solidity is an important feature of the Kierkegaardian self to which images of light and dark, of uncanny dawn and mysterious twilight are appropriate. A., the writer, explains his image of the silhouette:

If I pick up a silhouette, I have no impression of it, cannot arrive at an actual conception of it; only when I hold it toward the wall and do not look at it directly but at what appears on the wall do I see it. So it is also with the pictures I want to show here, an interior picture that does not become perceptible until I see through the exterior. Perhaps there is nothing striking about the exterior, but when I look through it, only then do I discover the interior picture which is what I want to show, an interior picture that is too delicate to be externally perceptible, since it is woven from the soul's faintest moods. (E/O,1, p. 173)



The image is again reminiscent of Plato's cave. The bound prisoners do not see reality. The objects in the cave firelight are puppets manipulated by unseen hands so that they appear to the prisoners. The prisoners see firelight reflections against a wall. For Plato there is *one* correct viewpoint, that of the freed prisoner who recognises that the firelight reflections are illusions.

By contrast, Kierkegaard suggests that there is no *one* correct viewpoint. The pictures of women which A. presents lack substantiality as do the firelight reflections. They are not seen with a direct gaze, but appear differently depending on the point of view of the reader. In one reading the silhouettes of women presented in Kierkegaard's work offer a narrative of women manipulated by their lovers, and their very insubstantiality makes their sorrow more moving. In other readings, in these portraits, the ironic Kierkegaard is the puppeteer; the bound prisoner is A., caught in the aesthetic existence-sphere; and the Silhouettes are the reflections that he deludes A. into seeing. Or Kierkegaard is himself a silhouette, a shadowy author continually writing and rewriting his disappointed love.

In A.'s portrait, these are selves without underlying solidity. As these selves relate to their lovers they take shape: their outlines emerging only via relationships to others. As Kierkegaard places them in A.'s writing, the Silhouettes echo each other, echo their literary selves. Their similarity suggests a multi-faceted idea of the subjectivity of the

'deceived' woman. Each story begins with betrayal and ends with restless sorrow, but as the women appear and disappear a shifting composite picture is created.

From the Silhouettes, I select Donna Elvira. As the reader is familiar with her name from the opera, *Don Giovanni*, she already has a past. In that she is surrounded by the music of the opera, she is already part of the staged illusion so much favoured by the pseudonymous author, the aesthete, A. The story is presented in the grand Romantic manner. Don Giovanni is fleeing from a dishevelled Elvira on a forested mountain. Her passions of love and then of revenge overwhelm her, the pursuit becomes her life. In A.'s vivid picture, the strength and force of this female character jump off the page. She torments herself with questions about her lover, she cannot rest in her anger, but is in a passion of perpetual anxiety. For Elvira autonomy and free will are irrelevant. She is swept along by her passions as she is swept by the wind down the mountain. This is not the Enlightenment division between body and mind. Her body and mind are restless in distress and longing. The light of the Enlightenment is lost in the storms surrounding Donna Elvira.

The Silhouettes flicker across each other, suggesting but not embodying depth. For each it is the relationship to her seducer which shapes her, and which each silhouette shapes. She does not stand alone and thoughtful, but moves endlessly towards and away from 'the other'. She cannot choose but feel the loss of her lover, as we cannot choose but hear sounds.

## The Female Relational Self as Mother

I have used Battersby's dialogue with Kierkegaard in *The Phenomenal Woman* (1998) as a starting point for my reading of the 'Silhouettes'. Battersby finds in Kierkegaard's writing resources for her project of a feminist ontology. Her technique is to read with and against masculine philosophers to construct her new metaphysics in which a female becoming is privileged over being, the female subject position is taken as normal, selves are treated as embodied. For Battersby, 'there is a normative connection ... between female identity and the capacity for pregnancy.' (1998, p. 17) Kierkegaard is important to her in presenting women as disruptive of the autonomous, rational self-determining model of personhood, which is a legacy of Kant. For Battersby, women are singular, outside the universal. Drawing on Kierkegaard's *Antigone*, *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*, she shows how his account of the self:

privileges vertical relationships – relationships between unequals – between the seducer and seduced; the father and his daughter; the father and his son. Although he doesn't write about motherhood, he frequently uses images of childhood, of wombs and weaning in order to stress what is inherited from the past. But that past is not simply a 'given', and neither is it negated: it is a part of finding oneself as a self by living through – and with – dependence. (Battersby, 1998, p. 149)

Relationality is crucial as 'self' and 'other' take shape together. There is no Kantian cut between self and other but a fluid patterning of individuals with intersecting lives. Battersby uses musical imagery to avoid the sense of mastery of the seeing 'eye/I'. She writes:

... the female self is shaped as it negotiates and renegotiates obstacles, and as it registers the resonances and echoes that its repeated movements produce.  
(Battersby, 1998, p. 197)

This different subject-position is that,

in which the self is fractured into personae which function as a unity always and only in relation to an embedded (but ambiguous) past and to other (non-equal) selves. An (uncertain) past gives the Kierkegaardian self a kind of permanence; but that permanence is no more than a temporary stability in the flow of intersecting systems and lives ... 'self' and 'other' take shape together – .  
(Battersby, 1998, p. 150)

Battersby does not write specifically about the 'Silhouettes'. Her position differs from mine in that she is more concerned with the material, the real, whereas I am more concerned with the symbolic. For me, the 'Silhouettes' provide a powerful imaginative alternative to the substantial autonomous self which dominates masculine ideas of personhood. The very dependency which they demonstrate is useful for the alternative

subjectivity which I wish to suggest. I find here an alternative to the clearly thinking consciousness of the Cartesian tradition. I hold Elvira up to the light of my female gaze, to decipher a different sense of self in which autonomy becomes less significant and relationship with the other matters more. Here, the relationship is to a careless male, the love is romantic love. I do not write on Elvira to approach the reality of being female, but to raise a different symbol of the self. For me, the different symbol is helpful in approaching the shadowy figure of the mother, whose relationship is to a child; whose love is a maternal love, little discussed in philosophy. Like the shadows flickering across the wall in Plato's cave, the Silhouettes are difficult to forget. While the hero is struggling towards the light, the Silhouettes are peopling the darkness. Plato's philosophical hero returns unable to endure belief in the shadows on the wall. In different ways, Kierkegaard, Battersby and I are remembering the shadows.

I suggest that although in Kierkegaard women do not inhabit the ethical existence-sphere, leaping straight from the aesthetic to the religious, the way in which he describes the choosing/receiving of the self seems apt for the transition of some women to motherhood. The use of the pseudonymous author of course leaves open Kierkegaard's own direction on this. In *Either/Or*, Part 2, the Judge spells out the transcendent demand on Johannes to live an ethical life, to enter into the universal categories of right and wrong. For the Judge, the transcendent is an external power which can demand a deep-seated change in individual

subjectivity. If we respond to the demand, our experience becomes differently mediated. In *Philosophical Fragments* (2000c), Kierkegaard describes the change as a 'rebirth'. For the woman who welcomes her pregnancy, it is both a state she chooses and a state she gives way to – the movement of heart of the mother who gladly first sees her baby. As the woman chooses to become a mother, she takes on the possibility of expressing the virtues of the mother. For the woman who does not welcome her pregnancy, or is ambivalent about it, the shift is likewise an ethical shift. She enters into the unchosen values surrounding her, and has to take responsibility for setting aside her reluctance to become a mother, or having an abortion with all that this entails. 'The idiom of receptivity captures our sense that values, convictions, selves, are largely *given* in experience.' (Mooney 1996, p. 24) The experience of motherhood, wanted or unwanted, exemplifies this.

The heroes of the transcendent religious existence-sphere are males: amongst them, Abraham and the Knight of Faith from *Fear and Trembling*. (1985) Yet this existence-sphere is important to the female in two ways: Kierkegaard writes of the women from the Bible who inhabit this sphere. On the whole Kierkegaard privileges the girl or the beloved, not the wife, but he also suggests that the capacity of a wife for devotion to her husband can be a model for man's proper relationship to God, (though what this might mean is thrown into doubt). I add that a striking example of a female love which goes beyond the self without negating the self is the love of the virtuous mother for the child.

Johannes de silentio, the narrator of *Fear and Trembling*, inserts into the story of Abraham and Isaac from the Bible, his reflection that he himself 'can make the movements of faith but [he] cannot perform them.' (F.T., p. 67) He insists on the inwardness of the Knight of Faith, showing how such a man is, from the outside, like a tax-gatherer (like St Matthew), or a capitalist. The Knight of Faith is completely ordinary and indistinguishable from others: 'and yet this man has made and is at every moment making the movement of infinity.' (p. 69) He is not oppressed by worldly cares – 'he is reconciled with existence.' Beyond this he has made the movement of faith. He lives his life on the strength of the absurd. In these pages Kierkegaard emphasises the interior nature of the religious existence-sphere, and its lack of outward marks on the individual.

Given Kierkegaard's double task of 'becoming a Christian', and of bringing to the attention of others what is involved in becoming a Christian, the analogy between woman's relation to man and man's relationship to God achieves significance. (Taylor 1997, p. 178) His commendation of women is such that becoming like a woman is analogous to becoming a Christian, and that showing female relationality is showing Christian devotion. Kierkegaard, in the person of Climacus, commends a womanly inwardness directed outward to another person. A creative dependency enables women to give themselves in relationships:

A woman is defined primarily through her relationships;  
her inwardness or subjectivity requires another to whom

she gives herself hence ... He views this relationality both as the weakness and the peculiar strength of women.

(Taylor, 1997, p. 178)

The feminine religious existence-sphere draws on the defining mark of woman: to direct her inwardness outward, that is, to be capable of devotion to another. Yet the female religious must differ from the religious sphere of Abraham. The mother as life-giver and nurturer could not become the mother of The Faithful through a story of violence like Abraham's. The test for her is to free her child, and herself. The story of the mother weaning her child is, as it were, hidden in the story of Abraham and Isaac. I explore this story at the end of this chapter. Like the Knight of Faith the mother does not stand out from the crowd. She is hidden both by domesticity, and by the norms of society which focus on the well-being of the child.

In her chapter entitled 'Kierkegaard, Woman and the Workshop of Possibilities', Battersby (1998) discusses Kierkegaard's reworking of *The Symposium, In Vino Veritas* (Part 1 of *Stages on Life's Way*, 1988). I use Battersby's work as a route to my position, but as I shall indicate, her position and her purpose differ from mine. Battersby draws on Kierkegaard's imagined dialogue, now on the topic of women, not homosexual love, as part of her strategy of outlining a female subject-position which takes natality seriously. Kierkegaard's move to a heterosexual perspective means that he writes of woman in relation to man, and Battersby's feminist re-reading here necessarily follows him in



this. Her aim in her re-reading is to support her argument for a (normalized) female 'in which there is no sharp division between "self" and "other."' (1998, p. 8) I now turn Battersby's re-reading by applying selected points to pregnant women and mothers of infants. I find the mother trapped outside the text. Battersby's interpretation of Kierkegaard's ideas on reality has provided a stimulus for my understanding of the maternal body, which Battersby does not discuss in this context.

Battersby summarises Aristophanes' myth told at Plato's *Symposium*, and re-presented by Kierkegaard:

... the gods first created self-sufficient and rounded beings: each had two faces, facing in opposite directions upon a circular neck. Each being also had four legs and arms and two sets of genital organs. Jealous of their completeness, the gods decided to cut these beings in two; but the result of that 'cut' was love, since erotic desire simply is the search for one's lost other half. (Battersby, 1998, p. 156)

Kierkegaard's Young Man sees the humour in Aristophanes' myth as illustrative of the ridiculous nature of the idea of the autonomous man. Battersby points out that this is Kierkegaardian mockery of the autonomous male self. She quotes the Young Man:

The more one thinks about it, the more ludicrous it becomes, for if the man actually is a whole, then he

certainly does not become a whole in erotic love, but he and the woman become one and a half. No wonder the gods laugh, and especially at the man. (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 43, quoted Battersby, 1998, p.157)

For me, the pregnant woman is, in the Young Man's terminology, 'one and a half'. That it seems absurd to describe a pregnant woman in this way is, for me, an argument for a relational, flexible self. In my re-reading, the pregnant woman offers an example of such an identity. She becomes more aware of the fetus if it moves, or if her shape obstructs her movement. She relates to it with protectiveness or interest, but then becomes less aware of it as the rest of her life commands her attention. The new-born child becomes more aware of the mother, has a greater need for her when she is hungry, or is in discomfort. These are selves taking shape together. In a movement of becoming, the mother emerges as mother of *this* child, the child emerges as child of *this* mother. They inherit each other as part of the condition of their lives. Past generations affect them in obscure ways, and their own early interaction cannot be definitively worded. A mother will often wake from the deepest sleep if her infant cries, even if she is out of earshot. The baby is dependent, yet she is also dependent on the infant. If she is breastfeeding, her breast milk will come down at feeding time and she needs the infant to give her relief. In my illustration, the repeated movements of nurturing in response to needs never simply reproduce a given. The mother changes: the child changes. Their realities emerge.

Battersby quotes Johannes' words from Kierkegaard's *Stages on Life's Way*, to show how Kierkegaard's character 'Johannes',

reverses the values of the Platonic texts, allowing infinity (being) to emerge from change and from continual motion, and from that which simply seems to exist:

Woman cannot be exhausted in any formula but is an infinitude of finitudes. Trying to conceive the idea of woman is like gazing into a sea of misty shapes continually forming and reforming, or like becoming unhinged by looking at the waves and the foam maidens who continually play tricks, because the idea of woman is only a workshop of possibilities ... (Kierkegaard, 1988, p. 76, quoted Battersby, 1998, p. 162)

Battersby's position is not identical with that of Johannes. She wants to build on Johannes' statement the idea of a model of identities 'fluidly' emerging out of patternings of relationship to 'otherness', in movement. (1998, p. 200) Battersby's relational ontology *births* the real, a multiplicity of reals that co-exist. Her model of fluid emerging identity, unlike my model of flexible changing identity, is not specific to the human.

In distinction from Battersby's position, my ontology retains a notion of a more adequate representation of a (true) reality. For me, Kierkegaard stimulates a sketch of the figure of the pregnant and nurturing

mother: a flexible maternal self with mobile edges. I adapt ideas of change and continual motion presented by Johannes to the 'morphing' quality represented for me by the figure of the pregnant woman. Whereas Battersby moves away from Johannes' position, I remain close to it but adapt it to my ideas on the mother. I move away from Battersby's ideas of 'fluidity', to employ the idea of a notion of an individualised self which then flexibly transforms. The pregnant woman *has* an identity, but is then subject to change, metamorphosis.

From the frequent pallor of the first trimester, a pregnant woman may bloom in the second, and become heavy and awkward-looking in the third. Often a heavily pregnant woman is utterly changed from her non-pregnant self. A sylph-like girl will have transformed herself into a solid mound. A well-built woman will have become mountainous. In my reading, Johannes' 'misty shapes' might be the memory that those close to the pregnant woman retain of her former self, which may momentarily appear in a gesture, a smile, or a way of moving. Such memories are not definite but hazy, dimmed by her changed presence. His phrase 'becoming unhinged' is extreme, but it captures for me something of the unnerving quality, for the onlooker, and even for the woman herself, of the transformation of a woman as her pregnancy progresses. The notion of the 'waves and foam-maidens' alludes to a different world enclosed by water. I adapt this to suggest the strange distance and inwardness of the expectant mother. After delivery, she re-forms herself into a new series of possibilities.

Battersby writes that for woman ‘action emerges not out of autonomy, but out of an acceptance of dependence and being bound to the other.’ (Battersby 1998, p. 163) In the context within which I write, which differs from Battersby’s context, this indicates the supreme effort many women make in recognising the infant’s dependence, and their own dependence, by succouring the child immediately after birth, setting aside the sense of themselves as autonomous, and setting aside waves of pain and exhaustion. Battersby links the female subject-position to ideas of a relational self. I provide a different and additional illustration of how the pregnant and child-nurturing body can be seen as a symbol of such relationality. In so doing, I present a ‘morphing’ maternal self with Wittgensteinian blurred outlines. Such a figure of the mother is not defined through her properties, but described in her relationality.

A movement between past and future is part of pregnancy, and part of the maternal condition. As we all come from our mothers, there is a movement back to origins. As the mother is usually focused on the future of the child, there is a movement towards a more generalised future. Recollection plays a part in Plato’s *Symposium* in that this text is a report of a conversation held twenty five years earlier. Kierkegaard begins his heterosexual reworking of Plato’s text by distinguishing recollection from remembering. Kierkegaard’s *Gjentagelse* indicates a ‘retake’ or a dropping of an initial approximation in favour of a new version, ‘done better, or being richer in meaning.’ (Mooney, 1996, p. 28) The new emerges from repetition of ‘the same’.

Musical terms assist in understanding the idea of 'recollection forwards'. Music frequently moves onward by developing a theme, thus referring back to the origin and forward to the new sequence of sounds. For example in Prokofiev's 1988 ballet, *Romeo and Juliet*, the famous theme which mixes joy and foreboding appears in the ball-scene. During the ballet each character is introduced by an elaborated variation on the theme. The theme is repeated, not aridly, but creatively. Each character appears as if caught in the skeins of the theme, and yet each changes the theme by her actions. The theme sets the scene but does not control it. The characters move forward, but their past echoes around them. Romeo and Juliet perform the formal dance steps as prescribed, but they also make variations and thus change the music. The past and the context make themselves heard, but the movement is forwards towards new possibilities.

As I have demonstrated, I find Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelse* valuable for understanding ideas of mothering. In her phenomenological reflection on pregnant experience, entitled 'Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation', Iris Marion Young writes of her own 'normal' female experience, restricting the range of her account to the specific experience of women in technologically sophisticated Western societies,<sup>67</sup> 'who have been able to take up their situation as their own.' (Young, 2005b, p. 47)

Young writes:

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<sup>67</sup> The admirable maternal tradition of many African-American peoples lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

This split subject appears in the eroticism of pregnancy, in which the woman can experience an innocent narcissism fed by recollection of her repressed experience of her own mother's body. Pregnant existence entails, finally, a unique temporality of process and growth in which the woman can experience herself as split between past and future. (Young, 2005, p. 47)

Whereas Young describes her experience as a *split* between past and future,<sup>68</sup> I suggest a Kierkegaardian 'recollection forward'. The recollection is of her own mother. The forward movement is not towards an abstract spiritual immortality but to a particular child's future, or particular children's futures, and to future lives. The sense of the future is linked to future generations, especially the new generation to which the mother has contributed, thus gaining a sense of generations past, present and to come.

Aristophanes' myth is of course a myth about sexuality. Yet maybe there is a Wittgensteinian 'fuzzy border' between sexual love and maternal love. In her essay *Breasted Experience* Young challenges the patriarchal border between motherhood and sexuality, which derives from the logic of identity and its dependence on opposites. (2005) Mother love, understood as defleshed, spiritual, is opposed to carnal desire:

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<sup>68</sup> Also discussed in my Introduction.

The separation of motherhood and sexuality thus instantiates the culture's denial of the body and the consignment of fleshly desires to fearful temptation. (Young, 2005, p. 86)

She explains this separation by reference to the incest taboo, and to the desire of men to monopolise women's desires. If mother-love instead of being totally selfless and giving, contains bodily pleasure for the woman, this gives her a source of satisfaction independent of men. She opposes the desiring woman to the self-sacrificing woman who just listens and cares. She suggests that the pleasure some women take from breast-feeding is an example of a 'shattering of the border': 'One of the most subversive things feminism can do is affirm this undecidability of motherhood and sexuality.' (p. 199) Of course, I agree with Young that there are dangers, especially to children, in the eroticization of mothering. But to recognise that a mother has desires which are met by her child is not to eroticise the mother in a harmful way. There is no necessary opposition between desire and protectiveness, or desire and nurturance.

I re-instate the mother's body. I understand nurturing not as a denial of the self, but as a development of the self. Where Plato focuses on the agency of erotic desire, I focus on the agency of maternal desire. To be afraid to claim an undecidability because of an opposition that is part of male logic, is damaging to women.



## Sarah

In the 'Attunement' preamble to *Fear and Trembling*, the author intersperses four retrospective versions of Abraham's fateful journey with Isaac with four poetic evocations of a mother's love for the child. (Kierkegaard, 1985) My final section elaborates Kierkegaard's short evocations of Sarah, the mother of Isaac. I weave together the themes of love, temporality and contingency which emerge through thinking through the meaning of Sarah in this text. In the preamble, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author uses the repeated symbol of the mother weaning her child to indicate both Sarah's presence in the story of Abraham and Isaac, and an orientation to a future shaped by the past. He writes of the mother weaning her child.

I precede my discussion of Sarah by noting an additional element of contingency. The weaning may not necessarily be from the mother's breast. The powerful symbol of the mother breastfeeding her child is part of religious iconography. Raphael's Madonnas present an image of perfect motherhood with the infant Jesus suckling at the breast. The beatific symbol has crowded out the reality of the history of breastfeeding. In *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to the Present*, Valerie Fields states:

The breastfeeding of another woman's child in charity or for payment occurred in all civilisations in which the death of mothers in childbed or during lactation was relatively common, but this was not the only reason why it was

employed. Social, political and religious factors played an important role. (Fields, 1988, p. 1)

She shows how this practice included: the exploitation of slaves by free women and poor women by rich women; a wide variety of relationships between mothers and babies, and wet nurses and babies; and a number of different financial and social practical arrangements. It remained customary among certain groups in European society until the second half of the eighteenth century when the influence of Rousseau's *Émile* (1993) encouraged parents towards 'natural' child care, maternal breast feeding, but even then this included upper class women employing a healthy country woman to breast feed. (Fields, 1988, Chapter 8) Today, in my society, 'natural' breastfeeding is encouraged, and wet-nursing is regarded as obsolescent. SMA milk, or as it is commonly called, 'formula' has replaced the wet nurse when the mother is absent, unable, or unwilling to breastfeed. Yet problems for breastfeeding mothers remain. Mothers who are obliged to return to employment usually have to stop breastfeeding. Goodison writes:

symbols become restrictive only when we relinquish our ability to question our choice and move on. There may come a time when they will need to be adapted, even abandoned. As symbols they must, I feel, remain secondary and subordinate to lived experience, and they need to be open to change in accordance with that experience. (Goodison, 1992, p. 251)

The symbol of the breastfeeding mother needs to be adapted to take in a realisation of the cultural background and history of what appears a 'purely natural' activity. Lived experience reveals the complexity underlying the image, the background to the Renaissance Madonnas. Yet perhaps it is not time to abandon this symbol. Very many mothers do breastfeed their children. This is a uniquely female activity, which may perhaps still symbolise the nourishment so many women provide for others.

I now return to *Fear and Trembling*, to Kierkegaard's portrayal of Abraham's wife, Sarah, whom I see as symbolic of a virtuous maternal love. Sarah's story echoes through, and counterpoints Abraham's story. I find a multiplicity of voices in the 'Attunement'. I take each version of the journey in turn, quoting the parts devoted to Sarah.

At first Kierkegaard's narrator, Johannes de silentio, makes a contrast. Abraham encourages Isaac to believe that he has changed to look ferocious while God has remained deserving of faith. Sarah watched her husband and son from the window 'until she could see them no more'. (p. 45) The mother's gaze is important here:

When the child is to be weaned the mother blackens her breast, for it would be a shame were the breast to look pleasing when the child is not to have it. So the child believes that the breast has changed but the mother is the same, her look loving and tender as ever. Lucky the one

that needed no more terrible means to wean the child.

(Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 46)

Here the breast doubles the part of Abraham, made deceptively black, as he was deceptively ferocious, while the mother, unlike Abraham and like God, remains deserving of love. The mother's body is a temporary source of nutrition, but it is not the body itself, but the love of the mother which is necessary to the child. The mother is prepared to negate her body in the interest of orientating the child to the future. The breast symbolises the mother, but like all symbols this one can be manipulated. The symbol is not the mother. The breast may not be the mother's, as discussed above. Some women agree with de Beauvoir that breastfeeding is painful and enslaving. (1999, p. 524) Feeding itself cannot be equated with a beneficial mother love. The loving look of the mother transcends the history of breast feeding, in the same way that Sarah's gaze went beyond the manipulation of Abraham and Isaac to hold them in her love. Each of the passages referring to the mother ends by an acclamation of luck. This draws attention to the vulnerability of the mother/child dyad. The child must pass from the mother's nurturing to the wider world, but there is no guarantee that this access of independence will come easily. It reminds us of the contingencies that surround a child's earliest years. A child may be weaned to a share in the resources of a Western wealthy family, or to the hardship of poor Chinese girl-babies. Cavarero reminds us 'Each one [birth] forms a link in a sequence of births that might not have existed or might have existed otherwise.' (Cavarero, 1995, p. 118)

In the second version of Abraham's story, Kierkegaard's narrator emphasises the physical closeness of the family by noting their farewell embraces. (pp. 46-7) He alludes to the primary importance of child bearing for women. Sarah is 'the bride of his old age'; Isaac 'had taken her disgrace from her, was her pride and hope for all generations.' Today, as in biblical times, women may be criticised for selfishness if they are childless. For many women their self-esteem and sense of the future is beneficially influenced by having a child:

When the child has grown and is to be weaned the mother virginally covers her breast, so the child no more has a mother. Lucky the child that lost its mother in no other way! (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 46)

This passage draws an implicit contrast between the virgin and the mother, thereby alluding to the integration of heterosexual sex and motherhood. It plays against the earlier passage in insisting on the importance of the nutritional link between mother and child. The final sentence gestures towards the devastation of loss of the mother. This emphasises the unique nature of the bond between mother and child. As discussed above, in biblical times, on losing its mother to death, a child would, if it was to survive, have been breastfed by another woman.

In Kierkegaard's third version, Sarah is a young mother whose natural happiness with her son is evoked in contrast to Abraham's 'thoughtfulness'.

When the child is to be weaned the mother too is not without sorrow, that she and the child grow more and more apart: that the child which first lay beneath her heart, yet later rested at her breast should no longer be so close. Thus together they suffer this brief sorrow. Lucky the one who kept the child so close and had no need to suffer more. (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 47)

Here the author follows a trajectory of the mother's love recognisable in Western society. At first she shares her body with the child. The phrase 'lay beneath her heart' evokes the intense care that, normally, the pregnant woman has for her unborn baby. In a situation of threat, a pregnant woman immediately places her hand on her stomach to ward off danger. She changes her way of moving, what she eats and drinks, her work and her leisure to suit the fetus. Today, in my society, pregnant women are advised not to take any drugs to alleviate any pain or discomfort, and it is normal that they take this upon themselves rather than risking damage to the child. In 'Pregnant Embodiment' Young comments that the fetus 'makes me conscious of the physicality of my body, not as an object, but as the material weight I am in movement.' (2005, p. 52) As a pregnant woman's 'automatic body habits become dislodged,' (2005, p. 50) she has an increased, aesthetic, awareness of her body. A woman will frequently struggle with the changes to her body in pregnancy, but the loving bond between the mother and the fetus is curiously untouched by her difficulties.

The phrase 'rested at her breast' indicates the possibility of peace, and of a sense of completion of breast-feeding, particularly after a feed when the mother and child are fully content with each other. Young describes this: 'I lay there as she made love to me, snuggling her legs up to my stomach, her hand stroking my breast, my chest.' (Young, 2005a, p. 88) Young understands the joy that mothers take in successful breastfeeding as an irreducible female pleasure. Thus, as the child grows, the necessary movement more and more apart leaves a melancholy. An alternate reading would refer to post-natal depression suffered by many women. The loss of the child from 'beneath her heart' can incapacitate the woman who has put so much energy into pregnancy. In writing that they suffer this together, the author looks ahead to the sharing of sorrows which is part of maternal and filial love. As the closeness comes from the heart, it can be affected but not cancelled by external events. The real sorrow is loss of closeness due to separation or death.

In the final version of the story the normalcy of Sarah is contrasted with the fell intention of Abraham. (p. 47) He 'takes leave' of her. He makes ready for the sacrifice. 'Then they turned home again and Sarah ran to meet them.' She is impelled by love. He has been impelled by his plan for sacrifice:

When the child is to be weaned the mother has more solid food at hand, so that the child will not perish. Lucky the one who has more solid food at hand! (Kierkegaard, 1985, p. 48)

Kierkegaard's narrator makes clear here that the mother must nourish the child and safeguard his life. Whereas the father may need to accede to God's command, the mother's primary duty is to keep the child alive. Thus her love is both protective, and practical. She foresees the future, and prepares for it. She recognises that her love will not suffice for the child, and prepares the more solid food of an independent existence. The threat is that the mother is unable to offer the child a way forward into the world. She has to send him out unprovided for, hungry and vulnerable. Maternal love includes enabling the child to make the transition well.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I ground my argument for a relational figure of the mother by bringing in Kierkegaard's philosophy. I demonstrate links between Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard before moving on to seek in Kierkegaard a relationality that is missing in Wittgenstein. The Wittgensteinian concept of forms of life is focused not on relationality between individuals, but on relationships between practices. I introduce female subjectivity through the narrative portraits in Kierkegaard's existence spheres, which stress relationality between beings who emerge together. I find resources in Kierkegaard for a way of writing of the self, which moves towards the 'morphing', relational figure of the mother. My aim is a more adequate representation of a (true) reality.

Wittgenstein writes:



The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something—because it is always before one's eyes.) (P.I.129)

The ordinary mainstream mother is an example par excellence of this. Each of us is aware that we come from a mother, and, in the vast majority of cases, that a mother has nurtured us and guided our growth to adulthood. Yet the mother is scarcely present to the philosophical mind. I suggest the figure of the mother as a paradoxical forgotten emblem as I show both her importance, and her obscurity. I vary male symbols by introducing the changing lived experience of the mother. I seek spaces for her by adapting myths from Kierkegaard. I insert language games of the mother into Kierkegaard's writing on women.

Yet the mother evades the page. She is at once an intensely practical and obvious figure, and an elusive figure. Think of the face and the figure of the heavily pregnant woman: she both retreats from and overflows our understanding.

## Chapter 6: Narrative Identity?

### Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect further on, and critique, the narrative form which, in the preceding chapters, has advanced my search to re-present the language around the figure of the mother. I bring together an investigation of the narrative form and the insight, stimulated by Wittgenstein's remark on games, that rather than *a* narrative, a multiplicity of narratives 'with multifarious relationships' is needed. I problematise the narrative of the figure of the mother, both as a subject of theory and in examples. Whilst recognising Cavarero's point that the narrative form is helpful in moving depictions of the self away from masculine abstraction, I express my suspicions that the meanings around the figure of the mother are not entirely captured in a given narrative, and may be even distorted in the transformational effect of narrative. I try out the strategy of adopting the perspective of the mother to examine the ambiguous nature of such transformation: both therapeutic and distorting. I question the function of narrative, and ask whose story is being told, and whose story is being forgotten.

Integral to this discussion is my presentation of the Kierkegaardian relational self – the self formed through and in relationship with others. I write of family resemblances, both deriving from 'blood' relationships, and, in the metaphorical sense, derived from Wittgenstein (discussed in

detail in Chapter 2). I make a different pattern of meanings from examples which put the theory of the narratable self in question. I explore the paradox of the forgotten emblem. I emphasise that the mother is forgotten in that her part in language games is marginalised or disguised, but that she has the force of an emblem in that her presence, once noticed, has an impact on all that surrounds it.

In 'From Analogy to Narrative', Warner explores how narratives can work to re-invent persuasive cases, and to impel us to grasp new concepts. (Warner, 2005) As part of this exploration, he discusses Wittgenstein's analogy between language and an ancient city. (P.I.18)<sup>69</sup> Warner adverts to Lucken's idea that to understand the force of the analogy we should

ask how a language game works in relation to the practice and form of life in which it is embedded ....

[Wittgenstein's argument] frames the field in a way which changes the sense of old questions and generates new ones.

(Lucken, 1997, pp. 219-20)

In my examples of analogous narratives below, I challenge the frame of reference from which the mother is excluded. I frame the field in a way that shows the male nature of old questions, and generates new female

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<sup>69</sup> .... Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses. (P.I.18)

questions. I show language games in relation to female practices and forms of life. Such examples are essential to my argument for a changed understanding of the term 'mother', and a philosophically significant relational self. As the figure of the mother is 'outside' philosophy, her importance cannot be argued deductively, since first premises are absent. By creating new analogies between language games previously thought remote from each other, I create the opportunity for a new understanding of the symbol of the mother, and of the interplay of symbols in particular cases.

Warner writes:

One remembers Wittgenstein's 'A picture held us captive' [P.I. 115]; analogical argument, it would appear, can shake the power of such a picture by providing an alternative. (Warner, 2005, p. 27)

Warner also goes on to say:

It is not difficult to see how the more dynamic concept of 'narrative' may sometimes be more appropriate than 'picture.' Since human experience is inescapably temporal, if our 'pre-understanding'<sup>70</sup> of that experience is narrative shaped, and if our perceptions of ourselves and others is such that we live in story-shaped worlds, the most appropriate way of de-

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<sup>70</sup> Pre-understanding is a term used by Paul Ricoeur to support his narrative theory, discussed below. I ask whether we do all always live in story-shaped worlds.

stabilising our standard frameworks may well be to relate to our time-bound existence through telling a disruptive story.

(Warner, 2005, p. 42)

Thus Warner argues from Wittgensteinian analogies which urge us to try to see the familiar differently, across to the 'more dynamic' narrative form. In appealing to the imagination of my reader,<sup>71</sup> I both use and resist Wittgenstein in engaging with the narrative form as a way of bringing together differing viewpoints, expressing relationality, and finding space for embodied experience. I discuss the mother as a symbol, and a material presence.

The chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, Narrative Theories, I explore and critique the claims for narratives in the theories of MacIntyre, Ricoeur, and of Cavarero, whose ideas I consider in depth. I draw on my key text, Sophocles' *Antigone*.<sup>72</sup> I adopt a female perspective,

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<sup>71</sup> Wisdom insists that in the form of analogical argument from case to case which he advocates, the 'imaginary case is as good by way of evidence as any actual case'. (1991, p.112)

<sup>72</sup> I recognise that there are significant differences between myth, narrative and drama. In this chapter, I read the relevant myths as narratives, and I refer to a narrative thread that runs through Sophocles' plays. The Sophoclean narrative synthesises elements from well-known myths. Although there is overlap between the forms, myth is distinguished by its flexibility, and ability to absorb and meld multiple narratives. The relationship between myth, narrative and drama is complicated by questions of literacy. The audience for a narrative, or spectators of a drama need not be literate, and may, as I demonstrate, be influenced by myths received within oral culture. Oral narratives of pre-literate

and raise problems for the theories which emerge when they are applied to the figure of the mother. In the second part, Reading *Antigone*, I follow Cavarero in looking back at the pre-Platonic myths of the house of Labdacus, as narrated by Sophocles.<sup>73</sup> Although *Oedipus the King* appears in my work on Jocasta, the primary focus of my work is Sophocles' *Antigone*.<sup>74</sup> My aim is to read the mother's body and the mother's voice into these open-textured myths. I present fictitious figures, whose stories are both acted out in Sophocles' tragedies, and reported in narrative form, in line with the Classical convention that all action takes place off-stage, and is recounted retrospectively. I aim to make a bridge between the dramatically conceived lives of the women and the significance of the figure of the mother. In the third part, Differences in Mothering, I exemplify differences. I draw on poetry, a novel, and then on interview material for a factual account. I choose diverse stories which complicate the figure of the mother, and, in so doing, complicate the idea of narrative identity.

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societies function differently from written narratives. Interaction from the audience or spectators is expected.

<sup>73</sup> All quotation from Sophocles is taken from Sophocles (1994) *Antigone; Oedipus the King; Electra*.

<sup>74</sup> Cavarero states (2002, p. 206, n. 24,) that part of her analysis aims at a dialogue with Judith Butler's (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. In her later book, (2000), *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* Butler continues her focus on the obstruction of vision consequent on a culture of normative heterosexuality. She begins this volume by providing a clear discussion of earlier interpretations of *Antigone*, by Hegel and Lacan.

## **Narrative Theories: MacIntyre, Ricoeur, Cavarero**

I begin by exploring Alisdair MacIntyre's historicist view in which there is an internal connection between belief in virtues being of a certain kind, and belief in human life exhibiting a certain narrative order. As I explained in my Introduction, I am using MacIntyre's concept of virtue to exemplify the virtue of the mother. Here, I outline his link between virtue and a strong view of narrative identity. However, I argue against MacIntyre in introducing Lois McNay's critique to suggest a different, female narratable self. (McNay, 2002) One of MacIntyre's central claims is that:

If a human life is understood as a progress through harms and dangers, moral and physical, which someone may encounter and overcome in better and worse ways and with a greater or lesser measure of success, the virtues will find their place as those qualities the possession and exercise of which generally tend to success in this enterprise and the vices likewise as qualities which likewise tend to failure. Each human life will then embody a story whose shape and form will depend upon what is counted as a harm and danger and upon how success and failure, progress and its opposite are understood and evaluated. To answer these questions will also explicitly and implicitly be to answer the question what the virtues and vices are. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 144)

MacIntyre's perspective on pre-modern traditional societies is enlightening with regard to the world in which the women of *Antigone* live. This is a world in which 'the chief means of moral education is the telling of stories'. (p. 121) Human life is understood as embodying a certain type of narrative structure. Every individual has a given role and status:

Individuals inherit a particular space within an interlocking set of social relationships; lacking that space, they are nobody, or at best a stranger or an outcast. To know oneself as such a social person is however not to occupy a static and fixed position. It is to find oneself placed at a certain point on a journey with set goals; to move through life is to make progress – or to fail to make progress – towards a given end. (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 34)

In Sophocles' play, neither Antigone nor her sister, Ismene has an individuality apart from her family relationships. The threat of being a stranger or an outcast is exactly the threat over the very body of Antigone's brother, Polyneices, and subsequently over the actions of his sister. Antigone demonstrates her sense of her 'interlocking set of social relationships' through her preparedness to die for her brother. Her social relationships outside the family count for less, as indeed they do for Ismene when she voices her horror at the thought of life without her sister. In Sophocles' play, Ismene appeals to Creon: 'But what is life to me, without my sister?'(l. 66) MacIntyre emphasises the importance of the



forms and claims of kinship in this society. Friendship and fidelity are important male virtues. MacIntyre informs us that in women, who constitute the crucial relationships within the household, fidelity is the key virtue (MacIntyre 1981, p.136). Antigone and Ismene suffer through conflicts of fidelity. MacIntyre informs us that *sôphrosunê*, ability to control one's passions, is *the* womanly virtue.<sup>75</sup> (p. 136) Antigone sought out death rather than control her passions. Ismene is at first controlled, but then desires to die with her sister. For MacIntyre, a Sophoclean insight is that 'through conflict and only through conflict do we learn what our ends and purposes are.' (p. 163) Creon evidently learns the distinction between the purposes of tyranny and the purposes of just rule in the unfolding of *Antigone*. The sisters learn what they have always known, that they were born of Jocasta, and that they continue her story.

For MacIntyre, the narrated self produces unity:

And the unity of a virtue in someone's life is intelligible only as a characteristic of a unitary life, a life that can be conceived and evaluated as a whole. (MacIntyre,1981, p. 205)

He offers 'a concept of self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative beginning to middle to end.' (p. 205) In her feminist critique of MacIntyre, Lois McNay challenges this

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<sup>75</sup> MacIntyre's italics. MacIntyre here follows the Greeks in noting a virtue which is convenient to men. He does not observe the virtue of the mother.

function of narrative, and the idea that there is a true narrative of the quest in which we are engaged. She suggests that an analysis of power relations is a missing element in MacIntyre's advocacy of a coherent, narrated self. (McNay, 2002) MacIntyre demonstrates an uncritical acceptance of social structures. McNay suggests that our memories may contain 'crevasses, ruptures, emptiness, deep wells of non-being'; that there may be a mismatch between different narratives of identity all of which we wish to retain; and that we may find a fundamental lack of congruity between our various social roles. (McNay, 2002, p. 87) She shows how women may be prevented from telling their story, indeed from hearing their story narrated, by issues of power, ideology and exclusion. Her example here is drawn from Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (Spivak, 1988) which explores the impossibility of Indian widows expressing themselves in the male debate on the practice of sati. (Spivak, 1988, p. 308) McNay examines the resignation to their situations and disorganisation of behaviour and thought in those who lack social power. Such difficulties may prevent women (and others) from creating or even desiring a narrative. The stress of child-rearing may lead to an uneven memory of its struggles. Older mothers frequently comment on how much they have forgotten of their children's younger years. The roles of mother and employee are often incongruous. The social structure in which they interact may place mothers in an inferior position.

McNay's acceptance of a fragmentation of social roles and narratives could also be illustrated by reference to Kierkegaard's

narratives in *Either/Or*. Kierkegaard offers an alternative to the unified narrative of MacIntyre. As author, Kierkegaard used a number of masks which reflect the fragmented self he explored. Each mask offers a self, but in the mosaic of masks the author is disguised, and the narrator shatters into a self as splintered as the selves he narrates. If we accept fragmentation, the continuity of memory which may be painful, or simply unreliable is no longer necessary. The different narratives of identity are not necessarily harmful. Rather they offer alternatives none of which has to be seen as definitive. In setting aside the authority of the narrator, Kierkegaard liberates him from the listener's possible demand for a coherence to events that is absent from the narrator's experience of them. The incongruity between social roles is no longer an impediment to the story. In the Kierkegaardian approach, the silencing of women, to which McNay and Spivak refer, is perhaps circumvented. Discontinuous parts of life, spoken in different 'voices', in different contexts, could be recognised as valuable narratives. Such a loosening of the demands of the narrator, of the narration itself, and of the narratee, is helpful to those who are marginalised in the traditional narrative form – amongst whom are mothers.

## **Ricoeur**

In his impressive essay, 'Life: A Story in Search of a Narrator', Paul Ricoeur's aim is to rethink the 'relation between a story and a life, rethink it such that fiction helps to make life – in the biological sense of the word – human.' (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 425) Ricoeur points out that plotting a

narrative involves synthesising heterogeneous elements which are organised into an intelligible whole by narration. The plot mediates between multiple incidents to achieve a unity of components such as accidental or expected confrontations, and interactions of various kinds. The narrative that runs through the Sophoclean plays synthesises elements from well-known myths. The confrontations of the characters with each other, and with their ineluctable fates, are the source of the tragedies. The reader or spectator adjusts her expectations in line with the unfolding of the story. Nevertheless, the plot can cover over erasures and omissions. As is well-known, many of Shakespeare's magnificently plotted dramas omit the figure of the mother.<sup>76</sup> The attentive female reader or audience does indeed adjust expectations. The expectation becomes that the mother will be absent, probably dead. For Ricoeur, the plot synthesises two kinds of time: 'a discrete, open and theoretically undefined succession of incidents'; and 'the temporal aspect characterized by the integration, the culmination, and the ending in virtue of which a story gains an outline.' (1991, p. 427) A story 'endures and remains right across that which passes away'. The linear sequencing of experience may be ill-suited to the narrative of the mother. Her multiplicity of experiences, acknowledged and unacknowledged, may be so diverse that to synthesise them is to falsify them beyond recognition. Her narrative looks forward with the growth of the child, but as a mother she is defined by retrospect in the act

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<sup>76</sup> Notable exceptions are the figure of Gertrude in *Hamlet*, and Juliet's mother Lady Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*.

of birth. The maternal body which is so vital a part of her experience is not fully comprehended in a narrative outline.

I find Ricoeur's idea of a 'receiver' of a narrative helpful. He suggests that the tragedy, the epic, the comedy develop in the receiver a 'narrative intelligence', which is a form of practical wisdom and moral judgment issuing from creative imagination. His thesis here

is that the process of composition, of configuration, does not realise itself in the text but in the reader ... the meaning or the significance of a story wells up from *the intersection of the world of text and the world of the reader.*<sup>77</sup> Thus the act of reading becomes the crucial moment of the entire analysis. (Ricoeur, 1991, p. 430)

The act of reading enables the transition from print to life. I place myself as a 'receiver' searching for the significance of the mother. In my reading below, I understand the succession of incidents, the threat from Laius, the defiance of Antigone, the caution of Ismene, as incidents in the lives of women born of a particular mother. I impress on the story an outline in which natality and maternal feeling matter. I seek a new judgment, not according to masculine codes of honour, but according to a female viewpoint.

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<sup>77</sup> Italics used in original.

For Ricoeur, the narrative schema has the characteristics of a tradition, which contains both innovation and sedimentation. The sedimentation of the tradition allows the ascription of typology to compositions. We know the type of story we hear or read because we can place it amongst similar stories. Yet the rules for what constitutes which type of creative composition slowly change under pressure of innovation. Innovation is not free-floating but remains a strategy governed by existing rules. Every work can be placed between the poles of repetition of an earlier creative act and deviance from such. 'The variations between these two poles confer on the productive imagination a historicity of its own and keep the narrative tradition alive.' (1991, p. 430) There is, of course, no problem in assigning the profound works of Sophocles to the canon of classical drama. Yet, as Cavarero points out, *Antigone* is 'wildly eccentric' and has 'significant and unorthodox irregularities.' (Cavarero 2002, p. 17) For this reason, amongst others, it has become an important text in feminist hermeneutics. The sedimented myth, in which, rarely, women are the principal characters, offers opportunities for innovation.

Ricoeur suggests that narrative leads back to life through realising itself in the reader, and makes possible 'reconfiguration of a life by the way of narrative.' The reader is able to appropriate the horizon of the world of the text:

The result is that the reader belongs to both the experiential horizon of the work imaginatively, and the

horizon of his action concretely. The horizons meet and fuse without ceasing. (Ricoeur,1991, p. 431)

My reading below makes a female imaginative appropriation which remains within the world of the text. I aim to engage in an act of reading which completes the work,

transforms it into a reading *guide* with its zones of indetermination, its latent richness of interpretation, its ability to be reinterpreted in novel ways within historical contexts that are always new'. (Ricoeur,1991, p. 432)

I allow the narrative to realise itself differently through reading it as a woman reading as a mother. I seek to fuse the horizon of the mother with the horizon of these ancient daughters, sisters, and their mother, all of whom 'act under a cloud of steady misogyny'. (Cavarero, 2002, p. 31)

Ricoeur is impressed by the desire for narrative. He terms life '*an activity and a desire in search of a narrative*'.<sup>78</sup>(1991, p. 434) Action is always embedded in a *descriptive context*. We understand a gesture or an action because of what surrounds it. He sees the demand for a story as part of the 'pre-narrative structure of experience', so that episodes in our lives may have the quality of potential stories, or stories not yet told. He illustrates by the examples of the patient who goes to the psychoanalyst in search of a story and the judge who creates a story from disparate facts to

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<sup>78</sup> Italics used in original.

understand a crime.<sup>79</sup> The function of a story is to bring out the ‘narratable self.’ Ricoeur stresses that the narrative must be acceptable to the patient for a cure to occur. The story the patient finds plausible enlightens him as to aspects of his life which had previously been obscure to him. The judge’s version of events is more acceptable than a disparate account, since this version is that which leads to action, to the sentence. Other narratives have other functions. For example, narratives may be expressive of relationality. They may be configured for purposes of reassurance. They may have entertainment value. Adapting an insight from P.I.66 (where Wittgenstein is talking about families of games) we might say that ‘we can go through the many, many other groups of [narratives] in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear.’

For Ricoeur, we find ourselves ‘entangled’ in stories each with a pre-history, a background, and an overlap with other stories. To understand our experience we need to understand our story, so that narrative fiction is an ‘irreducible dimension of *the understanding of the self*.’<sup>80</sup> (Ricoeur 1991, p. 435) My questions here are: Understanding for

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<sup>79</sup> Another example can be found in the field of medicine. Helen King suggests that the search for meaning in suffering ... should be seen in terms of narrative. Explaining illness leads to reflection on one’s life ... Reflection leads on to narrative, as previously unconnected events are perceived to have been linked in ways unseen at the time. Suffering ‘unmakes’ the world while, by creating a narrative representation of illness, medicine can reconstruct it. (King, 1998, p. 111)

<sup>80</sup> Italics used in original.



whom? Whose story is of significance, and for whom is it significant? I demonstrate below that a traditional understanding of *Antigone* as a story of a clash between duty to the state, and duty to the family, largely ignores the figures of Jocasta, Antigone's mother. An alternative understanding requires a perspective on the play in terms of female relationality. One purpose of this many-layered narrative may be to illustrate such relationality.

### **Cavarero**

In *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, Cavarero emphasises equally the desire to tell one's story, and the shaping power of the listener to the story of one's life. (Cavarero, 2000) The Italian title, '*Tu che mi guardi, tu che mi racconti*' – 'You who look at me, you who narrate me' – makes her stress on the person of the narrator evident. Cavarero does not discuss the idea that different listener/narrators may produce different truths, or that there may be no unifying truth to be heard. I select from her ideas those that return to the myth of Oedipus; those which develop ideas of the unique existent born from a unique mother; and those which are concerned with the relationality inherent in both identity and story-telling. I use Cavarero's ideas as a stimulus to shading in the mother to philosophical tradition; and add to Cavarero by shading in the figure of the mother.

In her first chapter, Cavarero attacks the masculinist tradition in philosophy with its enthusiasm for definitions of universals such as 'truth',

'beauty', 'man'. She achieves this by illustrating, through the myth of Oedipus, that:

'Man' is a universal that applies to everyone precisely because it is no one. It disincarnates itself from the living singularity of each one, while claiming to substantiate it. It is at once masculine and neuter, a hybrid creature generated by thought, a fantastic universal produced by the mind.

(Cavarero, 2000, p. 9)

In Sophocles' play, in his increasingly intense questioning of Jocasta and of the Messenger, Oedipus displays the desire, common to all, to know his story, in order to learn *who* he is. So long as Oedipus knows himself only in the universal, he is ignorant of his embodied uniqueness. This can only be revealed through learning of his birth from his mother. Oedipus cannot learn his story, learn *who* he is, while he is trapped in the universal. Demonstrating the importance of the mother for her ideas of narrative identity, Cavarero shows that Oedipus is trapped by being ignorant of the start of his story, in being ignorant of *who* was his mother. Cavarero turns away from the heroic preoccupation with death to characterise birth as a most significant event for knowledge of identity:

The story of one's life always begins where that person's life begins ... the uniqueness of his identity, his *daimon*, has its origin in the event of his birth. (Cavarero, 2000, p. 11)

From the outset, the desire for one's story is linked to another, a 'you', which Cavarero identifies with the Greek notion of the *daimon*. Here, Cavarero follows Hannah Arendt, (1958), in referring to:

the *daimon* in Greek religion, which accompanies each man throughout his life, looking over his shoulder from behind and thus visible only to those he encounters.

(Cavarero, 2000, p. 21)

In *Greek Religion*, Walter Burkert provides an account of the 'astonishing career' of the term 'daimon', now living on as 'demon'. (Burkert 1985, p. 180) The term moves between the idea of a force of fate, and a spirit with particular intentions concerning an individual man (not woman). The *daimon* begins as an 'occult power, a force that drives man forward where no agent can be named.' (1985, p. 180) When the tide of fortune is with the agent he acts *syn daimoni*, when all turns against him he acts *pros daimona*. The idea which derives from a pre-Classical tradition,<sup>81</sup> was that each of us is allocated at birth a *daimon*, who watches over us. The term became associated with spirits after death, particularly for those who died fighting for their country. Socrates uses the term *daimonion* to express the sense of something inner which causes him to stop and think, rather than 'speak of something divine.' (Burkett, 1985, p. 181)

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<sup>81</sup> 'A general belief in spirits is not expressed by the term *daimon* until the fifth century A.D. when a doctor asserts that neurotic women and girls can be driven to suicide by imaginary apparitions.' (Burkert, 1985, p. 181)

This internalised usage survives in our sense of being beset by, for example, the demon of drink. Cavarero transforms the *daimon* into an unseen double. She gives the *daimon* the unnerving gloss of a spectral individual. She introduces to the meaning the idea of the *daimon* as listener, as one who can see what the narrator cannot see. This changed meaning is important to the claim to truth in Cavarero's theory. We infer that there may be false versions of identity with which we fool ourselves, but the listener has access to a truth which encircles us.

Referring to the myth of Ulysses, Cavarero makes distinct the roles of the actor and the narrator. The actor is able to recognise himself only when he recognises his story. The narratee must appear to another in order to act in his story. Cavarero meditates on the significance of a newborn child, a child without a story. The philosopher asks from where the child came and receives the answer from 'nothingness'. The alternative question is 'Who gave birth to this creature?' The answer to this question brings in the 'other', 'the ex- of the existent', and leads to the particular identity.

The mother is the other to whom the existent first appears...the primacy of appearance constitutes through the others' gaze, the fundamental corporal aspect of identity. (Cavarero, 2000, p. 21)

In whatever scenes we may appear through our lives, our first bodily and unique appearance is to our mothers. To our mothers, at birth, we never

appear as the 'what?' a baby, but always as a 'who?' a unique existent born from our mothers.

The exhibitiv quality of acting ... makes birth into a phenomenal scene capable of conferring upon identity its expressive, contextual and relational status. In this way birth, action and narration become the scenes of an identity that always postulates the presence of an *other*. (Cavarero, 2000, p. 28)

From the moment of birth we appear, we express our being.

Cavarero is over-privileging sight. In most cases, the new-born is first seen by the midwife, and, today in Britain, by the father. Delivery is now accompanied by the steady and insistent sound of the baby's heartbeat, and the mother will often hear the baby's cry before she sees her. Provided that the birth is normal, and the mother is healthy and willing, the new-born enters its first reciprocal relationship with her as she responds to her cries by putting her to the breast. The baby begins, often after some initial difficulty, to suckle. In writing of the gaze, the 'primacy of appearance', 'the phenomenal scene', Cavarero is straying into an abstract picture of birth in which our senses of hearing and of touch slip away. She is preoccupied by the scene under the hospital arc lights. Relationality is born as we are born, through our bodies. The interwoven identities of the mother and daughter gradually start to emerge. Cavarero writes of the infant appearing to the mother or the lovers appearing to each other as unique individuals. In agreeing with this, I add that the speech of

birth is not only 'it's a girl', but often also immediately a searching for similarity. Many new-borns resemble family members. Family resemblance is a literal truth as well as a Wittgensteinian metaphor.

Cavarero writes: 'Between identity and narration – and this is our thesis....there is a tenacious relation of desire.' (2000, p. 32) Despite my disagreement with Cavarero over the privileged role of sight, I do want to support her claim that it is this desire that makes each of us into a narratable self. We have a familiar self-sensing recognition. '[The narratable self is] the familiar self [*sapore familiare*] of every self ...' (Cavarero, 2000, p.34) The spontaneous experience of memory within narrative is not the same as the reflexive nature which constitutes the autonomous subject, favoured in the male tradition. Not all memory takes the form of an active process of remembering, it can also take the form of involuntary recall or an unreflecting knowledge of the self. (Cavarero, 2000, p. 34) Cavarero's sense of our desire for our story is linked to the relationality of the story. She separates uniqueness from substantiality:

Our thesis, once more, is that the etymological root that the terms *uniqueness (unicita)* and *unity (unita)* share does not flatten them out into a homogenous substance, but rather renders them signs of an existence whose life-story is different from all others precisely because it is constitutively interwoven with many others." (Cavarero, 2000, p. 71).

For Cavarero, the unity of a human life, on which she insists, is provided by the related story of the life, and the relationality of the life: the function of narrative is clearly to produce unity.

I do, however, have further difficulties with Cavarero's thesis with respect to the narratable life. Cavarero erases difficulties in the interest of unity, whereas for me unity is often imposed on, or read into, the stories of the less powerful by the more powerful. For example, she warns briefly against the risk of 'cultural colonialization and instrumental appropriation' before analysing Elsa Joubert's *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena*. (1985, discussed in Cavarero 2000, pp. 64-5) She deals cursorily with the power relation between the white literate story taker and the black illiterate story giver. She is aware of the 'risk' that this story may appeal to those who speak the Afrikaans language, but do not know how to read it. She suggests that Joubert solves this problem by putting on a theatrical performance of the tale for the family and friends of Poppie Nongena. Although this is well intentioned, it seems unlikely that the performance would overcome the problem. A distance was created as Poppie Nongena was transformed from a black maid, who provided an autobiographical and oral story to the 'story-taker' who was literate, into the subject of a biographical novel. The theatrical performance would have been intelligible to non-readers of Afrikaans, but Poppie Nongena had still been transformed from being a worker, a daughter and a friend to being part of a white woman's literary oeuvre. Here the story of the black maid is given unity at all costs by the 'story-taker'. Cavarero does not acknowledge the

'smoothing' effect of story-giving to one's employer. Cavarero's concern with the language in which the story is related masks a disregard for the possibility of hidden, incongruous narratives within the published narrative. Another example can be found in Cavarero's stories of two ordinary Milanese women, Emilia and Amalia. (pp. 55-7) Cavarero does not hesitate to claim that Emilia is attached to her life-story written by her friend because it contains the unifying truth. She does not consider that there may be aspects of herself that Emilia does not choose to reveal even, or especially, to her friend, nor that the story itself may not be important to Emilia. It may be the simple act of friendship that matters, irrespective of what words are on the paper that she carries in her purse.

In the second part of her book, *Relating Narratives*, entitled 'Women', Cavarero turns to the occluded woman. She draws on Muriel Rukeyser's poem 'Myth' in which Oedipus asks why it was that he did not recognise his mother. The sphinx admits to having misled Oedipus:

'But that was what made everything possible' said  
Oedipus.

'No,' she said. 'When I asked "what walks on four legs in  
the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening?", you  
answered, "Man". You didn't say anything about woman.'

'When you say "Man" ' said Oedipus, 'you include women  
too. Everyone knows that.'

She said, 'That's what you think.' (Rukeyser, 1984, p. 498,  
quoted Cavarero, p. 49)



Sheer arrogance caused Oedipus to make the common error of including women within the category 'man'. Before his physical blinding, Oedipus figuratively blinded himself from recognising who he was. His incest is a direct consequence. While men are concerned with the universal,

there is a shade of truth in the stereotype that women have an aptitude for the particular ... in women's stories the accidental and the particular are alive and well. (Cavarero, 2000, p. 53)

The uniqueness of a life story corresponds to such particularity. The particular person so damagingly ignored by Oedipus was, of course, his mother, Jocasta. Failing to recognise his mother seems to go beyond 'ignoring the particular' as noted by Cavarero. An unspoken and unacknowledged familiarity with the person of one's mother is a basic expectation of lives as normatively lived in our culture. For an adopted child, like Oedipus, the depth and intimacy of the relationship may sometimes be displayed in the intensity of the desire for such recognition. For those cared for by mothers, adoptive or biological, recognising and being recognised by one's mother, is important to self-understanding.

In her final section, 'Lovers', Cavarero stresses the narrative reciprocity of lovers. She entitles her chapter, 'Eros and Narration', thus singling out one kind of love. She refers to mother-love, as a comparator, to suggest that the 'who', the person loved, is as unique to the lover as the child, the person loved, is unique to the mother. In placing mother-child

love as an exemplar of loving the 'who', Cavarero re-confirms the point she made through the myth of Oedipus: to learn who he is and thus to escape from the misleading universal, Oedipus needs to know *who* is his mother. The mother-child relation is at the origin of the story, and at the start of a uniqueness which emerges from relationality. Cavarero examines, *inter alia*, Alice Toklas and Gertrude Stein, and Orpheus and Eurydice. She demonstrates how, in loving each other, two narratable selves appear to each other in their uniqueness and provide ontological affirmation for each other. The lover seeks to tell her/his story to a listener who shapes the story as a way of enacting a loving relationship. Such narrative reciprocity is not confined to figures from literature. The scenes of storytelling range 'from gossip to the family feast, from the meeting of friends to conversations with strangers, and especially in friendship and love.' (2000, p. 126)

Cavarero places emphasis on the 'interweaving' of unique stories, in contrast to Ricoeur who expresses our 'entanglement' in each other's stories. This term 'entanglement' perhaps conveys better the potential complications of stories. For Jocasta, as for many women, there may be secrets that affect the lives of those with whom one is entangled, but which are not revealed to them. As I have argued elsewhere:

Given the complications of most women's lives, how many of us would entrust the vagaries of our fortunes to the discretion of another? Those in weaker positions have much to gain by having a hidden self. Perhaps we do not

entirely recognise ourselves in the other's narration,  
however gifted or close to us the storyteller may be.  
(Mitchell, 2001, p. 85)

The shaping listener whom Cavarero does not stress is the mother. She focuses on *Eros* rather than on mother-love, which equally well may call out narrative reciprocity. Curiously, a quotation from Oedipus which Cavarero provides earlier makes this point:

*She is my mother; my sisters are the Seasons;*

*My rising and my falling march with theirs.*

*Born thus, I ask to be no other man*

*Than that I am, and will know who I am.* (Sophocles,

*Oedipus the King*, quoted Cavarero 2000, p. 11)

In the second line, Oedipus makes clear exactly the interweaving in a loving relationship that Cavarero endorses. As Cavarero puts it, his uniqueness comes from being 'born of a mother ... who, by giving birth to him, has generated the seasons of his existence, ... ' (2000, p. 11). Sophocles' phrase, 'My rising and my falling march with theirs' expresses poetically the imbrication of a mother's life in her child's, and the child's life in its mother's. Though more rarely acknowledged than the stories told in romantic love, the story of our mother's life, while we are yet dependent, has influence, as does her version of our lives. For adopted children the story of their birth-mother is, often entirely or at least partially, unknown. The picture is complicated. Adoptive children do

frequently seek out details of their biological mothers, but at the same time not having that information, or not acting on it to form a relationship with their birth-mothers, is a viable alternative. A secure identity can be formed without this knowledge.<sup>82</sup> Jackie Kay's poem, 'The Adoption Papers', discussed below, suggests that the absence of narrative can be more bearable than the narrative. (Kay, 1991)

Cavarero's argument suggests that Oedipus is an extreme example of the ignoring of the mother typical of the relation of life-stories. Cavarero points out that in losing the event of his birth Oedipus lost his story. Characteristically life-stories begin, 'I was born at ...; my parents were ....'. Already in the phrase, 'I was born' the labour and the presence of the mother are lost, as they were lost, in a more extreme way, to Oedipus. Ironically Oedipus, famed for his romance with his mother, provides an emblematic example of the erasure of the mother which begins so many 'great lives'. Although Antigone and Ismene enter the stage at the end of *Oedipus the King*, Jocasta dies without telling them her story. Both daughters can be read as shaped by their mother, but this requires reader/listener thinking the myth through motherhood, rather than through the silencing hostility and revenge of the Theban court.

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<sup>82</sup> There is a further dimension in the recent decision to allow children who are born from donors to be allowed knowledge of the donor of the egg or sperm, if they ask for this information.

## Reading *Antigone*

*Antigone* has been important for the concept of 'woman' in philosophy. I precede my reading by briefly alluding to Battersby's use of Hegel's and Kierkegaard's writing on *Antigone* as part of her project of outlining a female subject position. For Hegel, *Antigone* represents woman in her purest form. I make no claim to engage with the huge debate, stimulated by Hegel, over the law of the state and the law of kinship, nor with psychoanalytic readings of the text.<sup>83</sup> For Hegel, *Antigone*'s most significant relation is to her brother. Battersby shows how for Hegel, 'Antigone's position as the "other" of patrilineal society is a necessary polarity *within* the development of (male/human) spirituality.' (1998, p. 111)

For Hegel, it is Sophocles' portrayal of the sister/brother relation that reveals the essence of woman most clearly. *Antigone*'s tie is to 'blood': to the family and (spiritualized) nature, in ways that put her outside the customs and ethics of the state or Greek *polis*.... Hegel supposes that woman's bondage to 'blood' keeps her

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<sup>83</sup> In *Stately Bodies* Cavarero notes that 'In Irigaray's work Sophocles' *Antigone* receives constant critical attention and passes through various interpretive phases ... . In her *Speculum* essay [1985a] ... *Antigone*'s identification with her mother is linked to her nullification of self within a maternal desire turned prevalently towards the son.' (Cavarero 2002, p. 203, n. 5) My aim by contrast is, primarily, to read into the myths, the story of the mother of daughters. I see the mother as a mother, rather than as a site of maternal desire.

obedient to sacred law in ways that leave her outside the duties that are imposed on males. (p. 110)

Antigone represented 'woman' in her purest form and was characterized as the 'everlasting irony in [the life of] the community.' (Battersby 1998, p. 153 including quotation from Hegel, 1977, §475, p. 288)

Battersby also discusses Kierkegaard's Antigone in which Antigone's most significant relation is to her father. He reworks the myth in a chapter of Volume 1 of *Either/Or* entitled 'The Tragic in Ancient Drama reflected in the Tragic in Modern Drama.' (1987, 139-164) Kierkegaard portrays a modernized Antigone, through the voice of the aesthete A., who presents a contrast. The Greeks 'suffered sorrow, but accepted their family or city as the unchangeable horizon of their lives.' (Kierkegaard, 1987, p. 143) The Greek Antigone rests in her fate. The modernized Antigone, as reworked by Kierkegaard, holds the secret of her father within her, alone, and with anxiety. Her secret knowledge prevents her from marrying her beloved. Only when she dies can she tell her beloved her reason for refusing marriage. Kierkegaard's Antigone fits neither the Greek model, nor the modern model. Battersby explains,

Kierkegaard's modernized Antigone is neither 'modern' nor 'ancient.' Her destiny is not just a matter of fate; her feelings are not just ones of 'sorrow.' But she feels pain for something that is not her own fault as she tries to take responsibility for the 'sins of the father.' As such Antigone

is singular: both inside and outside the norms of full personhood which are characteristic of modernity.

(Battersby, 1998, p. 254)

Battersby uses Kierkegaard's writing on Antigone to think through 'falling outside the norms of individuality and the ethics of personhood.'

(Battersby, 1998, p. 155) Thinking the concept of 'woman' has broken open such norms and ethics. In later sections I refer to Kierkegaard's insights on secrecy.

Cavarero discusses *Antigone* in *Stately Bodies*. (Cavarero, 2002, pp.13-97) I begin by following her in presenting Antigone primarily as a daughter. I emphasise her re-interpretation of the importance of Jocasta for the unfolding of the tragedy. I add reflections on Jocasta. I do not ignore the incest which darkens the relationship between these women, but neither is it a centre of my attention.

In my re-reading I have shifted Sophocles' descriptive context in that I have not focused on Creon, the king, nor the death of Haemon, his son and the fiancé, but on the lives of the women. The characters in *Antigone* are entangled in other parts of the myth not acted in this play. Ancient as they are, they enlighten us about female experience.

### **The Daughter's Story**

The first section of Cavarero's *Stately Bodies* is entitled, 'On the Body of Antigone.' (Cavarero, 2002) She shows the centrality of the body

of Polyneices to the tragedy, and the importance of the body to the quarrel between Antigone and Creon. Rather than interpreting Antigone's obligation to her brother in terms of a clash between her sense of family, and the demand that she should obey Creon's edict, Cavarero provides an explanation of Antigone's love for, and sense of duty to, her brother in terms of their 'co-uterine generation' in Jocasta's womb. In attending to the norms of life of the ancient Greeks, and showing the importance of female lineage, she brings the mother forcefully into Sophocles' play. Once Antigone and Polyneices are thought of from the perspective of the body, their mother is instantly called to mind, since it is having shared her body that is essential to their bond.<sup>84</sup> Cavarero points out that although the family is,

indicated sometimes with the term *domos*, it is rooted in the notions of *genos* or *philia*, or rather in the concept of that consanguineous chain linking those who belong by birth to a common breed, and who therefore share not only the same house, but also the same blood inscribed in *generation*. (Cavarero, 2002, p. 26)

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<sup>84</sup> Today, of course, we are not governed by the same sets of norms as the ancient Greeks, and may well not accept that we have duties to those to whom we are related by 'co-uterine generation'. However, Cavarero's insight throws a new light on many brother-sister dramas, such as Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*; or Jane Austen's sets of sisters in *Pride and Prejudice*, or *Sense and Sensibility*. A contemporary example of the force of the brother-sister relation was the angry outburst of Charles Spencer at his sister, Diana, Princess of Wales's, funeral in September, 1997.



In her emphasis on the power of generation and on the blood tie, Cavarero wrenches the idea of the mother away from the bedevilling subordination to house and household, and places her as a creative and unifying presence. Cavarero insists: 'it can only be Jocasta, the mother, who initiates the blood lineage'; 'it is blood generated by the mother that polarizes the tragic action'; 'It is the power of blood that moves Antigone' (p. 27). She vividly reminds of 'a birth that links each and every body to the carnal, internal and bloody recesses of the female womb.' (p. 32) In tragedy, and in history we are used to tales of blood being tales of battle, tales of blood spilt, of gashes and bleeding wounds. By contrast, Cavarero recovers the creative power of blood. Blood has a different significance considered from the point of view of the female. Cavarero gives the clue in her idea of blood lineage, but I take the idea further. Blood, for those who menstruate, is monthly evidence of the potential of their wombs. The menstruating woman is far more familiar with blood than most men. Miscarriage brings a huge and alarming flow of blood. Delivery can be accompanied by loss of blood. The after-birth is a bloody mass of flesh. For most women, blood is denotative of our generative power.

I welcome Cavarero's recuperation of the importance of the concept of the blood of the female line in ancient Greece, and I build on it in my reading of the stories of the mythic daughter, Antigone, and her mother, Jocasta, below. However, this particular significance of hereditary blood should be understood within the norms operating in ancient Greek society. Today, the image of 'hereditary blood' is overlaid with other meanings. In

a later section I show a daughter perplexed and damaged by allusions to her blood.

Cavarero presents Antigone as a daughter looking back towards her mother. She suggests that the daughter's self-sacrifice is in order to carry out the mother's desire. For example, Antigone refers to Polyneices as 'my mother's son'. (l. 466) Integral to Antigone's tragedy is that she is unable to look forward as mothers do, to new births, but is condemned to concern herself with the past, with seeking justice for acts already committed. Her sense of herself as female is intimately bound up with her sense of herself as her mother's daughter:

Antigone is, of course, not unaware that she was *born* a woman, because, aside from her sexing as female, which is read within the social order as the determination of her subordinate role, her action arises precisely from the fact that she was born of a mother's womb. For her, in fact, the significance of being born a woman, and that of being born *of* a woman, are linked by the symbolic code of the generative female body. These facts also link her, with ties stronger than blood, to that brother she buries precisely because they share the same mother. She acts in spite of the polis and outside the pre-established representation of a womanhood whose foundation she locates elsewhere, and which needs no further public confirmation. (Cavarero 2002, p. 43)

Kitto (the translator of the edition of *Antigone* I am using)<sup>85</sup> notes that Antigone's extraordinary declaration of loyalty to her natal family has been questioned on the grounds that it qualifies her objection to leaving a body unburied. It also offers a calculating attitude to the duty to the family which is sometimes seen as Antigone's main motivation. (Kitto in Sophocles 1994, Note, p. 160) Antigone says:

For had I lost a son, or lost a husband,  
Never would I have ventured such an act  
Against the city's will. And wherefore so?  
My husband dead, I might have found another;  
Another son from him, if I had lost  
A son. But since my mother and my father  
Have both gone to the grave, there can be none  
Henceforth that I can ever call my brother. (ll. 906-13,  
*Antigone*, Sophocles, 1994, )

However, the words ring true of the absolute judgments of the inexperience of youth. Never having had a husband or son, Antigone might well imagine them to be replaceable. Moreover, as she is continually drawn back by the power of the shared birth from her mother's womb, the uniqueness of her bond to her brother(s) is indelibly marked in her.

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<sup>85</sup> This edition, referred to in the bibliography of *Stately Bodies*, was used by Cavarero's translators, Robert de Lucca and Deanna Shemek, though not by Cavarero herself who used her own translation.

At the end of *Stately Bodies* Cavarero includes an appendix which draws on Maria Zambrano's fantasy of an experience of maternity for Antigone, entombed in the cave. (Zambrano, 1989) Zambrano interprets Antigone's tragedy as maternity denied. She supposes the shade of the mother crosses the daughter's body, so that she, the young virgin, may 'feel the weight of being a mother.' (Zambrano 1989, p. 63, trans. Cavarero 2002, p. 192) This shade is not Jocasta, but the mythical Great Mother and the Earth. Zambrano focuses on the 'revelation' of birth. As Antigone is primarily concerned with the body – the body of her brother, her own fated body – she had a close awareness of her birth, and thus of her mother. As Antigone has remembered the body, she has remembered her mother, and, in Zambrano's vision, her mother reveals maternity to her. The Sophoclean focus on the male dead body of Polyneices enables us to forget the mother. A counterbalancing focus on the woman's body immediately brings back the mother/daughter dyad.

The shade of maternity provided by the mother for the daughter here is reminiscent of Cavarero's earlier depiction of the relation between mother and daughter in *In Spite of Plato* (1995) where she reinterprets the myth of Demeter. Here Cavarero writes of the relation between mother and daughter as the 'figure of maternity already complete on both sides, the generator and the generated.' (1995, p. 90) Cavarero suggests that the daughter who remains solely a daughter, does not lack maternal power. It is rather the patriarchal order that prevents the backward gaze of the daughter on her mother. There is a disturbing claustrophobic edge to

Cavarero's picture. She claims that women's desire to be a mother is pre-ordained in patriarchal codes, and suggests that the daughter could keep her gaze on her mother, find her sense of rootedness from her mother and thus become rooted in a free subjectivity. The desire of Demeter is for her daughter to be what she is, a girl, not the wife of Hades. Cavarero is keen to 'forbid the identification of the "substance" of being a woman with the act of generating *alone*.'<sup>86</sup> Her idea is rather to stress mother-daughter rootedness 'in a horizon of similarity'. (1995, p. 64) When a daughter becomes a mother she frequently becomes closer to her mother, not infrequently overcoming a previous estrangement. The desire for sharing motherhood is a frequent female response to birth. Yet, against Cavarero, it might also be argued that difficulties between mothers and daughters need to be recognised.<sup>87</sup> The idea of the girl with her gaze eternally fixed on her mother is restricting, for both mother and daughter. The mother has a life beyond maternity. The daughter will not remain eternally a girl. She may well move on by resisting her mother, whether or not she has children. The mothers I discuss below in the work of Jackie Kay and of Andrea Levy, are both grieved by their daughter's leaving home, but there

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<sup>86</sup> Italics in original.

<sup>87</sup> I allude to difficulties in the mother-daughter relationship in my introduction. Hazel Barnes writes of her mother: 'It would be false to say that I did not love her, but strongly negative emotions were there as well. From the beginning our relations were troubled, and the tension between us intensified with time; it was still there beneath the surface even in later years when we consciously avoided conflict.' (Barnes 1997, pp. 20-21) Such a mother-daughter relationship is at least as common as the devoted relationship which Cavarero advocates.

is no suggestion that the daughter is in the wrong. Cavarero's view closes off resistance and a focus on the future for both women. A more open view of their relationship can be combined with a recognition of their continuing significance for each other.

### **The Mother's Story**

Although Jocasta does not appear in *Antigone*, Sophocles would have expected his audience to know her story. The Greeks were familiar with legends of the house of Labdacus. Kitto makes clear that although plays were performed over three days as a competitive festival in Athens,

the three surviving plays by Sophocles set at Thebes and focussing on the family of Oedipus were not designed to be performed together sequentially. (Kitto, Introduction to Sophocles, 1994, p. xi)

It is misleading to suppose that the audience would see Jocasta in *Oedipus the King* on one day, and then follow this with seeing her daughters in *Antigone* the next. The links between the plays are thematic. However, as Ruth Padel points out: 'The tragedian ... invited members of his audience to make vivid for themselves the family's history, time past and now invisible.' (1992, p. 344) I begin by considering Jocasta from *Antigone's* viewpoint, and then think of her as she appears in *Oedipus the King*. The presence-in-absence of Jocasta in *Antigone* is an aspect of the audience's imaginative response to the play. Jocasta can be viewed as a motivating force behind *Antigone's* death-defying 'burial' of her brother.

Beyond this, Cavarero emphasises the *excessive* motherhood of Jocasta – ‘so much a mother, in fact, that she is mother not only of her last four children, but also of their father.’ (2002, p. 27) Cavarero uses a forgiving simile for Jocasta, which recalls the germination of plants. She compares her incestuous family to ‘successive bodily off-shoots of one flesh’. (p. 27)<sup>88</sup> In a striking aside, she alerts us to the imbalance between the attention paid to the ‘crime’ of Jocasta in marrying her son ‘while millennia of history keep silent about the paternal rape of daughters’. (p. 27)

Recognising, of course, that Jocasta is a figure from myth, I now set aside her incest which has been the target of so much thought, and place Jocasta in context, and in contemporary expectations of motherhood. Such is the silence of mothers, that in *The Greek Way of Life: From Conception to Old Age*, Robert Garland begins by warning the reader that there is no ancient Greek testimony from women patients during pregnancy or delivery, nor from a female biologist or gynaecologist. (Garland, 1990) The focus of medical writing was on conception and birth, not contraception, from which Garland deduces that the Greeks were preoccupied more with the difficulty of achieving live births, than with

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<sup>88</sup> At a Centre for Literature and Philosophy Conference at the University of Warwick in May 2004, entitled *The State He's In: Political Philosophy and the Figural*, Cavarero stated in discussion of her book that Jocasta was ‘terrible, awful’. Thus my reading of her simile does not accord with her intention in using it. This illustrates Ricoeur’s emphasis on the importance of the reader, discussed above, receiving the text differently from the way the writer intended it to be read.

preventing such. It is of course possible that there was considerable concern with, and knowledge of, contraception, but this was a woman's topic and did not find its way into medical writing. In the extant male texts, there is evidence of a fear of childlessness, and sterility was regarded as a divine punishment. (Garland 1990, p. 36) The expected age of the mother at conception came early in life:

While the effect which either pre-menarcheal or early post-menarcheal sexual relations may have had on fertility cannot be gauged, there is little doubt that the early age at which many girls first gave birth greatly increased the risk of infant mortality, since those who became pregnant within two years of menarche put both themselves and their child at high risk. (Garland, 1990, p. 26)

Jocasta must have produced her five children at a precariously young age, and a precariously mature age. The preoccupation with male fertility may well have obscured for the Greeks, the durability of Jocasta's successful child-bearing.

The narrative of Jocasta's suicide is normally interpreted as a response to the (undoubted) horror at the incest in which she had been unwittingly engaged. A sub-text to her story lies in her response to the exposure of her first born son on the mountainside. I begin by exploring the practice of exposure, and then return to Jocasta, as she appears in *Oedipus the King*. Garland makes clear that for us to assume (with Plato) that exposure was an accepted and little grieved for method of abortion,



revealing cultural difference between us and the Ancient Greeks, is too swift a judgment. (Garland 1990, pp. 59-105) It seems at least plausible that it was as hard for a Greek family to dispose of its baby as it is, or was, for families in modern day China. The Greeks did not actually kill unwanted babies, apparently because had they done so they would have incurred blood-guilt.<sup>89</sup> Instead they practised *ekthesis* or *apothesis* which Garland translates as exposure. (Garland, 1990, p. 84) They employed a midwife or household slave to carry the baby outside the residential area and leave it to the mercy of the elements. This implies a repugnance to murder, and sense of divine control over life and death. The picture is complicated. Exposure was not a practice limited to poorer families. It also served to obviate problems of dividing the inheritance in too numerous families. The categories at risk were girls; deformed or sickly infants; illegitimate offspring; offspring of slaves. Plato prescribes exposure of defective children in *The Republic* (Plato, 1961, 5.641) but recognises the potential of tenderness to the infant in the *Thaetetus*:

Or do you think your infant must be reared in any case and not be exposed? Will you bear to see it examined and not be upset if it is taken away, even if it is your first-born?  
(Plato, 161a, 1961, quoted in Garland, 1990, p. 88)

A traditional part of the myth of the exposed child is the inability of the person charged with the deed actually to perform it. The slave or midwife

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<sup>89</sup> Similarly Creon seeks, unsuccessfully, to avoid blood-guilt by not actively killing Antigone, but only entombing her with a small supply of food.

helps the Gods to care for the child by placing it where it will be found. Garland even suggests that the idea of a society that tolerated exposure may be a dramatic fiction. He points out that 'not a single real-life instance of exposure is documented for Classical Athens' although such cases form the key to works of literature. (Garland, 1990, p. 92)

In Ancient Greece, the father was the owner of the child. Jocasta, particularly given her assumed youth, had no choice but to endure his removal from her. Her maternal feelings are not explored by Sophocles. The removal is seen as the key to the plot. Jocasta simply reports:

As for the child, it was not three days old  
When Laius fastened both its feet together  
And had it cast over a precipice.<sup>90</sup> (ll.72-5, *Oedipus the King*, Sophocles, 1994, )

Jocasta's mood here is not one of sorrow, but of indignation at Oedipus' belief in the 'crafty prophet'. The years that had gone by, the solace of the birth of her subsequent four children, and the extremity of her situation may explain Jocasta's tone. Later she allows compassion to creep in. Referring to the prophecy she says:

For that was clear:

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<sup>90</sup> Kitto notes that the Greek indicates a trackless mountain. (Sophocles, 1994, p.167)

This fits well with the ambivalence of the action of exposure. A trackless mountain is less fatal than a precipice.

His [Laius'] son, and Mine, should slay him. [Laius] —He,  
[Oedipus] poor thing,  
Was killed himself, and never killed his father. (ll.854-6,  
*Oedipus the King*, Sophocles, 1994)

We can easily imagine the pause for a sharply remembered grief from her youth indicated by the long dash in the text. Silence replaces the story. The brevity of Jocasta's reference 'poor thing' for her baby, indicates to me a familiar sorrow, which no longer calls out an outpouring of emotion, but is a contained blow to the heart, no longer narratable.

Jocasta's distress must have been increased by the wound inflicted on the baby. The pinning of the ankles – Sophocles expresses this as 'the fetters clamped upon your feet' (l.1034) – was unique. (Garland, 1990, p. 92) It is evidence of the cruelty of Laius, and flies in the face of the saving notion that the child is to be left to the care of the gods. The compassion for her baby that we can imagine in Jocasta finds an echo in the tale of the servant charged with disposing of him. When Oedipus asks him why he did not fulfil his charge, his complete and adequate reply is: 'I pitied it my lord.' (*Oedipus the King*, 1.1178) The speed with which Jocasta realises that Oedipus had survived the exposure shows that she was well aware of the practice of giving the abandoned child a chance to live by placing it where it might be found. (ll.1050-1068) She realises fast what has happened and her concern is to prevent Oedipus's realisation: 'O may you never learn what man you are!' (l.1068)

In the majestic narrative of the death of Jocasta and the self-blinding of Oedipus, Jocasta at last refers to her earlier tragedy. The messenger reports:

[She] called on Laius, these years long dead,  
Remembering their by-gone procreation.  
“Through this did you meet death yourself, and leave  
To me, the mother, child-bearing accursed  
To my own child.” (ll.1244-48, *Oedipus the King*,  
Sophocles, 1994)

As she approaches her own death she remembers the husband of her youth, and the child of her youth. The sadness of the mother whose creativity is thwarted is contained in the curious phrase, ‘by-gone procreation’. In Kitto’s translation, the simplicity of the word ‘by-gone’ contrasts starkly with the biblical weight of the idea of ‘procreation’. In her final reproach to the dead Laius, she identifies herself not as wife or queen, but uniquely as ‘mother’. Her sorrow is not solely for her incestuous union, and its off-spring, but also for the injury to her first-born.

There is a fleeting shadow of the mother struggling with, and being defeated by, the injury to her children in the moving figure of Eurydice, Creon’s wife, the mother of Haemon, in *Antigone*. In a few lines, Eurydice evokes intense pity in a brief speech in the play:

my hand was on the bar

that holds the gate, to draw it; then there fell upon my ears

a voice that

spoke of death ...

I am no stranger to bad news. (ll.1185-1191, *Antigone*,

Sophocles, 1994)

At the close of the play, Eurydice's suicide is reported. She could not bear the double death of her sons. The death of her first-born, Megareus, not named until the end of the play, is obliquely referred to earlier. The death of her second son Haemon makes her life unbearable. Jocasta, does not appear in *Antigone* as a character. The only mother who speaks is Eurydice. Presumably the Greeks at the festival, familiar with these stories, could hear the echo of Jocasta's lament, and of her fate, in Eurydice's words and in her suicide.<sup>91</sup> This ancient image of the woman with her hand upon the gate, ready to suffer and retreat, is an apt illustration of the eclipsed figure of the mother, and of a silenced maternal grief.

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<sup>91</sup> The translator, Kitto, notes that the suicide of Eurydice was rare in tragedy in that she stabbed herself. He states that most females commit suicide by hanging themselves. (Sophocles, 1994, p. 164) That the suicide of such a minor character should take so unusual a form, increases my suspicion that it is partly intended as a reminder of Jocasta's suicide. The view of suicide of the ancient Greeks was different from the view which became prevalent in the Christian era. For the Greeks, suicide was seen rather as choosing to die at the appropriate time. Nevertheless, the suicide of a mother, caused by her children's misfortunes, is a tragic event.

## Differences in Mothering

Wittgenstein writes, 'for if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all* [games], but similarities, relationships and a whole series of them at that.' (P.I.66) He advises us to look not for an essential sameness, but for resemblances. I now change the scene and provide three contemporary narratives of mothering which illustrate differences in mothering: a narrative of adoption; a narrative of family life; and a narrative of home-school relations. I move away from the act of birth (which is so much part of Cavarero's perspective), to mothers engaged in the activity of mothering as the children grow up. The time shift enables the social and economic context of mothering to become evident. I do not use these stories to suggest that the experience of these particular mothers is a universal experience.

Cavarero's emphasis on a unitary story of a life is complicated by reading her work through *The Adoption Papers* by the Scottish Nigerian poet Jackie Kay (1991). For Cavarero the blood tie between mother and daughter is a source of strength, an impulse to action. Kay explores attribution of blood as a mark of racism, and the painful lacunae caused by a daughter's lack of blood relation with her mother. Whereas Cavarero writes of a story told to a shaping listener, for Kay the roles of narrator and listener overlap and merge into each other. In *The Adoption Papers* Kay presents the voices of a Glaswegian infertile adoptive mother, a daughter, and a birth mother interwoven in the text. The voices are indicated to the reader by different typefaces but are even more distinguishable by their

different contents and tones. The series of ten short poems in chapters are made up of their three voices reflecting on the birth, and neonatal illness of the daughter, and then on the daughter's schooldays and the possibility of her meeting her birth mother when she is twenty-six. In an intricate structure, Kay mixes time periods in the thoughts of her characters, though the three parts are dated 1960-61, 1967-1971, 1980-1990. The birth mother and the adoptive mother are white. The father and the daughter are black. Although, as I indicate below, silence plays a significant part in Kay's partly autobiographical poems, the artistry with which she has created them suggests the countervailing therapeutic effect of narrative. I select aspects of the poems which throw light on the concept of narrative identity.

The opening poem 'The Seed', brings together narrative detail and mixed reflections on the maternal body. (Kay, 1991. p. 11) The birth mother thinks of the brevity of the moment of conception: 'the time, the exact time/ for that particular seed to be singled out', as contrasted with the 'slow weeks' of pregnancy. This is interspersed with the adoptive mother expressing her longing for the discomfort of carrying a child, and for the pain of childbirth. Kay thus draws attention to the amazing chanciness of conception, and to the sense that the infertile woman's very body has been denied an experience that is regarded as characteristic of the female. The chapter closes with an allusion to the father by the birth mother: 'He couldn't leave Nigeria ... / His eyes intense as whirlwind/ the

music he played me'. (p. 12) Kay brings in the physical joy and passion of conception.

The second poem introduces the daughter's voice as she seeks her mother's name and her own original name from the Records Office. She relates the few sparse details of her mother's life that she receives in 'a slim manilla envelope'. Such a bureaucratic disclosure is a far cry from Cavarero's exploration of the self-discovery of the mythic figures of Ulysses or Oedipus.

The tone changes in the third poem. Kay introduces issues of family resemblance and of race. She provides an ironic description of the home appraisal visit of the social worker to the adoptive mother's home.<sup>92</sup> There are 'no babies' until the adoptive mother says: 'oh you know we don't mind the colour./Just like that, the waiting was over.' (Kay, 1991, p. 14) Kay moves on to contrast the excitement of the adoptive mother picking up the daughter with the shame and grief of the birth mother.

This casts a flickering light on the next poem which juxtaposes the daughter's phone calls to trace her mother, 'If she wants to meet me that's fine if she doesn't /that is also fine', to the adoptive mother's dream that the birth mother appears at the door. In the related dream the adoptive mother notices that the birth mother looks like the daughter, – 'she looks a dead spit' – and then the birth mother takes the baby. (p. 19) The physical

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<sup>92</sup> Single parenthood was more unacceptable in the early 1960s than it is today, and adoption more common.



resemblance which we often accept unquestioningly as part of the binding together of the family is part of a haunting absence for the adoptive mother. In a light touch, the daughter closes the chapter by setting the 'few genes, blood, a birth' of her birth mother against 'the mother who stole my milk teeth/ate the digestive left for Santa.' (p. 20) The domestic details reveal the years of care ... . Kay also alludes here to the unspoken relationality between mother and daughter.

The comfort of the unspoken is no longer available in Part 2 which engages with the schooldays of the daughter, and provides a challenge to the traditional narrative of the mother. The language changes to Glaswegian as the daughter says: 'After mammy telt me she wisnae my real mammy/I was scared to death she was gonnie melt'. (Kay, 1991, p. 22) The adoptive mother protests against the charge that the child is not her own: 'she's my child, I have told her stories/wept at her losses, laughed at her pleasures, /she is mine./... all this umbilical knot business is nonsense'. (p. 23) The frail defensive tones of mother and daughter alike indicate to the reader the weight of conventional expectation. It can be damaging to insist on a blood relation between mothers and daughters. The racist history of attribution via blood is followed up when the daughter, unable to dance correctly, receives the reproach from her teacher: 'I thought you people had it in your blood.' As the daughter, reflecting, aptly asks: 'What is in my blood?' Her schooldays are threaded through with casual racism to which she responds by allying herself with

Angela Davis.<sup>93</sup> (p. 27) The birth mother's voice enters with a counterbalancing reminder (sadly unheard by the daughter) of the glamour of the father: 'Olubayo was the colour of peat/when we walked out heads turned.' (p. 26) The adoptive mother and daughter recover from the onslaught of the categorisation of the public narrative in the manner so well known to mothers and children, by sitting together in the armchair and having tea and cake.

The last part begins with the re-emergence of the birth mother, assailed by memories and fears, now that the daughter is legally old enough to discover her story. Kay addresses the issue of blood in the grown-up daughter's voice. The daughter has no answer to medical questions about her blood family. She tries to set it aside: 'the blood does not bind confusion'; is only menstrual flow; comes from her finger; but she still wants to 'know my blood'. She phones her grandmother, but then retreats. Kay's poem ends with all three women *not* telling their stories. After she moves out, the adoptive mother restrains her worry over losing her daughter: 'Getting myself into a tizzy', and silently reassuring herself, 'Closer than blood /thicker than water. Me and my daughter.' (p. 32) The

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<sup>93</sup> Angela Davis is currently Professor in the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She is a political activist and a philosopher. In her writing in the 1980s she adopted a Marxist position through which she perpetuated a low valuation of reproductive labour. In her later work, she has contributed towards understanding how racism has been specifically manifested in black women's lives, including an 'important critique of the implicit racism present in some white feminist work on the problem of rape.' (Jagger and Young, 1998, p. 480)

rhyme of 'water/daughter' suggests, but she does not relate, her anxiety that her link to her daughter is too weak, not bound by blood, and that the daughter may revert to her birth mother. In anguish, the birth mother throws the photo of her baby into a well,<sup>94</sup> signifying a deep and silent loss. The daughter dreams of meeting her birth mother, but a dream of not meeting inserts itself. The daughter's final words – 'There is nothing left to say. / Neither of us mentions meeting again.' – show that the notion of a letter from her birth mother is now entering the fantasy which has sustained her. It is too painful. After so long, words will not cover the gap. The story cannot be told.

Secrecy is not explored by any of my three theorists of narrative, MacIntyre, Ricoeur, and Cavarero, but it is often a powerful force in family life. In her novel set in a British Jamaican family in the second half of the twentieth century, entitled, *Every Light in the House Burnin'*, Andrea Levy depicts a poor family for whom secrecy is a way of life. (Levy, 1994) Such secrecy has two aspects: secrecy from the society of North London beyond the family; and secrecy within the family. The narrator's voice is that of Angela, the youngest of four children, now a professional photographer. The novel is written in a realist style, with the action switching between Angela's childhood and the time of the death of her father. Angela writes: 'How can you explain your family

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<sup>94</sup> This may be an allusion to the traditional tale of village girls drowning themselves in the well on discovering that they are pregnant.

conventions – the secrecies, the codes, the quirks, to someone who's never lived them?' (Levy, 1994, p. 228)

The parents have adopted a policy of keeping 'as quiet as possible in the hope that no-one would know they had sneaked into this country', (Levy, 1994, p. 88) although we are told that 'Dad' came over amongst the first post-war Jamaican immigrants, who arrived on the ship, *Windrush*, in 1948. In general, the family seem accepted in their neighbourhood, without conforming to all the English domestic rituals. In a revealing aside, Angela notes that her mother still walks as though she has the Jamaican sun beating down upon her. She remains quietly Jamaican in the way she walks, while not being confrontational about her origins. There is only one full description of a racist incident in which the children's playmates suddenly turn on the four Jamaican children with abuse. The mother insists that they confront the situation, and stands at her door, arms folded, while her children venture outside again to play.

Yet, the novel conveys the sense that the family are living under the continual threat of incurring racism. When a (rare) visitor asks about the difficulty of 'coloured people' getting jobs and accommodation, the father replies 'we don't have any trouble. We just keep ourselves to ourselves. Don't let anyone know our business, you know.' (Levy, 1994, p. 126) In such a situation, being asked to tell one's story is perceived as an invasion of privacy. When a district nurse asks Angela's mother questions about her life, she bitterly resents it, and finds a reason to dispense with her services. As Caroline Steedman points out, Cavarero

ignores the forced narration of their stories by so many impoverished women seeking official assistance. (Steedman, 2001, p. 45) Whereas Cavarero insists on our desire to hear ourselves narrated, to hear our stories, Levy depicts a situation in which the mother has no desire to tell her story. Levy's 'Mum' does not express the desire to be a narratable self, but rather a secret un-narrated self. Perhaps she lives with the break in her experience between her life in Jamaica and her life in England as simply that, a break. Perhaps she does not conceive of her life as a unity, in the way that Cavarero suggests is created by narrative, and therefore would be averse to a falsifying unifying narrative. In the instance Levy describes, 'Mum' is able to avoid disclosure, but life stories may be elicited by harsh necessity. It is an attribute of the powerful to be able to put others to the question. The enthusiasm for the story ignores the uses of silence for the oppressed.

The distrust of words, of the usefulness of making a narrative of experience, is equally evidenced in the secrecy within the family. In a striking incident, the father reveals, when Angela is twenty five, that he had an identical twin, with whom he lost touch. She writes:

This conversation was brief, but condensed. First, I have an uncle in this country. Second that he's my dad's identical twin, and lastly, that he is dead. I had learnt more about my dad in those few minutes than in most of the years that got me to that point. (Levy, 1994, p. 237)

Such secrets are, of course, very different from the dramatic secret of incest in Sophocles' *Antigone*, which was so important to Kierkegaard's reworking. Yet A.'s<sup>95</sup> (maybe ironic) description of the reassuring quality of holding a secret 'close to the chest' is appropriate here:

Perhaps nothing ennobles a person so much as keeping a secret. It gives a person's whole life a significance, which it has, of course, only for himself; it saves a person from all futile consideration of the surrounding world. Sufficient unto himself, he rests blissful in his secret; this might even be said though his secret is a most baleful one. (E/O, p. 157)

As a man in low-grade employment, 'Dad', had little to call his own. Once he had lost touch with his twin brother, perhaps the significance of his distant existence, of their identical appearance, of the exceptionality of being a twin, meant more to him than it would have done if it had been a shared narrative. The unshared knowledge could have been more precious than public knowledge. In his case the 'surrounding world' was the world of white English society. It could have been a source of strength to him to keep this secret, any secret. The fatal nature of 'Dad's' illness is never acknowledged to the father. This is an example of Kierkegaard's baleful secret. Levy's novel makes clear that 'Dad' is not well-treated in hospital. 'Mum' and 'Dad' existed in a world of secrets. In keeping this last secret, the nature of 'Dad's' illness, from each other,

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<sup>95</sup> 'A.' is the aesthete, Kierkegaard's mouthpiece in *Either/Or*.

‘Mum’ and ‘Dad’ were maintaining their world, sufficient to themselves, against the personal exposure integral to being treated in hospital.

The relation between the mother and daughter rests on the unspoken. She greets the disappointing news that Angela is not moving with them to their new home with silence. When the father is depressed by his illness he attempts suicide. The mother, *in extremis*, tells her daughter: “‘He took the painkillers – the paracetamol,” ... there was a silence. My mum looked round at me and then turned quickly back to the sink and began washing dishes with urgency.’ (p. 178) Silence is the usual response to bad news. She pretends not to hear. The depiction of the mother is convincing and familiar. In our society, many mothers express their feelings through rampaging through domestic tasks, rather than in a ‘therapeutic’ narrative. Silence is a common response to painful events, or unwanted memories. For those whose voices are discordant, amongst whom are mothers, secrecy is a vital strategy.

My final narrator provides a direct link to Wittgenstein. In *The Everyday World as Problematic*, Dorothy Smith adopts the perspective of a standpoint feminist to relate the stories of some Canadian mothers. (Smith, 1988) Her strategy reveals a gap between ‘where we are and the means we have to express ourselves and to act’, since

the concerns, interests and experiences forming “our” culture are those of men in positions of dominance whose

perspectives are built on the silence of women (and others.)

(Smith, 1988, p. 19)

She agrees with Wittgenstein that seeking essences – such as illustrated in the idea of true narratives – beyond or beneath the ordinary use of language is a misleading philosophical practice. ‘Wittgenstein opposed the philosophical practice of lifting terms out of their original home (*seine Heimat*) and their actual uses in order to explore their essence.’ (Smith, 1988, p. 188) She takes the further step of arguing ‘that the way terms are used in their original context, including their syntactic arrangements is “controlled” or “governed” by its social organisation.’ (Smith, 1988, p. 188) Smith writes of particular women in order to show how narratives of female experience are already determined by the male world into which these descriptions fit. She adds to our understanding a sense of the social structure and relations in which narratives are necessarily placed. My interest is to show that the idea of a coherent narrative may leave unnoticed important parts of women’s experience which come to the surface by taking the viewpoint of the mother.

I precede an example of mothering from Smith by drawing on Sandra Harding’s ‘Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology’ (1993) to provide a context my use of Smith’s study. I go on to show how my advocacy of the standpoint of the mother both resembles and differs from positions taken in standpoint theory, before returning to Smith’s narrative.



Harding begins by tracing the intellectual history of feminist standpoint theory to ‘Hegel’s reflections on what can be known about the master- slave relationship from the standpoint of the slave’s life versus that of the master’s life ... ’ (Harding, 1993, p. 53) She notes that in Marxist theory the Hegelian insight was developed into the standpoint of the socially oppressed, which reveals more than the standpoint of the socially privileged. For the standpoint theorist, knowledge claims are always socially situated. In failing to interrogate their advantaged social situation dominant groups suffer a disadvantage in accessing knowledge, particularly knowledge of social relations. Harding emphasises that members of dominant groups cannot easily change their perspective. Their activities both organise and set limits on their understanding of themselves and their worlds. By contrast the activities of those at the bottom of social hierarchies can offer starting points from which a different view of humans’ relations with each other and with the world they encounter can come to light. The term ‘activities’ is important. Nancy Hartsock insists that a standpoint is ‘not simply an interested position (interpreted as a bias) but is interested in the sense of being engaged.’ (1995, p. 70)

Introducing specifically feminist standpoint theory, Harding turns to Dorothy Smith’s later investigation of the relation between power and knowledge: *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*. (1990, pp. 54-6) Here, Smith emphasises that women’s many different lives and different experiences are invaluable for generating new

critical questions about both women's and men's lives, and the causal relations between them. Smith thus engages with developments in standpoint theory in which it attends to the diversity of women's experience. Smith points out that women's work of caring for bodies (domestically, emotionally, sexually) is invisible to men who are immersed in the world of abstract concepts. 'Starting thinking off' from the site of such work will break the silence which surrounds both the women engaged in these practices and the practices themselves.

I differentiate between a standpoint and a viewpoint. I understand a standpoint as more fixed, and a viewpoint as more flexible. My engagement with Kierkegaard leads me over that there is no *one* correct viewpoint. Although Kierkegaard ironically plays with a variety of viewpoints, he undermines the notion of a viewpoint when he writes 'I am just as little, precisely just as little, the editor victor Eremita, as I am the Seducer, or the Judge.' (Kierkegaard, 2000a, p. 243) Like Kierkegaard I am wary of taking up a particular fixed standpoint. For me, meanings are not seen as such, they are flexible, in the process of becoming.

Working within the symbolic, I am more interested, in a Wittgensteinian way, in a multiplicity of points of view leading to a multiplicity of language games, than in a Marxist analysis of relative positions of power. My writing on the mother acknowledges, but does not depend on, a contrast between the mother's viewpoint, and that of those in more powerful positions than hers.

Yet, I agree with Smith, who takes a sociological perspective, that the ways terms are used, the 'homes' of words, are 'controlled' by the social structures into which such use fits. The focus of my work is not on critiquing oppressive social structures, but I recognise the powerlessness of mothers in some social structures, as revealed in mothers' exclusion from some language games, and in their marginalisation in others. I challenge such powerlessness by placing the mother in different language games, and making her experience as a mother central to philosophical narratives in which she had played only a minor or metaphorical role. I agree with standpoint theorists that engaging with the activities or practices – in Wittgensteinian terms the forms of life – of those who are often overlooked generates new critical questions, and in my terms, different stories, and stories of differences. I attend to the nexus of power relations in which the language games of mothering take place in that I do not insist on a coherent narrative in which the mother fits seamlessly into the social structure in which she finds herself. I employ a Wittgensteinian therapy to overcome philosophical silences around mothers. Working within sociology, Smith writes of taking different standpoints to break silences around female practices.

Let me return to my example, taken from Smith, of a narrative of mothers of school-age children. In Chapter 5, of *The Everyday World as Problematic*, Smith exemplifies her focus on the critical edge of feminist standpoint epistemology by asking illuminating research questions starting

from the site of the work of the mothers of a group of school-age children. She does not intend to generalise from her small group, but to identify how 'institutional practices of the school penetrate and organise the experience of different individual women as mothers.' (Smith, 1988, p. 187) Such institutional practices are seen, or partially seen, by the mothers. By contrast, the understanding of those who create and live within such practices are limited in that they do not engage with the mothers' practical activities, although these are engendered by the institution.

Dorothy Smith seeks out the gap between the official perspective and the mothers' perspectives by providing a detailed analysis of interviews revealing the work of particular mothers in relation to their children's schooling. Her contention is that the process of education, of transforming the child from an individual in a private setting into an evaluated and graded social being, presupposes the social organisation of the work of mothers, which is unspoken and unseen. It is of course easy to see the contribution of the mother from the perspective of the school, and this contribution is publicly recognised, more frequently now than in the early 1980s when Dorothy Smith was writing. Her aim is to make appear the line of fault between female experience and the expression of that experience. She shows how the organisation of the form of life of the mothers of school age children whom she investigates is a product of processes in which they have no part, but of which they are necessarily

aware, and to which they continually, and for the most part, willingly, respond.

An example is the organisation of the school day. (Smith, 1988, pp. 187-193). In the interviews, both Smith herself and the mothers 'naturally' talked of 'getting the kids off to school', of lunch-time, after-school etcetera. The educational programme, demarcated by the male public authorities, had an enormous influence on the rest of the mothers' lives, including on their opportunities for talking with their children, and on the style of these conversations.

The male public authorities are the dominant group absorbed in educational policy making at an abstract level, and thus unable to see the work of the mothers in caring for the bodies of the children through providing lunch etcetera ... , nor how their work impacts on the mothers' work. Because they are not asking the relevant critical questions of themselves, the male public authorities do not provide an arena in which the mothers' voices might be heard.

Smith's questions from a different perspective allow the mother's work to become visible. She notes that the mother adopts the school's sense of the importance of the timetable. A child is sent to school with homework unfinished rather than be late for school. (Smith 1988, p. 192). The mother's understanding of, and observance of, the conventions is crucial, but because it is implicit in their practice, it is suppressed in language. It does not form part of the conventional narrative.

Through taking the standpoint of the mother, Smith is able to provide new insights into the process of the management of homework. The authorities presuppose that the mother (normally) has the time to give to homework management, but also that she has a sophisticated understanding of the line between helping with, and doing, the homework. The apparatus of education controls her interaction with her child. She, like the education authorities, focuses on standards to be achieved, levels to be reached:

The child moves back and forth between the home setting in which she is embedded in particularising relationships, and the school setting in which she is being inducted into a standardized curriculum and impersonal procedures that evaluate her performance. (Smith, 1988, p. 199)

As the child moves back and forth so the mother moves between one frame of reference and another as she relates to her child. The social relations with the school are structured for her through notes on homework, reports, and parents' evenings. (Smith, 1988, pp. 199-200) In engaging with the school, the mother engages with a set of structures that are only partly revealed in the language games in the public domain. Her work of negotiating the tasks that take up her time – of being available for child or teachers, of reaching an understanding of what is required by the society of which she is a member – are not open to view but require a particular engagement with the activities of the mothers to become apparent.

Experiencing the everyday world as a mother need not bring overt awareness of these defining structures. The mothers in Smith's study do not reflect on the demands the structures of education bring upon them. Ignoring the existence of these structures, and their effect on mothers, does however entail an incomplete understanding of mothers' activities in relation to their children's education. A difference of experience is suppressed if the standpoint of the mother is not taken.<sup>96</sup> The narrative of home-school interaction, which plays a large part in many mothers' lives, is filled out and slanted in a different direction by the concrete practical questions which give rise to Smith's study. Smith can be read in terms of changing the 'homes' of the words used by the mothers she interviewed. As a more expert judge of the language games of education of schoolchildren, the researcher sees homes of education discourse differently.

## Conclusion

A narrator reflects her own position into the world which she creates in narrative, whether relating her own experience or that of others. In some way she participates in the narrative related. I reflect my own

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<sup>96</sup> A survey from the Equal Opportunities Commission, *Working Fathers: Earning and Caring* reported in *The Guardian*, 13 January 2003 has discovered that men in the U.K. are now spending far more time with their children than when Dorothy Smith was writing. The findings are that the time men spend with their children has increased from less than fifteen minutes a day in the mid-1970s to two hours on the average weekday, and six and a half hours a day at weekends by the late 1990s. This, of course, reduces the work of mothers, but their standpoint remains important.

position in that I highlight the mother where she had not previously been highlighted, but I see her also as the authors of the sources I draw on see her. Such a reflection enables a multiplication of reflections which merge in and out of each other. In that telling a narrative offers the perspective of the author, it invites counter-narratives, which evidence the mutability of the narrative form. I weave together narratives and counter-narratives. The truths of narratives do not lie in their fidelity to events or people. These are not unitary truths but kinds of variable truths-in-the-telling that offer plurality.

I problematise the mother as a narratable self. I challenge the claim that telling, or hearing one's narrative has the function of producing unity of identity. I provide examples to throw doubts on the ideas that we all have a desire for narrative, and on the narratability of experience. I illustrate the significance of untold narratives. I illustrate that the narrative form is open-ended in a way that allows for a shifting essence of the figure of the mother. I suggest that a narrative, seen as one among a multiplicity, offers understanding of a web of maternal relationships, each resembling the others in some ways: 'and the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.' (P.I.66) In examining the narrative form, I adopt strategies to overcome the erasure of the mother, and to complicate her story and her silences.



## Conclusion

In my thesis, I create a space for the language games of the mother in philosophy. My thesis is original in placing together Wittgenstein's ideas of how language works, and arguments for the philosophical significance of the embodied and relational figure of the mother. I move through the paradoxes of silence and speech, and of the forgotten emblem, towards a repositioning of the language games of the mother in philosophy. I show how the mother may be seen so that she becomes significant within philosophy; but I also want to show how philosophy may be seen differently if the mother is included in it. I situate my ideas within the project of feminist philosophy. I am not simply making a truth claim, but through uttering the language games of the mother as I weave together feminist philosophy and the writing of Wittgenstein and of Kierkegaard, I bring into existence a different feminist philosophical figure of the mother.

My thesis provides openings for future work on the mother. In discovering her through Wittgenstein, I have worked on and within the 'labyrinth' of language. If consideration of the mother becomes normal, the mother could perhaps be discovered in different ways through other major philosophers. Equally my work paves the way for future work on Wittgenstein. In insisting on Wittgenstein as a philosopher of resemblances, I make space for further re-readings. My alternative ideas on identity are created from a versatile pattern of thoughts not confined to the identity of the mother. Different elements could be accented –

different philosophical ideas could be generated, as I will emphasise below.

Let me return to my thesis. I build from the female towards the mother. I draw attention to, and speak through, the silencing of the figure of the mother. A critical employment of narrative is integral to my argument. The mother's place in language games begins snarled up in the essentialism/anti-essentialism debate. By engaging with Wittgenstein, I release myself from this debate. I discover the mother's place as a holding point in language games around women. From this point the lacuna between language and experience which began as part of a critique of Wittgenstein, grows beyond its application to Wittgenstein, to reveal truths about speech, and about writing, in which silences are part of a variety of easily overlooked maternal meanings. Through narratives, I move towards recovery of such meanings. The question of the placing the mother in language games leads to the theme of female shadows. Female shadows are a haunting presence in the texts of Kierkegaard, which become emblematic of the emergent relational self, the undeniably different self of the mother relating to her child. Disembodied shadows merge into a concept of active embodiment.

Wittgenstein advises:

In philosophy we do not draw conclusions. 'But it must be like this!' is not a philosophical proposition. Philosophy only states what everyone admits. (P.I.599)

I follow his advice in that I do not conclude by insisting that the figure of the mother must be as in any of the ways I have depicted her. However, I resist Wittgenstein in that I suggest that in stating what everyone admits, philosophy forgets the figure of the mother. In reconceptualising the mother so that she has a space, if not a place, in philosophy I highlight her where she had previously been obscure. Through bringing the mother into different philosophical contexts, different language games, I add to, and change her meaning within some of the conversations of philosophy. If the 'work of a philosopher consists in assembling reminders for a particular purpose', (P.I.127) my task is to bring reminders of the mother into language games in which she formerly played little or no part. In persuading the reader to look differently I aim to engender a therapeutic *Gestalt* shift. I do not seek to make an unarguable deduction from established premises. I offer a truth-in-the-telling, an evanescent performative truth, rather than a fixed truth. The performances I conjure are those of writing and reading.

John Wisdom advocates a Wittgensteinian philosophical approach of reflection by analogy, or parallels. It involves seeing the value of proceeding from particular case to particular case. To demonstrate this procedure he favours narrative examples. He suggests that the conclusions reached may not be within the limits of conventional usage, but may be either borderline or paradoxical. (Wisdom, 1991, p. 77) Whilst I demonstrate below that these insights are relevant to my methodology, the idea of the borderline needs careful handling here. My claims are

borderline only in that I do not so much argue against previous truths discovered by the philosophers whose work I draw on, as add in suggestions of the female which come from the borders of their work, and yet influence how the whole is seen.

Veronica Vasterling raises the political question of finding room for alterity and plurality. (Vasterling, 2003) She insists on the value of discordant new voices. She points out that human beings have a

long period of assimilating the meanings, norms, explanations, knowledge, and stories that circulate and are transmitted in the family, school, and society of which we are part. (Vasterling, 2003, p.154)

Bringing the figure of the mother out of the home, out of the homely, and into philosophical debates on mind and body, on the relation between self and other, involves working against the grain of such assimilations. Politicising the figure of the mother is uncomfortable work. Rather than being supported by the authoritative teachings of tradition, the mother falls within the groups that Vasterling describes as being subordinated to the tradition. (2003, p.168) As I demonstrate, such subordination takes the form of silencing, marginalisation, allowing only a borderline importance. The way in which we approach borderlines matters. If a colour is relegated to the murky undistinguished greys, its trajectory and its context are diminished. If greys and blues are shown as resembling each other, an azure grey can find its place alongside the Titian blues, and change how we see other greys and blues. As Wittgenstein puts it: 'I don't try to make

you believe something you don't believe, but to make you do something you won't do.'(cited in Rhees, 1970, p. 43), I do not try to persuade the reader of new beliefs, but to persuade her to see family resemblances between language games, customarily divided in philosophy.<sup>97</sup>

I draw attention to a female relation to language as different from a male relation to language, and thus to female experience mediated differently through language. In the hermeneutical arc between writer, text and reader that Ricoeur describes, 'the final brace of the bridge [is] anchorage of the arch in the ground of lived experience.' (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 164) I ground my writing in my contextualised, lived experience as a woman and a mother in the society of which I am part. I address issues relevant to mothers with different lived experience. I have worked to construct a bridge from my experience, and that of diverse women and mothers, to the philosophical reader. In so doing, I test experience, as related, (or partly related), through and against philosophical texts. Thus the lacuna between experience and language games that Scheman identifies is crucial.

Notwithstanding this lacuna, Wittgenstein's view of language can work against the male idea of the universal and against a chaotic fragmentation, to allow a space for women, in all our many differences, into the philosophical picture. In examining the position of the mother

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<sup>97</sup> John Wisdom suggests that 'Instead of Venn's diagrams, one might use painted circles that fade out towards the edges.' (Wisdom, 1991, p. 39)

within the symbolic, my work remains rooted in ordinary language. In its very definition of a mother, ordinary language acknowledges that the mother has a distinctive body, and a distinctive relation to embodiment. However, I change the language games of the mother's body so that they become expressive of an embodied choice. I argue for a different philosophical understanding of the body, which remembers the body which gives birth and nurtures. I demonstrate awareness of other uses of the term 'mother' and how the term is learnt, by presenting the mother who loves her child as an ordinary virtuous mother. In this way I keep within the normal experience of being mothered, and of mothering.

An *'übersichtlichen Darstellung'* of the problem of essentialism within mainstream philosophy, and of the problem of essentialism within feminist philosophy leads me to unravel these problems by linking this concept with that of family resemblances in Chapter 2. I argue for an understanding of Wittgenstein as thinking of the norms and practices in which we engage, and which are evident in our language games, as changing and fluid, as one practice shades in and out of resemblance with another, and creates a new norm in so doing. I also resist Wittgenstein here bringing in a narrative from Scheman which raises the acute problem of those who engage in practices, and inhabit a form of life, but are not at home in either the practices or the form of life, and are unable to express their discomfort in the language games available. (Scheman, 1996a) Her narrative draws attention to a potential gap between experience and language which entails that experience remains hidden. The shadow

remains, haunting the philosophical discussion. In placing together Luntley's reading of Wittgenstein, and Scheman's reading, I suggest that while Luntley valuably suggests the agent who makes judgements and in so doing, creates new norms and practices, Scheman's narrative reminds us of unspoken presences. (Luntley, 2002) In adding to the meaning read by Naomi Scheman on to the narrative of *Torch Song Trilogy*, in my further reading, I welcome the significance of her resistance to Wittgenstein. I am influenced by Scheman's idea of a shifting 'diasporic' essence to identity.

This leads on to my discovery of a place for the mother as a limiting case in the language games around women. I bring in the type specimen approach from botany. I do not claim a true inner essence to mothering, but a significant place for the language games of mothering in language games about women. I counter the forgetting of the mother which means that neither the practices nor the relationality of the mother play a noticeable part in philosophical (or feminist philosophical) discussions of identity. I insist on the mother as embodied, and on the power of the narrative form.

I move on to examine whether there are openings for women in Wittgenstein's writing. I begin by protesting that Wittgenstein, who criticises philosophers for subsisting on a one-sided diet of examples, himself suffers from the same limitation in that he does not include examples relevant to women. Thus, a woman reading as a woman finds herself excluded. However, I adopt strategies to open this closed door; to

turn this imposed silence into speech. My strategies include substituting female language games for male language games, and adding in de Beauvoir's account of her emergence into language, and the mother as teacher of language described by John Wisdom. I disclose the figure of the mother talking with her child as a veiled support to Wittgenstein's 'natural' account of language learning. I find Wittgenstein's omission of women does not debar me from using his concepts. Curiously, Wittgenstein who at first appeared to impose a silence upon me, becomes the thinker who helped me find my way to speech. The therapy of his method is more powerful than the absence of relevant instances.

Wittgenstein's concept of a form of life which underlies language games depends on the idea of practices which make up such a form of life. I add in a discussion of maternal practices in order to raise a maternal form of life. I discuss what is normatively built in to the figure of the mother, and challenge the conventional symbol of the mother by introducing Cavarero's reading of the Demeter myth, which restores the power of the figure of the mother. I emphasise how Wittgenstein, especially in his *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough*, draws attention to the way practices are seen. Wittgenstein looks at the practices of 'primitive' people differently from Frazer, and sees different meanings in these practices. This prompts me to look at the practices of philosophy differently, and to see openings for the mother. Like Wittgenstein, I examine the role of the words, gestures and ceremonies within language games – Wittgenstein sees a use different from Frazer's, I add to his changed use. Each use



brings a new meaning. By showing different uses of female concepts which bring along new meanings, I develop Crary's Wittgensteinian insight that although meaning is not fixed independently of use, use does not necessarily fix meaning. (Crary, 2000)

Novel to my approach is my engagement with Kierkegaard. I think together Wittgensteinian forms of life and Kierkegaardian existence-spheres. My intention in bringing in the philosophy of Kierkegaard is to provide an alternative symbol of the self, and a distinctively female subject position, drawn from a re-reading of a philosopher important to Wittgenstein, who, like Wittgenstein, was writing against the main philosophical tradition of his time. Kierkegaard addresses questions of gendered subjectivity and explores psychological interiority. Wittgenstein is concerned with the relationality of language games; Kierkegaard is concerned with the relational self in the process of becoming. Following Kierkegaard's indirect lead through his pseudonyms, I reveal the importance of examining the viewpoint from which we understand an existence-sphere, in order to introduce female viewpoints, which I bring from the edge of the text and make central to my writing.

Thinking about subjectivity raises a different picture of the self, which I suggest through the theme of shadows, in Plato's cave and in Kierkegaard's Silhouettes. Battersby's writing on a Kierkegaardian idea of the self, communicated indirectly, offers a route to my ideas of a maternal self. I suggest shadowy insubstantial selves, who are, through a strange

contradiction, known by their bodies, their physicality. I argue for a relational, 'morphing', maternal self with blurred outlines. I cannot shine a direct light on these shadows or they disappear, so I approach them through narratives.

Stimulated by Battersby's ideas, I move on to re-read Kierkegaard's *Gjentagelse* (repetition, retake) of Plato's *Symposium*, entitled *In Vino Veritas*. I re-read this text as illuminating differences of the self as mother. My focus on such differences entails that the pregnant, birthing and breast-feeding mother (as distinct from the mother of older children), obvious around us but philosophically little noted, plays a large role in my writing. I introduce the work of Young, where I find a phenomenological expression of the embodied experience and relationality integral to being a mother. Thus, I detail a different use of the term 'body' in philosophy, focusing on the mother's practices which create and sustain another life. I raise the question of what difference it would make if philosophy did allow significance to these female activities.

A memorable shadow is that of Sarah, a *Skyggerid*, (shadow outline), introduced in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*. I use her silent watchfulness, which casts a peculiar light on the biblical tale, to indicate how the virtuous mother both nurtures and relinquishes the child she loves. The terrifying drama of the tale of Abraham and Isaac reveals, away from the limelight, a mother's love. Sarah's love is distinctive in the intensity of her physical connection to the child, which is threaded through with the demand from the future, which entails that she give up the child.

In each narrative, I blur boundaries between selves, and between forms of love. Having focused so much on writing the mother's body, I close by a reminder of the impossibility of the task. Somehow, the mother eludes the symbolic. In my discussion these narratives, I wrench the focus of philosophical discussion of love away from sexual love to mother-child love.

Throughout I argue for parallel female language games. I bring in female examples and instances resembling those used by male philosophers. In moving from particular case to particular case, I offer sets of instances which resemble each other. For example, I move from Cavarero's Demeter to Kierkegaard's Sarah, prising open the text to let in the mother. In working from particular instances, I demonstrate my wariness of universals, showing how a Wittgensteinian 'family resemblance' approach helps me avoid both the traps of the universal and a 'contemptuous attitude to the particular case'. (Stern 1992, p. 369)

In my final chapter, I discuss how the narrative form, which I use warily, enables me to express the shifting essence of the mother and the diversity of mothers; and to acknowledge the silences which are part of the mother's story. I discuss narrative theory in the work of MacIntyre, Ricoeur and Cavarero. Cavarero writes: 'The scission between universality and uniqueness, between philosophy and narration, signals from the beginning a masculine tragedy'. (Cavarero, 2000, p. 53) Cavarero makes this point in her discussion of the tragedy of Oedipus, which she interprets as caused by his absorption in the sense of himself as an abstract

subject. She notes that as women are estranged from the traditional self-representation of the subject, they are not tempted by abstraction, but rather favour narration. Whilst differing from Cavarero's view of narration as conveying the uniqueness of the subject, I agree on the significance of the scission between philosophy and narration. Like Cavarero, I see in the restoring of the philosophy of narration an opportunity for what she terms 'a feminine art'. (2000, p. 54) In drawing on narratives and in making a trajectory towards a discussion of the narrative form, I resist the 'masculine tragedy'. Though I recognise the strength of the idea of narrative identity for expression of subjectivity, unlike Cavarero I challenge acceptance of narrative by bringing in the power of secrets and silences. I suggest that narrative identity is more successful for those with successful stories. A unified narratable self can be a daunting chimera.

I provide examples which create imaginative parallels between mothers in dissimilar situations, and from contrasting genres of literature. I do not seek to create contiguity between my chosen narratives, but to create in the reader a sense of a variety of missing meanings restored. My narratives come from different spaces within literature – from Greek myth, from Nigerian-Scottish poetry, from a London mother, from Canadian sociology.

And this was, of course, connected with the very nature of the investigation. For this compels us to travel over a wide field of thought criss-cross in every direction. (P.I.Preface)

I respect the fissures and breaks in language that difficulties of life, and of expression of psychological interiority, demand. I argue that the Kierkegaardian fragmented self, which is in the process of becoming, resonates more with some female experiences, than the self as author of a coherent story. I draw attention to the dangers of assuming that we all have a desire for a story, or the wish or ability to remember our stories. Yet, the narrative form appeals in its fluidity, its therapeutic power to encompass discontinuities and unspoken gaps. It invites different perspectives and resists closure. I acknowledge the transformational power of narrative, what Bell has termed the alchemy of narrative. (Bell, 2004) My quest is not to search to double base metal into gold, but to double the text to create a space for the mother through re-working the symbols on the page. I work not with shiny metal but with open-textured cloth. I re-stitch narratives in order to persuade the reader that the pattern of the presence of the mother, once imaginatively seen, is difficult to erase. The mother appears, even looms large. But I also indicate tears in the tapestry in that I indicate the secrets and silences into which the mother slips. In my readings, narratives are always complicated by signs of absences.

My readings of Wittgenstein, Kierkegaard, and of narrative theory, are rooted in the antecedent thinking of Scheman, Battersby, and Cavarero, whose feminist ideas do different work in the thesis from the ideas of the male philosophers. I engage in feminist philosophy not to play games with words, but to explore and create female meanings, to

suggest varying truths. As I illustrate throughout, a symbol has a performative force. In use, a symbol becomes a double, or shadow of reality, which conjures meaning. As Wittgenstein writes: 'Only in the stream of thought and life do words have meaning.' (Wittgenstein, *Zettel* 1967, 173.) The point of my discussions is to elicit meanings, to persuade the reader of different meanings through investigating and changing language games in the female and maternal stream of thought and life. I add to feminist philosophy by taking the term 'mother', rather than the more general term 'woman' as the norm of personhood. I suggest that the absence of the mother from male philosophy has a significance different from, (not more than) the significance of the absence of the woman. I develop and turn feminist philosophical arguments by foregrounding the mother. I illustrate this by revisiting the three feminist philosophers with whom I have been in dialogue throughout my thesis.

Scheman has inspired me in her creative use of Wittgenstein. In revisiting issues that trouble feminist philosophy, such as the problem of essentialism, she uses a Wittgensteinian approach to free her into new ways of asking questions. She takes from Wittgenstein the idea of putting philosophy itself in question, and thus produces her own different kind of relation to philosophy. Like Wittgenstein, she is impressed by the power of examples, but she uses a different kind of example. A case in point is her writing on the experience of transsexuals, or of those who, in her words, have a 'diasporic identity'. Scheman works with the notion of a shifting essence to identity, and an identity with a blurred outline. My

position is close to Scheman's as I bring these ideas into my picture of a flexible figure of the mother, stimulated by the type specimen method used in botany. I am also influenced by Scheman in expressing such ideas of identity through narratives. Such narratives are not just making truth claims. They create a different symbol of the self.

In resisting Wittgenstein, Naomi Scheman disturbs the Wittgensteinian close fit between language and experience. I uncover such a lack of fit not in those who we might anticipate to have difficulty feeling 'at home' in their use of language, since they may well be in a marginalised position in society, but in mothers who, from a conventional perspective, seem to be in a settled position in society. In this way I adapt and move on from Scheman's ideas to reveal what may be hidden in the ordinary. I tread a careful path in keeping within the range of the ordinary, and ordinary language, whilst resisting a quietist reading of Wittgenstein, and a conformist understanding of the mother. In describing the ordinary mother, I imply simply that being a mother is an ordinary widespread experience, and the language of mothers is spoken and heard in our ordinary lives. In describing the language of mothers through and against Wittgenstein's approach, I make clear that mothers do not simply passively inhabit a given form of life, but are active and engaged in changing the shifting immanent norms of our form of life. Mothers continually create and alter language games, as I do in creating new questions for philosophy in this thesis.

The work of Adriana Cavarero provides a strengthening feminist fibre in the weaving together of the philosophical language games in each of my chapters. Cavarero asks whether the mother is completely occluded in the history of philosophy. She employs the method which has influenced my work, of reading against the grain, and of working with the remaining traces of the female. Cavarero's writing is important to me as her startling re-reading of the Demeter myth first made me see a possibility of bringing the mother into philosophy. I make a parallel between my work and her work on Plato, in which she turns his predominant negativity towards, and exclusion of, women into a site for a feminist re-reading which empowers women. Cavarero insists on embodiment, an insistence which I have echoed in my depiction of the figure of the mother. I also find very powerful Cavarero's opposition to (male) universals. She turns, through the legend of Oedipus, the traditional philosophical question 'What is man?' which raises a universal, to the question 'Who?', which leads to a narrative, beginning with birth. Cavarero emphasises the importance of the mother-child relationship to knowing who you are. She writes of the individual's need to know who his mother is. I write from the mother's point of view.

For Cavarero, uniqueness emerges from relationality, related in narratives. I focus less on uniqueness, and more on a different narrated relationality, as I am concerned with the relational figure of the mother, whereas for Cavarero the scenes of storytelling are wide-ranging. When Cavarero writes of the power of the mother – Demeter, Jocasta –



sabotaged in male philosophical and literary texts, I agree with her, but I am wary of the drama of her writing. I fear that the theatrical footlights shine up and the shadow is lost. I take issue with some of Cavarero's ideas on identity. I suspect the idea of the shaping listener as likely to conceal a hidden, unnerving power relation. I aver that mothers are frequently reluctant to, or unable to, tell their stories, or create for themselves a unique narratable identity. Nonetheless, Cavarero provides an opening for me to portray the muted but insistent significance peculiar to the figure of the mother.

Both Cavarero and Battersby are ontologists concerned with a relational identity. My concern is with language. I have drawn from Battersby the idea of moving away from the autonomous (male) individual towards a Kierkegaardian relational self, and of a body which can generate as paradigmatic of the self. I give a greater emphasis to the birth mother's relation to the child than does Battersby. I move away from Battersby's work by linking it to the question of writing the experience of the mother whose body creates, carries and nurtures the child. Whereas Battersby has written on the reality of relationality between fluid emergent selves, I write on the language of relationality between the mother and child. My flexible figure of the mother, with 'mobile edges' is not defined through her properties, but is discovered in the flexibility of narratives.

Ricoeur reminds us that although as it is written a discourse becomes fixed, at the same time it achieves 'emancipation with respect to the author', so that what the text says matters more than what the author

meant to say. (Ricoeur, 1981, p. 201) The reader is free to reactualise the text in ever new contexts, as she makes the text her own. (p. 185) I make the texts I have discussed my own through my readings and re-readings, and I hope that my reader will make my text her own in new contexts. Already I am such a reader. If I began this story now, it would be a different story, with different silences.

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