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With “Two Throats and One Eye”:
Abject Female Friendships in Contemporary American Women’s Novels

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With “Two Throats and One Eye”:
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By

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Advisor: Martine Watson Brownley, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
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2011

Abstract

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By Sarah Prince

Although individual feminist analyses have underscored the importance of both friendship and the body to a distinctly female literary coming-of-age tradition, no study has yet examined how women's bodies inform these self-defining friendships. Drawing on feminist theories of abjection and embodiment, this dissertation adapts self-psychological concepts of mental and emotional bonding to illuminate different ways contemporary American female novelists write these bonds on the body—conceptualizing female self-development through embodied friendships with other women.

Juxtaposing novels from Toni Morrison (*The Bluest Eye, Sula*), Ellen Douglas (*Can't Quit You Baby*), Maxine Hong Kingston (*The Woman Warrior*), Margaret Atwood (*Cat's Eye*), Paula Gunn Allen (*The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*), and Sefi Atta (*Everything Good Will Come*), a pattern of embodied friendship bonds becomes vividly clear across much contemporary women's literature, crossing bounds of race and region. This literary border crossing calls for new critical inquiries that do the same. Through an explication of the body's centrality in bonds of imitation, idealization, and adversarial violence—all of which construct the dynamics of contemporary literary friendships among women—this project aims to answer this call. By considering women's bodies, differently merged through friendship, as a fundamental site of feminist literary analysis, this dissertation provides a better understanding and more accurate reflection of literary and actual female comings-of-age.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Fran, to my sister, Emily, and to my brother Quinton, who have each taught me valuable lessons about friendship, empathy, and coming-of-age.

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Introduction

With "Two Throats and One Eye": Depictions of Female Bonds of Abjection and Embodied Empathy in Contemporary Women's Novels

In the latter half of Toni Morrison's critically acclaimed novel *Sula*, a now middle-aged Sula becomes nostalgic on her death bed. Allowing her mind to drift backwards in time, she laments a lost connection with Nel, her childhood friend. Sula's wistful reflections eventually find focus, as she begins to recall the intensity of the friendship the two women once shared, a bond the dying woman can only describe as living in a state of merged existence—two adolescent girls thriving as a single being with "two throats and one eye" (Morrison 147). Through Sula's musings, Morrison creates a grotesque merger of female bodies, highlighting the corporeal significance of friendship in women's lives and temporarily trading in the limits of autonomous and individuated selfhood to revel in the libratory blurring of the embodied boundaries of her female protagonists. Morrison is not alone in underscoring women's embodied bonds as important to mapping the contours of same-sex friendships and self-development in contemporary female-authored literature. Similar accounts of the importance of corporeal bonds between female characters, formed not only through the merger of body parts, but also through the exchange or transfer of abject elements (saliva, sweat, food, feces, urine, vomit, tears, blood, and even corpses), exist in various works by critically acclaimed women novelists across a range of cultural backgrounds. This study interrogates these textual spaces of women's bodily mergers and exchanges, transferences that cement a pattern of female affinity through embodied bonds of abjection in fictional representations of female development.

Julia Kristeva notes the importance and proliferation of taboos against the abject in our efforts to consciously forget or deny the ever-present human body's need to excrete, exchange, and discharge abject elements in order to sustain its existence. She underscores the necessity of the abject's disavowal in order to create and sustain a stable sense of selfhood, a construction formed in an effort to transcend or be separate from the body in the current symbolic order. Elizabeth Grosz emphasizes the visceral repulsion to the abject such stability requires, highlighting human disgust brought on by visions or exchanges of these elements. These elements of the body, she points out, are ultimately impossible to transcend and are constant reminders of what is considered to be the base materiality of human embodiment:

> Abjection is a reaction to the recognition of the impossible but necessary transcendence of the subject's corporeality, and the impure, defiling elements of its uncontrollable materiality. It is a response to the various bodily cycles of incorporation, absorption, depletion, expulsion…It is an effect of the child's corporeal boundaries being set through the…incorporation and evacuation necessary for existence. (87-88)

In a system of meaning that depends on the stability of the subject and a clear delineation between body and mind, subject and object, inside and outside, any reminders of the uncertainty or malleability of these boundaries threaten the current borders of such meaning. The abject, then, is the ambiguity around embodied borders, highlighted by the body's secretions and excretions, which must be repressed in order to secure a place within the symbolic order. Repression is necessary because, as Grosz writes, acknowledging the abject threatens "apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and

possible dissolution" (87). Reveling in or celebrating the ambiguity of the abject, on the other hand, takes one to the edge of individuated subjectivity—"an abyss at the very borders of the subject's identity, a hole into which the subject may fall" (Grosz 87).

However, contrary to the negative connotations words like *abyss* or *hole* might suggest, many feminist critics see the borders between sanctioned identity and this void outside of the symbolic as a transformative space, which opens up new possibilities for transgressing constructed boundaries of subjectivity. Trinh T. Trinh calls this void the "third space" in which subjectivity becomes edgeless, as binary systems of meaning break down and access to separation, to unity, and to transformation are all held in tense balance (233). This dissertation examines fleeting moments representing this third space in late twentieth-and early twenty-first century women's novels. It does so by analyzing the cracks and fissures in individuated identity created by instances of embodied abject bonds—material connections made through the exchange or merger of abject elements between female friends—that blur bounds between self and other. Although this study does not and cannot claim to provide exhaustive coverage of all novels written by contemporary women writers, the works analyzed here open a critical conversation about how a generation of textual female bodies functions within friendships in differently marked embodied situations. Using late twentieth and early twenty-first century novels from Toni Morrison (*The Bluest Eye, Sula*), Ellen Douglas (*Can't Quit You Baby*), Maxine Hong Kingston (*The Woman Warrior*), Margaret Atwood (*Cat's Eye*), Paula Gunn Allen (*The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*), and Sefi Atta (*Everything Good Will Come*), this project juxtaposes works of women novelists from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds who currently live and write in the United States and Canada.

Although all of these novels participate in dialogues with various second-wave feminist ideologies of sisterhood, and all employ same-sex bonds of friendship in their female protagonists' personal journeys, the novelists themselves cannot be categorized succinctly by race or region. The selection of these novels is not, then, an effort to create straightforward literary continuities among these women writers, but instead to construct a series of case studies, which analyze the recurring phenomenon of the body's role in demythologizing the often idealized bonds of problematical female friendships. At their worst, such sentimentalized bonds create a false sense of universal feminist sisterhood. In contrast to these oversimplified and sometimes maudlin female ties, these novels demythologize such bonds by locating women's friendship within the abject and often grotesque byproducts of merged bodies—bodies that are always already differently imprinted with markers of historical, cultural, class, racial, regional, and sexually specific embodied permutations.

The choice to juxtapose variously situated women authors takes its lead from feminist critics like Carol Boyce Davies and Trinh T. Trinh. Just as Davies points to the danger of disregarding creative connections when critics force "the rigid compartmentalization [of authors] into geography and national identity" (94), Trinh underscores the need to move beyond allowing personal and authorial location to over determine the subjects of critical analysis: "for just as one must situate oneself (in terms of ethnicity, class, gender, difference), one also refuses to be confined to that location. If art can be neatly contained in systematic forms of closure…then it is no longer art" (231). Heeding such warnings, this study's aim is to balance an adherence to different culturally and historically embodied lived experiences with a pragmatic employment of the

category of *woman*, signifying that the use of this term is not always already an essentialist endeavor in discussions of subjectivity. Simply put, despite its absence in existing criticism, the importance of female embodied bonds is a pattern vividly illustrated in much contemporary women's literature, crossing bounds of race and region. This literary border crossing calls for new critical inquiries that do the same.

In contrast to past critical failures to consider the corporeal bonds of female friendship in these and other women's novels, substantial critical attention has been paid to the intensity of same-sex emotional, spiritual, and intellectual bonds in contemporary women's literature. Because the novels in this study all employ literary elements of the female *bildungsroman,* and because the most commonly cited of these elements is the presence of an intense female friendship that acts as a catalyst for the protagonist's identity formation, critics continue to extensively analyze the importance of the psychic bonds between women. The tradition of the female *bildungsroman*, first created by feminist revisionist efforts, is rooted in the previously all-male conventions of the literary *bildungsroman*, or self-forming narrative. Literary scholars have traditionally defined this genre as the intellectual, spiritual, psychological, sexual, and moral growth of a central male protagonist, as the narrative traces his journey from boyhood to manhood (Buckley 18).

This male literary tradition was later redeployed to describe female characters' progression into adulthood in late eighteenth-and nineteenth-century novels. However, these feminine versions usually ended ambiguously, providing readers with female protagonists who come of age by a process Annis Pratt calls "growing down"—conforming to gendered strictures or choosing death as the only alternative (14). These

novels reflected past social and cultural conditions that only recognized female characters who suffered a thwarted sense of self-development. Historically, the incomplete female *bildungsroman* has been linked to both the social pressure to make marriage the female life ambition and the Victorian insistence that women stay basically infantile (Labovitz 6). A fully realized feminist *bildungsroman* was not recognized and defined as a separate literary tradition until the 1970s. This period marked a time when the experiences of certain female protagonists could build upon one another to create both awakenings of feminist consciousness and autonomous senses of selfhood. However, this genre generally only accounted for protagonists who had access to the specific privileges of race, class, and sexual orientation. For these female characters, developing such consciousness promised the intellectual, financial, and social means to achieve a limited, but unprecedented, level of independence.

Although many women writers and critics have amended the traditional *bildung* literary paradigm to account for a specifically feminist *bildungsroman*, the revised feminist genre shares many basic thematic elements of literary self awakening with its traditional male counterparts: a child's naiveté evolves into adult awareness, and female protagonists engage in a quest to develop and employ a newly-emerging (feminist) self-consciousness. However, these women's novels diverge from the classic male *bildungsroman* in their creation of female fictional awakenings that are usually accomplished through an emotionally intense same-sex bond, often denoted as friendship (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 11-13). Contrary to male *bildungsheds*, who develop a sense of self through separation from the communities of their youth, female protagonists in this revised genre usually share their journey and form their sense of agency within

dyadic or communal relations with sisters and friends.[1] In fact, narratives of female friendship have become so prevalent in the novel that some critics claim they have replaced the romance plot altogether in contemporary women's literature. Joanne Detore-Nakamura categorizes the typical contemporary friendship plot through six common stages:

> First there is an initial meeting of the friends. Second, there is a search for self by one or more of the women through the relationship with her friends. Third, there is a complication in the friendship that can be either a male lover, another female, or self-imposed isolation. Fourth, there is a pursuit on the part of one or more of the friends for reunion, to mend the friendship. The fifth stage is the crisis moment in which the friendship is rekindled or dismantled either by the death of one of the friends or by a decision to separate. The sixth and final stage is the embrace or welcoming of self and of the friendship. (48-49)

Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, in *Between Women: Love, Envy, and Competition in Women's Friendships,* reiterate Detore-Nakamura's claim, which has become a familiar refrain in discussions of female friendship in contemporary women's literature. All three critics emphasize the simultaneity of relational bonding and self-development between women, especially within the context of friendship: "Identification is also the search for self, and a woman's malleable boundaries create confusion about where she ends and another person begins" (Eichenbaum and Orbach 69). These relationships of sometimes-supportive women are lauded not only for what Rita Felski calls their ability to frequently create "an effortless harmonizing of individual and group needs" (135), but also for offering an alternative model of female self-development

outside of the traditional heterosexual romance plot: "[In the female *bildungsroman*] women's friendships with each other are more important sources of warmth, human contact and avenues of growth than are their relationships with men"(Payant 160).

This feminist reworking of the genre, first used only in connection with a select group of white women's novels, has since been accused of falsely assuming universalized bonds of female friendship as a new second-wave feminist form of freedom from patriarchal self-restriction. Bridgette Wilds Craft explains that if the marginalization of women from the classic *bildungsroman* is based on a definition of self that cannot be extricated from a specific community of women, then many female novelists of color have long since been engaging with such narrative forms: "[A]s members of [social and] regional minorit[ies] they are questioning the traditional novel of formation's understanding of individual development as something inherently at odds with family and community" (41). In addition to contesting the origin of relational self-development in contemporary women's novels, Linda Krumholz points to the freedom of liminality many minority women writers have always had in constructing accounts of friendship-focused coming-of-age narratives from the point of view of the other—writing from a place of "formlessness, a space outside of social classification and power relations" (5). Pin-chia Feng reiterates this idea of a space outside classification, punning on Elaine Showalter's notion of women writing from the wild zone. Pin-Chia calls the space from which minority women write "the wild, wild zone" (18).

It is often from this marginalized "wild, wild zone" that lesbian feminist critics question what exactly feminist critics mean by friendship. After all, many feminist literary critics employ Adrienne Rich's notion of the lesbian continuum to access a

language to describe the intense emotional bonds of female-identified experience so prevalent in contemporary women's literature. In her analysis, Rich claims that under the social rubric of compulsory heterosexuality, the emotional and erotic ties between women have been severed. This damaging split from the physical occurs even though most women are emotionally, psychically, and spiritually sustained by bonds with other women. Her essay raises questions for many literary critics about how, where, and if lines between "platonic" and erotic same-sex friendships should be drawn. However, in response to her claims about a spectrum of female-centered experience, critics like Bonnie Zimmerman accuse Rich's lesbian continuum of desexualizing lesbian relationships by conflating these relationships with female friendship: "[T]oo often we equate lesbianism with any close bonds between women or with political commitment to women" ("What Has Never" 553). In addition, Zimmerman underscores the importance of the *bildungsroman* within lesbian literary traditions, as she asserts the genre has always been the default format for the paradigmatic lesbian novel of development, or coming out narrative. Although Zimmerman is adamant that a line between female friendship and erotic relationships should be drawn, she still draws on similarities of female development between the two. She claims that just as in other contemporary women's novels within the feminist *bildungsroman* tradition, the protagonist's development through female community is the aim of the feminist lesbian novel of self development: "The ultimate goal…is the creation of lesbian community, established through shared experience, visions, and stories" (Zimmerman, "Exiting from Patriarchy" 247).

Despite the consensus on the power female ties have in defining self-consciousness in variously situated contemporary women's novels, not all authors and critics embrace such an idealized role of women's bonding. Felski notes that literary friendships do not begin and end with individual protagonists' quests to understand themselves; instead, self-creating involves protagonists who must question identity as "intertwined with the exploration of roots and cultural history" (138). Female friends often inhabit different sides of such cultural histories, where power is divided asymmetrically and friends are appropriated using privilege, not mutual desire (Monteith 103). Other critics claim that literary friendships between women often prevent female protagonists from reaching the last stage of autonomous *bildung* (Paloge x). In contrast, still other feminist critics reject a *bildungsroman* tradition in which "only the masculine experience of separation and autonomy has been awarded the stamp of maturity," explaining that "the fully realized and individuated self who caps the journey of the Bildungsroman may not represent the developmental goals of women, or of women characters" (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 10-11).

Adding to this list of problems and incongruities, this study highlights the problematic acquiescence to masculine versions of individuated autonomy that many endings of contemporary female *bildungsromane* perpetuate, despite the initially promising premises that begin innumerable contemporary women's novels. In spite of their original promise, many of the novels ultimately end with female friendships pitted against an individual's journey toward autonomous identity, causing the power of dyadic female bonds to be diffused through larger communities of women or the possibilities of these friendships to be made implausible beyond the bounded print of the narrative. As I

emphasize throughout this study, these problematic ambiguities are particularly important when one considers the intensely physical bonds that contemporary novels of female friendship often depict—friendship that originates and is sustained in these novels through the bodily exchange of the abject. However, despite continued debates about whether same-sex friendship in novels plays a positive or negative role in female self-development, and despite academic disputes about how authors define and employ female bonds, the psychic, emotional, and intellectual ties between women have clearly become a central organizing thematic around which authors detail the coming of age of their female protagonists, and which critics approach contemporary women's *bildung* novels of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

To consider female relationships in terms of physical merger and abjection, this study moves away from the circular critical stagnation that attempts to define the psychic tenets of female bonds and, instead, opens up new interpretive possibilities previously foreclosed in discussions of female selfhood and bonds of friendship in contemporary novels. After all, female selves are not created in abstraction; the corporeal ties between women are an inseparable component of the relationships that shape the contours of female protagonists' coming-of-age. However, whether in instances of "ambivalence about the female body" or through the complete omission of mergers of female bodies bound by friendship, large gaps exist in the surrounding literary criticism that this project interrogates (Gardiner 168). In contrast to popular criticism that centers only on the emotional and intellectual bonds between women, this research seeks to underscore the importance of embodied selfhood and female corporeal communities as fundamental to

literary quests for female self-agency in a world that often reduces women to the particularity of their physicality.

The widespread ambivalence about the female body in criticism of both women's selfhood and same-sex bonds in the *bildungsroman* tradition (and elsewhere) seems to result from the lack of tropes available to talk about the physical bonds between women without evoking Western taboos against homoeroticism or the objectification of female bodies. However, as both a cornerstone in understanding corporeal bonds between women and as a central organizing principle in this dissertation project, the concept of embodied selfhood demands a working definition. Even taken alone, concepts of self and body are neither static nor theoretically transparent, and ideas concerning exactly what constructs a self have always provoked theoretical disagreement. Michael Basch, for instance, defines selfhood as "not a thing or entity; it is a concept; a symbolic abstraction…The self refers to the uniqueness that separates the experiences of an individual from those of all others while at the same time conferring a sense of cohesion and continuity on the disparate experiences of that individual throughout…life" (53).

At its most basic level, embodied selfhood rejects this definition and all others that fail to recognize the body, specifically in this case the gendered female body, as a fundamental part of self-formation. Instead, a selfhood which accounts for corporeality of subjecthood views "the body and one's perception of it…[as] essential components of the self" (Brison 46). Even if our notion of the self is taken as a cohesive narrative based on a collection of unique experiences, the experiences themselves, and any attempt to represent them as a cohesive unit, do not occur outside of or without reference to the body. Toril Moi underscores the body's importance, stressing it as simultaneously "our

perspective on the world" and "at the same time [a material presence] that…is engaged in a dialectical interaction with its surroundings, that is to say with all other situations in which the body is placed" (68). Moi calls this dual functioning of our material existence "the body-as-situation"—a fundamental situation of a concrete body that, through lived experience (an open-ended process of embodied situations, ending only in death), informs one's understanding of self and the surrounding world (63).

However, as Susan Bordo points out, women's bodies more often than not become a weighted burden: "*the body* is the negative term, and if the woman *is* the body, then women *are* that negativity, whatever it may be: distraction from knowledge, seduction away from God, capitulation to sexual desire, violence or aggression, failure of will, even death" (5). Indeed, feminist critics have frequently argued that the tendency to equate the image of woman to a physical body limits women's freedoms and opportunities to embodied lived experiences—experiences often crafted through discursive threats and restrictive bodily norms. Nita Mary McKinley highlights the ways in which many of these cultural restrictions become internally regulated by girls and women themselves through what she calls "objective body consciousness" or OBC, a three-part process including body surveillance (viewing herself as if she were an outside observer), internalization of cultural body standards (experiencing cultural standards of beauty as coming from her own desires), and appearance control beliefs (believing that if she puts forth enough effort, she can achieve cultural body standards) (56-57). Although cultural standards vary based on race, culture, and historical moment, women's "normative body dissatisfaction" is a well-documented systemic social phenomenon in the West, constantly increasing with the globalization of Western media and behavioral

practices (Striegal-Moore and Franko 186). This project's account of embodied selfhood, then, does not only center on the components of personal lived experience and the body-as-situation, always situated in corporeal permutations of race, class, culture, ability, and sexual orientation. Instead, it employs a more comprehensive definition in order to also account for the myths, ideologies, and norms of femininity surrounding the female body—components Moi refers to as shifting dimensions of situatedness, embodiedness, and freedom (81).

Still missing from Moi and other's accounts of the female body-as-situation, however, is an explanation of exactly how the corporeal nature of women's senses of selfhood functions in relationships with other women. After recounting a female sense of embodied selfhood that cannot be separated from either the cultural freedoms or baggage of its corporeality, questions about the embodied imprints women's bodies-as-situations make on one another still remain unresolved. Ultimately, my research seeks to fill in some of these critical fissures by analyzing the abject in instances of embodied bonds between female friends in contemporary women's novels. The abject in these bonds between women is found on the borders of corporeality itself—abject, and sometimes grotesque, mergers and exchanges between bodies connected through idealization, twinship, and adversarial violence.

As stated above, contrary to the plot line of the classic male *bildungsroman*, whose protagonist defines an autonomous self in isolation from the community, a female protagonist most often develops a sense of autonomy that functions in psychic and physical relation to her community. Her autonomy is "fundamentally dependent on others," if what she develops can even be considered in terms of traditional rubrics of

self-sufficiency or independence at all (Brison 61). Because previous accounts have failed to analyze the corporeal aspects of this relationality, part of the theoretical foundation that informs this project underscores the body's importance. However, this study does not simply assert the body's importance over that of the mind in female friendships. As Moi asserts, the body cannot be separated from the myriad of psychic relationships and situations in which one finds oneself throughout the course of human life. In order to account for this sense of fully embodied selfhood, my analysis employs Kristeva's theory of abjection—the physical "state of abjecting or rejecting what is other to oneself…thereby creating borders of an always tenuous 'I'"—in conjunction with Judith Kegan Gardiner, Elizabeth Abel, and Joan Lang's adaptation of self-psychology to construct the necessary union of both the physical and psychic connections in self-development and female bonding (McAffee 45). Together, using the language of self-psychology to ground the psychic formation of an empathetic and relational subject, and locating relational subjectivity on the body through bonds of abjection, the two theories form an integrated provisional language that map out the physical bonds between women in this feminist literary analysis.

However, this project is certainly not the first to use psychoanalysis to help explicate fictional accounts of women. Since Nancy Chodorow's 1978 assertion that women's friendship bonds originate with the mother-daughter bond, creating "relational capacities and definition of selfhood in relationship," a steady stream of psychoanalytically-motivated literary analysis of female bonds has ensued (200). Both Elizabeth Abel and Judith Kegan Gardiner have followed Chodorow's lead, using a psychoanalytic approach to describe relational typologies between female friends in

contemporary literature. Abel borrows from object relations theory to describe literary friendships between women as "a self-reflexive enterprise as each psyche gains definition through relation to the other" (421). Gardiner, on the other hand, is the first to use self-psychology to highlight literary friendships' intimacies as a way to dramatize female empathetic identification. She asserts that this kind of same-sex intimacy and identification aids the psychological and moral growth of both protagonist and reader. Hollinger later affirms this assertion, explaining that for women, "friendship becomes a vehicle of self-knowledge, a uniquely valuable relationship attainable only with another version of the self" (15).

Self-psychology, the psychoanalytic approach with which this project is concerned, in its most basic terms explains the development of interdependent empathetic selves through their evolution in relationships with selfobjects, or others (Gardiner 162). Selfobject relationships begin with parent and child in merger, the infant viewing initial caregivers as "part of the self rather than in terms of emotional response to a person perceived as an independent agent" (Gardiner 162). As the child's self continues to evolve through different types of selfobject relationships—idealization, twinship, adversary—she continues to develop by internalizing lessons learned from those bonds. In addition to internalizing socially sanctioned ways of interacting, evolving selves also learn to remove the personal contexts from these interactions, making them able to then relate to various other selfobjects—a process Lang calls "separating the signal from the noise" (59). Selfobject relationships continue to be important ways of interacting throughout adult life, culminating in a psychic maturity that allows one to participate in relationships as a cohesive, fixed self.

Under the self-psychological model, early selfobject relations become indicators of how one functions in adult relationships. If these early selfobject relations are faulty, subjects experience a fragmented self, in which self-cohesion is stunted or lost. Lang contends that all women suffer from a fragmented sense of self, based on "the empathetic failures caused by imposing gender stereotyped external agendas on the child's own" (60). In order to maintain self-cohesion, which is ultimately dependent on selfobject relations that begin with the mother, a woman cannot violate any selfobject-sanctioned boundaries, which Lang argues are corrupt with oppressive gender stereotypes, without threatening her own sense of self-cohesion. Lang calls any action outside of such boundaries a "not me" impulse, in which a woman rejects certain parts of herself in order to protect sanctioned borders of externally legitimated cohesive female selfhood (61). For example, gendered stereotypes of female passivity have historically been passed down from mother to daughter and reinforced through social scripts both inside and outside of the home. In turn, if a woman were to act from a place of aggression in any given situation, a "not me" impulse would ensue, creating a space in which she was temporarily "not herself"—an impulse that would preserve her own sense of identity within the space of appropriate femininity.

Lang asserts that these impulses often lead to psychically stunted adult women who confuse the borders of self, creating a desire for empathy-based relations by way of imitation (narcissistic transference), instead of empathy-based relations that signify an understanding of the borders of the self. Simply put, women befriend and imitate women with qualities they wish to emulate throughout adulthood. Gardiner contends that often in novels, narcissistic transference relationships are "replicated in the female friendship

bond," giving credence to Eichenbaum and Orbach's claim that a "woman's malleable boundaries create confusion about where she ends and another person begins" (Hollinger 16, Eichenbaum and Orbach 69). Ultimately, under this rubric, women fail to reach empathetic maturity, defined as empathetic object love, in which one can see the other as an extension of the self with no "merging, blurring, or loss of self" (Gardiner 165).

This project, however, is not simply concerned with the psychic damage or empathetic failure women are subject to within this particular model of incomplete selfhood, which, in part, appears to replicate masculine ideas about individual autonomy. Instead, my focus centers on the libratory possibilities in the physical manifestations of these psychic mergers, often presented in literary representations of female bonds of abjection between same-sex friends. Although this study draws on psychoanalytic language to discuss the physical bonds between women, its aims are strictly literary. With no readily available tropes for discussing such bonds within the context of women's friendship, this project uses the language of self-psychology loosely to generate a provisional lexicon that can analyze these intensely physical female bonds. Ultimately, this provisional language is meant to serve a generative function; it is not intended to over determine the analyses of character development in the novels.

By extending some of the language usually employed in self-psychology to describe the malleability of psychic boundaries in constructions of female selfhood—within which are embedded historically and culturally specific expectations—to then illustrate bonds of abjection written on the body, new possibilities for defining selves-in-relation arise in contemporary female-authored *bildungsromane*. The chapter divisions of this dissertation are organized to highlight new ways to interpret such possibilities of self

by asking a series of questions: How do female authors of contemporary women's *bildungsroman* define a coming-of-age if not through an autonomous or cohesive sense of self-identity? How is such an identity written on and inflected through the boundaries of female bodies? How is self agency repressed or freed by clarifying embodied boundaries? Finally, how can feminist possibilities exist in the space created by an ethics of embodied empathy, which depends on the intense bonds of the abject between women? The following chapters are structured around such questions. These chapters do not represent a chronological progression from author to author, nor do they follow a linear trajectory from female adolescence into adulthood. Instead, they construct a series of case studies, which highlight the importance of previously critically neglected corporeal bonds between women in literary depictions of same-sex friendship within the female *bildungsroma*n genre of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

To this end, chapter one specifically focuses on the physical merger of mirroring, or the bond of embodied twinship, in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. Twinship, in particular, is a self-psychological concept, which centers on relationships that allow one to experience a psychic connection of "sameness or likeness" (Feld, "Self Psychology"). Frequently in female coming-of-age novels, this psychic connection of twinship often physically manifests itself in the embodied bonds between women. However, despite intensely intimate literary depictions of adolescent bonds between girls, physical twinship ties almost always dissipate in adulthood.

Paula Gunn Allen's protagonist, Ephanie, best illustrates this embodied twinship merger, when she recounts her adolescent friendship with Elena as one that was so strong

the surrounding community, herself included, could not decipher which young woman was which:

"[N]o one could say which was Elena, which Ephanie. With each other they were each one doubled. They were thus complete" (23). This same kind of corporeal twinning is present in Morrison's novel, *Sula.* In an effort to convey the physically intense friendship between Nel and herself, Sula discursively creates a monstrous Cyclops constructed from the merger of female bodies. Atta, in contrast, creates the physical bond of twinship between her protagonists Enitan and Sheri not through the overlay of merged bodies, but through the blurring of physical boundaries—often confusing where one woman's body ends and another begins. By creating a narrative structure in which Enitan's menarche occurs simultaneously with the gang rape of her best friend Sheri, Atta crafts a twinship between the young women by underscoring the substitutability of adult female bodies as victims of sexual violence. It is in this moment of embodied flux from girlhood to womanhood that the corporeal bonds of the two girls are cemented through the mutual exchange of abjected menstrual blood and semen—their fates are now bound by sameness. Sheri's body acts as a mirror to Enitan's, becoming a physical reminder of the threat of sexualized violence that could happen at any moment to the now menstruating female.

By putting these three narrative accounts of physical twinship in conversation, this chapter interrogates whether or not embodied bonds must always already be an encumbering obligation or a physical limit to the autonomy of female protagonists. Because in each novel the corporeal intensity of adolescent bonds is discarded as part of a necessary progression toward individual autonomy, I seek out the possibility of moments

of embodied empathy in the texts that make room for physical bonds between women that are not constructed on the basis of fear or failure and do not stifle character development.

In chapter two, I continue to explicate the theme of merger; however, I shift my focus to the physical female bonds constructed around idealization in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Ellen Douglas's *Can't Quit You Baby*. Both novels depict eras of racial unrest—the 1940s and 1960s respectively—and feature protagonists who come-of-age by crossing racial lines through idealizing and figuratively appropriating physical characteristics traditionally denied to them. Like chapter one, this chapter borrows from self-psychology, extending its concept of psychic mirroring (or imitation) through idealization to the physical bonds of merger between women in the novels. For Morrison's Pecola Breedlove, an imaginative bond with Shirley Temple allows the young black girl to believe the white child's blue eyes have been transplanted to cover her own brown eyes. Similarly imagined physical appropriation occurs in *Can't Quit You Baby*, as Cornelia, a frail middle-aged white woman, strategically deploys the physical strength and street presence of her housekeeper Tweet's large black body to carry her safely home through the dark side streets of New York City. Although both women only imagine taking on the physical attributes of blue eyes or a larger and darker body, such imaginative embodiments, made real in their own psyches, have direct physical effects on how these protagonists navigate their own corporeality in the world around them.

In both of these problematic constructions of assumed physical bonds and appropriation, the protagonists create an "idealizing transference" in their effort "to merge with an idealized, powerful figure" to gain the physical characteristics, and the

social value they carry, from a selfobject they believe possesses these attributes (Gardiner 169). In these narratives, idealized relationships create grotesque and often problematic descriptions of the physical merger between black and white bodies. This chapter teases out the disjuncture between imagined and real embodied mergers in both Pecola and Cornelia's friendships. In the process it highlights the potential danger of merged bodies that re-creates stories of female-condoned silence and reinscribes hierarchies built on racism, while it also interrogates the possibility of a subversive female *bildungsroman* that features interracial embodied bonds between women. Ultimately, by highlighting the disjuncture between asymmetrical appropriation based on racial inequality and instances of meaningful embodied mergers between the women, this chapter creates interpretive room for fleeting moments of "third space" abjection—an alternative that offers a way out of the self-stifling and stereotype-driven practice of strategically appropriating corporeal commodities across lines of race.

In the third chapter, I shift my focus to the abject bonds between adolescent female friends who are tied together by adversarial violence. In contrast to the previous chapters, which take on the foundational definitions of the self-psychological model in order to highlight how these psychic concepts manifest themselves on the body in corporeal friendships between women, this chapter rejects self-psychology's description of adversarial bonds. Significantly, because the self-psychological account of selfobject ties is not gender specific, the model represents adversarial bonds in broad strokes as a necessity in youth to promote a healthy self-concept by "providing experiences of nondestructive conflict" (Feld, "Self-Psychology"). However, *bildung* novels of female self-development rarely allow for benign adversarial relationships between girls. Instead

of neutral rivalries, both Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* portray bonds of abjection that ultimately do not support but deny adversarial selfobjects as a way to produce a sense of coherent embodied selfhood. Adversarial relationships in these novels are anything but nondestructive. Instead, they are written on the body in the form of horizontal physical abuse, and they often call for the bodily sacrifice of one woman so that the other may gain socially sanctioned self-cohesion.

Like twinship, abject adversarial violence is most often represented in literary relationships of adolescence. In Atwood and Kingston's novels, this violence stems from the protagonists' frustrations about being reprimanded for performing femininity incorrectly. As a result the girls act out in horizontal violence, physically curtailing the bodies of young women they have deemed most like themselves (Brown 190). This physical abuse represents, again, a substitutability of female bodies—a merging of female weakness—and is ultimately an act toward sanctioned self-cohesion and preservation. The snot, tears, and blood that make their way from the abused to the abuser are physical representations of the merger of female bodies through the shared fate of punishment for acting outside the ideological strictures of femininity. Lyn Mikel Brown describes how adolescents regulate the rules of these strictures for one another, enacting "on each other what they themselves endure on a daily basis…to secure at a very early age, through anger, pain and loss, their proper place in the patriarchal order" (182).

In both Atwood and Kingston's narratives, the physical bonds of abject violence ultimately signify separation through the substitutability of female bodies. In these cases, the abject physical bond actually restricts knowledge of the boundaries of the self and the

power of bodies in relation. This horizontal violence, although first providing fleeting feelings of empowerment, becomes violence against the self, ultimately preventing self-cohesion outside of pre-sanctioned scripts of femininity. Atwood highlights the limitations of this kind of self-cohesion as her protagonist Elaine waits in vain for Cordelia, the friend she sacrificed in adolescence, to re-enter her life: "I could give her something that you can never have, except from another person; what you look like from the outside. A reflection. This is the part of herself I could give back to her. We are like twins in old fables, each of whom has been given half a key" (450). It is this stolen part of the other, the reflection, which both Elaine and Cordelia lose through abject adversarial violence, which, in turn, has also created a lifelong interdependence between the two.

This chapter argues that it is impossible to analyze this interdependence in literary depictions of female self-development through adversarial relationships—relationships which call for the sacrifice of one woman's selfhood to allow for self-cohesion in the other—without considering the effects such abject bonds have on the material bodies of girls and women. In these novels adversarial relationships between female adolescents are rarely positive and almost always foreshadow the physical demise of one character in order to support the development of only one autonomous protagonist by the novel's end. However, despite the sacrifice in both Atwood and Kingston's novels, the throwaway bodies of these adolescent friendships affect the surviving protagonist and how she understands her own embodiment. Chapter three focuses on these case studies of female-to-female adversarial relationships in order to analyze how women define the boundaries of each other's bodies through reflections of violence, ultimately drawing attention to

how these novels might suggest avenues for abject bonds outside of adversarial violence that could protect a key to female self-definition that can never fully be singular or completely in our possession.

Although many feminist critics praise literary versions of female *bildungsromane* that conclude narratives with a single female protagonist, calling "the female alone at the end of the novel…a symbolic feminist triumph," this study underscores the damage often done by this particular plotline (Detore-Nakamura 32). The concluding chapter of my analysis begins at the point of corporeal sacrifice in the selected novels, rejecting Detore-Nakamura's claim that the paradigmatic friendship novel ends by signifying a rekindling of both the importance of female friendship and selfhood, and reiterating Yeager's concern about the women who do not survive to the narrative's end. However, contrary to Yeagar, I do not view these sacrificial female bodies as "*not* symbolically central" or without potential to open up spaces for an embodied empathy between women (69). To this end, the chapter is focused on those bodies in instances of corporeal bonds of exchange and sacrifice in the selected novels, which often, even if only fleetingly, construct an ethics of female embodied empathy. This ethics of embodied empathy demands that the body's role be considered in any analysis of the inflections of same-sex bonds in literary journeys toward female self-development, and it requires a conception of an embodied subjectivity whose boundaries are always physically concrete, but also always both permeable and in flux.

Yet, employing empathy to describe contemporary novels of female self-development can be a precarious characterization. As Judith Kegan Gardiner points out, "in twentieth-century Western culture [empathy] has become a specially marked female

trait," a trait that always runs the risk of being conceptualized as ahistorical or overly sentimental, and one that falsely assumes a generalized "loving and nurturant understanding" between all women (2-3). However, despite the validity of these claims, efforts to avoid stereotypical sentimentalizing often retreat to falsely labeling as cliché all moments of human compassion or emotion. For instance, the rubric of self-psychology defines empathy as outside of the classic sentimental connotations of the term. Contrary to definitions of empathy that call for relationships in which one sees the other as an extension of oneself, under the self-psychological model, the psychically mature adult functions in empathetic relationships with "no merging, blurring, or loss of self" (Gardiner 165). This definition implies that mature empathetic relationships prevent women from falling into the trap of becoming what Payant calls "encumbered" by other women in *bildungsromane* (253). This encumbrance, which results from a blurring of the incomplete psychic self is said to cause the female need for "shedding" within the course of many contemporary novels, as "heroines rid themselves of excess baggage as they proceed in their life's journey" (Payant 253). Female friends often become this "baggage" in a quest toward Western individuated selfhood. Using this social script, bonds between women are appropriated and then subsequently abandoned when the responsibilities of empathy cannot be successfully navigated within the strictures of autonomy. According to the self-psychological model, object love is an exemplar of healthy human relationships, defined through a decentering of the self without complete loss of the self—a relationship in which one understands that "the selfobject needs of others are as significant as one's own" (Basch 27).

This definition of empathy, however, fails to acknowledge an embodied sense of subjectivity, one constructed by viewing "the body and one's perception of it" as "essential components of the self" (Brison 46). Any analysis of subjectivity at the level of embodiment makes clear that bodies-as-situations are always merging, blurring, and losing parts of the self in the daily exchanging, absorbing, and discharging of the abject. To understand an ethics of embodied empathy, then, is to understand the body as both a concrete and inseparable part of the self. This physical part of the self aids in navigating the situations that construct life narratives, while simultaneously being the malleable part, allowing corporeal connection and exchange with others. Reveling in the abject, or in the acknowledgment that the body itself has indistinct and constantly changing borders, makes room for literary accounts of blurred female boundaries between bodies, which can offer a positive ethics of embodied empathy. The merger of bodies through sweaty caresses and simultaneous bleeding, for example, confuses the physical borders between self and other, allowing entrance, instead, into an amorphous communal space outside of a symbolic order. Instead of depending on the constant suppression of the knowledge that embodied boundaries are always in flux through the abject, this newly-opened space allows us to use the abjected parts of ourselves and each other to constantly deconstruct and reconstruct ourselves.

Residing in this unmapped space of abjection, outside of the symbolic order, women's bodies in merger are fleetingly outside of narrative, temporarily outside of rote scripts of embodiment. Because there is no readily available language to describe and fully understand the relational self-formations that these instances of same-sex corporeal exchange or embodied merger create, they instead form spaces of opacity surrounding the

borders of protagonists' subjectivities. This opacity manifests by making an easy transition into autonomous self-development impossible and necessitating an understanding of self that cannot be extricated from physical intertwinement with other women's bodies: "And [they] had known themselves and their surroundings in terms of each other's eyes" (Gunn Allen 22).

Under this construction of embodied subjectivity, one can never access a succinctly defined, independent or wholly separate self, creating a space of not knowing, or opacity, of the self. These holes, missing links, or indistinct boundaries in self-understanding, necessitate an ethics of embodied empathy in the novels. If empathy is defined as the "vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another," then embodied empathy is the acknowledgement that the body is an inseparable part of this vicarious experiencing, creating visceral and lasting resonances on self-formation through embodied exchanges between women ("Empathy"). Such empathy asserts that although there is always a coherent and unique embodied subjectivity from which we speak, one that is written with the specific permutations of sex, race, class, and region, there is also the shared state of female corporeal opacity and abjected exchange between bodies. This shared fate opens up a space for a community of embodied subjectivities and demands an ethics of empathy based on compassion and the constant destruction and invention of ourselves together—women sustaining selfhood by mutually sustaining embodied relationships with one another.

If the abject is the border where symbolic meaning begins to collapse, my final chapter of analysis makes an effort to resurrect an abjected space where interdependent empathetic bonds of female selfhood-in-relation can flourish and make new meaning and

construct new versions of self. This project ends by placing fleeting moments of embodied bonds in conversation across the selected novels in order to construct new tenets of an ethics of embodied empathy that does not always already see the merging of self and other as a debilitating bond between women. However, the construction of this ethics is not meant to idealize or create ahistorical generalizations of female bodies, implying that all corporeal ties between women create such moments of empathy; some do not. Certainly, women's bodies tied together through appropriation based on raced power asymmetries, held together through the fear or failure that surrounds sexual violence, or bonded through women's physical violence against one another do not make up an ethics of embodied empathy worth emulating.

Yet, I still assert that instances exist in many of the novels that create critical feminist possibilities by underscoring the necessity of including the merged and marked bodies of women in any analysis of women's friendships within the female *bildungsroman*. To access this space in the novels, one must consider the body as a fundamental site of critical engagement—dictating situations of varying political projects, freedoms, assumptions, and beliefs of differently embodied protagonists, while also acknowledging the central humanizing aspect of the female body across lines of race, class, sexuality, and region in these works. These considerations allow for one to make visible, even if only fleetingly, the mutual blurring of self through the unmapped bonds of female bodies in corporeal exchange or merger. Despite that many of these novels depict female protagonists who are still ultimately required to make a choice between autonomous self-identity and self-creating-and-sustaining ties with other women, my final chapter highlights these fleeting embodied bonds as moments of imaginative

potential in contemporary women's novels. It is a preliminary effort to rethink literary friendships between women outside of the choice between bonding and autonomy and to draw provisional guidelines for an ethics of empathetic embodiment in the larger feminist community, positively blurring, merging, and recreating old categories of analysis in literary criticism to better understand the lives of both fictional and actual women.

Notes

[1]It is important to note that these bonds between women are not only restricted to adolescent girls, in the strict sense of the traditional *bildungsroman* plot. In female *bildungromane*, the coming-of-age of many female protagonists often does not occur until middle age or after.

Chapter 1

Body Doubles: Embodied Twinship Bonds in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

In Margrit Shildrick's 2001 essay "'You are there, like my skin:' Reconfiguring relational economies," she employs the image of conjoined twins to "challenge the distinctions both between mind and body and between body and body" (162). She claims that twins who share the same flesh are not only threatening to ideals of bodily closure, existing as corporeal doubles, but also to "western notions of individual agency and personal identity" ("You are There" 163). Shildrick concludes her work by asserting that the western privileging of bodily singularity and individualized independence ultimately forecloses both considerations of other ways of being and different grounds for relational interactions. In fact, the only space in which Shildrick sees future possibilities to reconfigure "relational economies that privilege neither the one nor the two" is in the realm of human touch—a double sensation always reversible "in that the hand that touches is also touched" ("You are There" 171, 165). Susan Cataldi affirms the power of touch, asserting that "through our flesh and thanks to tactility, we are always already 'outside' of our 'selves'" (126). Although this chapter does not focus on twins conjoined by flesh in the traditional sense, it does reconsider the permeability of the body's boundaries by analyzing the corporeal effects of psychic, emotional, and intellectual twinning through bodily imitation and through material exchanges of touch.

Shildrick's assertion that western discourses of singularity and autonomy have a monopoly on self construction is made clear in traditional male novels of self-formation. The genre is typically structured around episodic moments in a hero's life that lead him from attachment in childhood to individuation in adulthood. Self-development for these

classic literary protagonists, then, is defined in terms of the separation of self from community, even if only temporarily, and the formation of distinct or "rigid ego boundaries" (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 10). Consequently, the same "mapping of boundaries between singular selves and singular bodies" that authorizes "our being in the world as subjects" also concludes the successful *bildungsroman* narrative (Shildrick, "You are There" 162). However, this archetypal definition has long been questioned by feminist critics studying women's self-development, or literary *bildung* quests toward maturity. Their analyses emphasize that "whereas boys define their identity by contrast, not relation…girls persist in defining themselves relationally…[and their] identity resides in intimate relationships" (Abel, Hirsch, and Langland 10-11). Yet, despite decades of feminist critical intervention, the traditional definition of the *bildungsroman* through detachment and individuation still exists as the critical gold standard for narratives of self-development, making women's failure to separate from one another a failure to properly develop. In turn, the female desire for a "fusion of identity and intimacy" is not only seen as immature and naïve, but also ultimately equated with a loss of self: "the desire to fuse…is primitive and must encounter the healthier impulse, the desire for separation (Gilligan 159; Wyatt 116-117).

Even within feminist literary criticism, the legitimacy of selves formed in relation exists as an issue of debate. On one side, critics like Jean Baker Miller have highlighted the importance of women's formation of selves through their ability to "stay with, build on, and develop in the context of attachment and affiliation with others…celebrat[ing] the possibilities of renewal through merging" (83, 115). In oppostition to the traditional narratives in which failure to separate causes a loss of self, these critics assert the

inverse—for many women the loss of same-sex affiliations is perceived as "not just a loss of relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self" (83). However, other feminist critics reject claims that every woman's sense of self should develop within intense bonds of female friendship or sisterhood. This critical rejection of same-sex bonds points to the stereotypical nurturing persona frequently expected of women and to the difference-effacing reliance on second wave scripts of feminist sisterhood in many of these celebrated narratives. Since the early 1980s, many of these claims to a universal sisterhood have been criticized, or discounted altogether, for their failure to account for the disparate experiences between and among women.[1] At their height Christy Rishoi called such narrative plots the new hegemonic construction of women's selfhood-in-relation, underscoring the damage this narrow narrative paradigm has caused in actual women's lives: "Women continue to be held accountable for their ability to nurture relationships, and if a woman does not define herself in terms of her relationships (wife, mother, daughter, friend), she runs the risk of being an 'unnatural' woman (or worse)" (16).

This chapter's analysis situates itself in this struggle, refusing to blindly valorize the belief that the natural state of women is always already a self-in-relation, while also refusing to ignore the fact that many contemporary women's novels represent the untangling of the either/or binary of human connection and individuated self-agency. Instead of simply celebrating affinities between women in merger or rejecting such fusion as traditional feminine weakness, this study grounds female bonds within and between specific bodies in particular historical contexts to consider "the multivalent desires of the individual—for relationship *and* for agency" within each novel (Rishoi 18). In order to

better understand women's mergers, this analysis extends the notion of relational self-development—the idea that one important facet of many contemporary coming-of-age novels is the protagonist's desire to share formative journeys with friends, sisters, or mothers—to also account for the feminist assertion that corporeality is inextricable from self-identity.

In addition to the omission of selves formed in relation, the failure to acknowledge protagonist corporeality is yet another catalyst for feminist revisions to the traditional male self-development narrative, which often employs "transcendent disembodiment [as] a condition of agency" (Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies* 2). Feminist theories have long made it clear that although some men enjoy the privilege of disembodiment, women's senses of self are permanently entangled with the body. Toril Moi underscores this corporeal importance in women's lives, claiming that "the body is our perspective on the world, and at the same time that body is engaged in a dialectical interaction with its surroundings" (68). Elizabeth Grosz similarly stresses the "irreducible materiality and corporeality" of our bodies as a fundamental condition of our subjectivity (*The Body* 81-82). However, as Shildrick's essay concludes, the body, although neither static nor closed, is tied to the discourse that describes the contours of "normal" bodies. The female body in particular is bound by social conceptions that view "the body…[as] the negative term," and, "if the woman is the body, then women are that negativity, whatever it may be (Bordo 5).

The female body's discursive construction and the body's bearing on self conception are especially important within the coming-of-age or *bildungsroman* tradition for women. Christy Rishoi points to the special significance of embodiment within this

literary genre, especially when it occurs in a protagonist's adolescence. She asserts that because adolescence "is by definition a time when identity is fluid and contradictory" and because "the physiological changes of female puberty seem to work against the cultural pressure to ignore the body," coming-of-age narratives "assert the embodiedness of identity, often through an apparently unconscious search for bodily knowledge" (Rishoi 12-13). Although Rishoi limits the inability to ignore the embodiedness of identity to adolescence, the physiological changes of both pregnancy and menopause could also generate the same kind of hyper-embodied awareness. It is no coincidence, then, that many female development novels are constructed around either the embodied transitions of adolescence or middle age in women's lives.

Given that bodies are fundamental to female subjectivity, especially in times of physiological changes, and given that women's subjectivity or self development is often inseparable from the subjectivities of sisters or friends, it stands to reason that women's embodiment must have some bearing on their relationships with one another. However, because much criticism of contemporary women's novels either ignores the body or, as Kegan Gardiner notes, treats it with ambivalence, exactly how embodiment inflects, or possibly even drives affinities between women has yet to be considered. This chapter analyzes exactly how and when the body is represented in depictions of friendship between women in selected contemporary novels, considering whether or not the joining of women's bodies has the subversive potential to break down limiting forms of sanctioned individuated subjectivity. By adaptively employing the self-psychological bond of twinship as a rhetorical foundation to discuss the intense ties women form in adolescence, the chapter analyzes physical instances of embracing the abject—or

acknowledging the discharging of excrement, sweat, blood, urine, vomit, etc. that are generally denied as part of both body and consciousness—in narratives by Toni Morrison, Paula Gunn Allen, and Sefi Atta. Integrating, and sometimes adapting, the language of twinship and Kristeva's theory of abjection, this analysis aims to create a lexicon from which to begin an important discussion about the corporeal effects of female friendship in contemporary women's *bildungsromane*.

The twinship bond in self-psychology is commonly used to describe childhood relationships in which peers connect to gain "the reassurance of similarity…that other people are like oneself."[2] In this relationship, positions between the parties are reciprocal and each is sustained by finding an "echoing of their own experience" in the other (Kegan Gardiner 170-171). Twinship ties rely on compatibility through sameness. Through mirroring support and acceptance, both individuals come to see the other as an "alter ego" or another aspect of one's self (Kegan Gardiner 171). By using the notion of twinship, which is generally reserved for psychic affinity between individuals, to talk about the connection of historically and culturally specific female bodies, formed through the mutual acknowledgement of abject bodily processes, physical commonalities become plain without reducing or erasing fundamental embodied differences.

In its simplest terms, the process of abjection—denying the abject fluids and processes as being part of the body or of one's consciousness—defines and sustains a sense of coherent and individualized embodiment through its denial of abject elements, which are common to all bodies:

> [It determines] the ways in which the inside and outside of the body, the spaces between the subject and object, and the self and other become structured and

> made meaningful…These pairs need to be oppositionally coded in order for the…body to be constituted as a unified whole and for its subjectivity to be definitively tied to the bodies forms and limits. (Grosz, *The Body* 86)

Part of the way the process of abjection defines these limits is through the body's expulsion or exclusion of "the unclean, and disorderly elements of its corporeal existence that must be separated from its 'clean and proper' self" (Grosz, *The Body* 86). This cultural adherence to ritualized practices of hygiene means that the abject, or waste products of the body, must be eliminated as other than oneself and looked on in disgust to achieve a unity of self and to become a subject in the symbolic order (Grosz, *The Body* 91).[3] When one fails to conform to the process of abjection, the unified symbolic self begins to break apart as the arbitrary boundaries of the body (outside/inside and self/other) are exposed as permeable and in flux.

However, Julia Kristeva and many contemporary female novelists envision subversive power in failures to adhere to the strictures of bodily propriety. By acknowledging that the boundaries of the body are arbitrary, protagonists can open up a space for subjectivity outside of the rules of an individuated self construction under the patriarchally controlled symbolic order. Existing outside this order of autonomous self-construction is desirable to female protagonists, as it offers liberation from discourses that bind and suppress women's bodies. By embracing the abject or satirizing parts of themselves as cultural, sexual, or social abject, women temporarily trade in these restrictions for moments of relational pleasure and feelings of embodied efficacy formerly foreclosed. This chapter uses these moments, in which female characters slip from coherent subjectivity by sharing a reveling in the abject with friends, to highlight a

space of female embodied merger that makes distinctions between singular bodies temporarily indecipherable.

Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973), Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983), and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2006) all feature embodied twinship mergers that begin in adolescence and continue to shape the contours of their protagonists' lives into adulthood. Within this chapter, each novel is analyzed separately, respecting each text as a unity written in a specific historical location and conveying a particular protagonist's evolution. However, each novel does follow the same general pattern of the formation of twinships based on abjection. By first declaring a twinship, female friends in each of the novels engage in a series of abjected exchanges, often initially learned from matrilineal legacies of women who reclaim their status as abject. Both embodied imitation and sacrifice cement the twinship bond of sameness, blurring the borders between the end of one body and the beginning of the next. Ultimately, each of the adolescents in merger creates temporary alternate worlds, despite cultural, class, religious and racial differences, from which a single autonomous self cannot be separated. These mutual self-creating and sustaining worlds only end with the declaration of the personal first person pronoun, the intervention of the patriarchal symbolic order. This intervention causes the dissolution of the selves-in-relation in the name of the rigid boundaries of the individual, subsequently producing a lonely void written on both bodies—an absence Shildrick compares to phantom limb syndrome. However, if the "I" of individuated selfhood is not declared in adulthood, embodied mergers create possibilities for a more encompassing and porous sense of self that promotes pleasure, corporeal worth, and an ethics of continued embodied empathetic responsibility.

A. *Sula*

In its briefest terms, the twinship bond is described as intimacy or affinity through an acute likeness. It is exactly this intimacy Toni Morrison portrays in her novel, *Sula*, as she episodically catalogues the story of the inseparable evolution of self and friendship between protagonists Sula Peace and Nel Wright. As girls, Sula and Nel grow up in the hilltop town of Bottom, a black community in Medallion, Ohio, which suffers from both poverty and racial discrimination in the aftermath of World War I and the first half of the twentieth century. The novel spans most of Sula and Nel's lifetimes, from roughly 1919 to 1965, detailing the loneliness of their girlhood, the corporeal pleasure and safety in their twinned affinity as adolescents, and the physical void left by their estrangement from one another as adults. Only on Sula's deathbed do both women realize the former power of their adolescent bond to erase physical distinction, to insulate them from social hatred, and to imagine their bodies anew and empowered. The novel ends with Sula's death and Nel's overwhelming grief at what her estrangement with her best friend has cost both women. However, this bad blood between Sula and Nel is hard to imagine at the narrative's beginning, as Morrison conveys the intense affinity the girls feel for one another when they are first introduced: "Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on…they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for" (53).[4]

Despite blatant markers of physical difference—Nel's broad nose and skin the color of "wet-sandpaper," barely escaping the social danger of being too light-skinned, and Sula's "heavy brown" skin, "gold-flecked eyes" and facial birthmark that give "her

otherwise plain face a broken excitement"—Sula and Nel are often confused throughout the novel as being extensions of the same individual (52). Sianne Ngai underscores the reason for this confusion and first introduces the possibility of twinship, explaining that their relationship is "defined by symmetry so perfect, an affective reciprocity so complete, that its main effect ironically seems to be doubleness" (127-128). This doubleness, or twinning in self-psychological terms, is affirmed by the narrator's proclamation that "in those days a compliment to one was a compliment to the other, and cruelty to one was a challenge to the other" (84). Even Sula and Nel, like the surrounding Bottomites, are guilty of this blurring of self-boundaries, as "their friendship was so close that they themselves had difficulty distinguishing one's thoughts from the others" (83).

Like common representations of the twinship bond, the girls' relationship is one of choice, a "mutual dependency and thus equality of participation" (Gillespie and Kubitscheck 41). Their affinity for and dedication to one another in part stems from being isolated as children, as they were "solitary little girls," who were daughters of "distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers," creating a burden of "loneliness…so profound it intoxicated them" (51-52). In adolescence, together they fill in the lonely voids of their childhood with a bond that exceeds the bounds of friendship, creating an "almost impossible conjunction of sameness and autonomy, attainable only with another version of oneself" (Abel 429). Sula and Nel's intensely emotional and intellectual twinship affinity, however, is one that is not uncommon in contemporary female *bildungsromane*. Luise Eichenbaum and Susie Orbach, for example, reiterate what has become a familiar refrain about the simultaneity of relational bonding and self-development between women, especially within the context of friendship: "Identification is also the search for

self, and a woman's malleable boundaries create confusion about where she ends and another person begins" (69).

What makes Sula and Nel's twinship bond unique, however, is Morrison's insistence that their affinity for one another is reflected in their understanding of their own embodiment, highlighting friendship's ability to alter corporeal borders during "self"-development. The reconstruction of embodied borders is perhaps most evident in Sula's description of her and Nel's girlhood friendship as one in which the young women together were "two throats and one eye" (147). This declaration implies a refusal to adhere to the process of abjection, "the state of abjecting or rejecting what is other to oneself," so that the boundaries of the individual's body are clearly defined and upheld (McAffe 45). Outside of this process, their twinning creates what Donna Haraway calls a "boundary breakdown," a symbolic melding of bodies that becomes one of the most important facets of Morrison's novel; "could they have been merged, [Sula and Nel] would have amounted to one whole" (Haraway 152; Bakerman 549). Contrary to Jane Bakerman's belief that the actual merging of bodies is nothing but the nostalgic musings of a woman who misses her former best friend, the blended monstrous creation does, in fact, become an accurate descriptor of the real embodied exchange that conjoins Sula and Nel in twinship. Yeager points to the female grotesque, depicted here as a monstrous merger of bodies, as a form of the abject: "the grotesque is a figure that registers the body's social contamination and becomes itself a contaminant" (235). This monstrous form simultaneously layers flesh on top of flesh, creating two mouths and conjoining four eyes into one, an image that negates the stable and closed proper body. By failing to reject what is other to oneself and thereby refusing to create individual physical and

emotional borders around an individual sense of self," this new twinned being denies closed and singular subjectivity. Instead, together, Sula and Nel accept and celebrate the holes in symbolically created embodied borders—borders that are always porous and recreating themselves (McAffee 45). This fantastic blending of bodies, first made visible through Sula's declaration of their existence as a fused whole, continues to evolve through the adolescent's recurrent exchanges and imitation of the abject in each other.

The propensity to express subjectivity outside of the process of abjection, to embrace what is demarcated as grotesque, foul, or unclean, does not originate with Sula and Nel, however. Instead, it can be charted along the matrilineal lines of parodied embodied sacrifice taught to both girls in some of their earliest childhood memories. Through their grandmothers' satirical rejections of the body as a static form sealed through skin, Sula and Nel begin to understand the freedom presented by allowing one's body to inhabit the realm of the abject—a glimpse of the "threshold between what is inside the body, and thus a part of the subject, and what is outside the body, and thus an object for the subject" (Grosz, *The Body* 88). For Nel, this realization comes in the form of a childhood juxtaposition of her mother and her grandmother. Helene Wright, Nel's mother, seems to be a paragon of self-sacrifice and domestic feminine virtue, a persona created to escape her past as the daughter of a Creole prostitute. However, Helene reduces herself to sexual objectivity in order to get into the good graces of a white train conductor after she makes a seating error—sitting in the white's only section of the train—on a trip to New Orleans. Watching Helene flirtatiously imply her sexual availability to the conductor, the other black passengers on the train look at Nel's mother with blatant disgust. In turn, Nel begins to understand the shame that comes with even the

suggestion that a black woman's body could so easily become abject or an unclean sexual commodity. In this instance, intense racial shame is attached to her mother's suggestion of sexual availability to avoid the persecution of white society. Through the possibility of a sexual encounter, creating confusion between the embodied boundaries of Nel's "custard" colored mother and the white conductor, Nel learns to associate the abject with racial defection and hypocrisy. As a result, Nel embraces the process of abjection as necessary to uphold singular, closed subjectivity and to separate herself from her duplicitous mother.

However, Nel's attitude shifts upon her introduction to her grandmother, Rochelle, a prostitute she meets only by chance on her trip south for her great-grandmother's funeral. Nel is intrigued by this woman's work, which she understands relies on sex, or the merging of bodies outside the bounds of marriage, for the purpose of making money. Rochelle's unapologetic enjoyment in her prostitution satirizes the myth of the static, closed body by blurring the strict lines between clean and unclean, proper and improper, self and other. Although readers cannot ignore that the woman's body is inscribed with "a historical lesson of the double gender and racial oppression of black women," Rochelle still manages to "undermin[e] the stereotype of the 'tragic mulatto' with her defiant haughtiness" (Feng 82). Between clients, as Nel watches her grandmother reconstruct herself anew in the mirror, painting her eyebrows to "create her own image," the adolescent is in awe of the woman's lifestyle (Feng 82). This meeting with her grandmother allows Nel to begin to contemplate self-expression outside of the sanctioned boundaries of her mother's ideas of the appropriate and hygienic female body.

This shift toward the abject becomes clear as the young girl later reflects on visiting her grandmother. Nel accesses her memories of the trip through her own embodied processes, which are supposed to remain in the unconscious or to be transcended altogether through the process of abjection: “Nel lay in bed thinking of her trip. She remembered clearly the urine running down and into her stockings…the disgust on the face of the dead woman and the sound of funeral drums. It had been an exhilarating trip but a fearful one” (28). Nel feels budding “power” and “joy” when contemplating the abject, seeing it as a gateway outside the confines of appropriate female subjectivity. Rochelle’s “wild blood” has provided the young girl with a new inheritance of subjectivity formed when “what is rejected, useless, or edged with decay becomes charged with value” (17; Yaeger 272). Immediately after the trip, she rejects any ties to the young woman her mother imagines her to be and claims an embodied sense of “me-ness”: “I’m me. I’m not their daughter. I’m not Nel. I’m me. Me” (29). The courage to act outside of Helene’s rules of appropriate feminine embodiment, refusing to erase from consciousness her urine, her great-grandmother’s body, and her fascination with Rochelle’s prostitution, gives Nel the courage and “the strength to cultivate a friend in spite of her mother” (29). Her new sense of identity comes when Nel exchanges her mother’s lessons of virtuous black womanhood for an older matrilineal legacy—a legacy that embraces the grotesque as a means of exposing the hypocrisy of appropriate black female subjectivity.

Sula also is conditioned for her friendship with Nel through a matrilineal legacy of refusing to be bound by the rules of the coherent and clean female body. Eva Peace, Sula’s grandmother, maims herself in order to gain insurance money after her husband

abandons her. Although it is unclear how, most of the Bottom community believes that Eva purposefully lost her leg to financially support her children. However, the horror of the imagined suggestions of how the leg was lost and the grotesque image of a one-legged woman only amuse Eva, who embraces the new contours of her body she herself has created: "Nor did she wear overlong dresses to disguise the empty place on her left side. Her dresses were mid-calf so that her one glamorous leg was always in view as well as the long fall space below her left thigh" (31). Like Rochelle's socially problematic vocation, Eva's self-mutilation cannot simply be viewed as an empowering act outside of sanctioned rules for subjectivity; her location as an impoverished black woman in a racist post-World War I society highlights the multiple jeopardies of oppression that, in part, account for the desperation of her act. However, it is the satire in Eva and Rochelle's responses to the sanctity of their embodiment, of their amusement in the corrupted use of their corporeality, which places them outside the realm of normalcy and provides both women with their subversive abject power. Unlike Helene, who simultaneously employs and denies her position as abject, Rochelle and Eva embrace the abject as a means to gain power and economic freedom.

In Sula's family, the legacy of the grotesque is passed on from mother to daughter, as Eva's daughter, Hannah, also grounds her identity in the abject. Just as Eva's missing leg represents the irregularity of the grotesque body, Hannah's promiscuity is a grotesque "representation of female sexuality as uncontainable flow" (Grosz, *Volatile* 206). Noticing that her mother has regular sexual encounters with other women's husbands in the cellar, the pantry, or the parlor of their home teaches Sula that sex is "pleasant and frequent, but otherwise unremarkable" (44). This knowledge, passed

indirectly from mother to daughter, makes most Bottomites view Sula as complicit with her mother's pollution of the community. Although sex within marriage is one of the only sanctioned acknowledgements of the permeability of the human body, Kristeva notes that individual cultures decide all other sexual circumstances of clean and proper subjectivity by defining its abject opposition (Grosz, *The Body* 91). In Medallion, Ohio, the reactions of the Bottom community, who call Hannah a "nasty woman," show that the blurring of embodied boundaries through the circumstance of adultery is considered abject on the hilltop (44). In fact, it is the "nastiness" of Sula's mother's morals, her status as a social pollutant, that causes Helene Wright to keep Nel away from Sula. Helene, like others in Bottom, is afraid that the denial of the process of abjection through the Peaces' parody of the sanctity of human flesh has been passed from mother to daughter. However, the matrilineal legacies of grotesque bodies that are "open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing" provide both adolescents with their only opportunities to temporarily escape the limiting subject positions of wife and mother available to women in the Bottom (Russo 8). Instead, Sula and Nel's separate realization of the abject's power to create a space outside of appropriate femininity becomes the foundation for a twinship between the girls.

Although they grow up in very different households, this early introduction to the celebration of the abject through the parody of flesh manifests itself similarly in each girl's paralleled excitement in watching the burning and bloating of human skin. Both Sula and Nel are similarly transfixed by separate instances of human decay that "lie outside of the present system of representation," the "rare places where the repressed may erupt" (Homans 187-190). For readers, this secret thrill becomes evident in Sula when

she stands still, watching Hannah burn to death as a result of a careless error while she is canning. Even though Eva Peace jumps from a second story window to save her daughter, Sula watches her mother burn but does not move. As Morrison points out, the young girl remains standing in the same spot, doing nothing to save her mother, “not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested” (78). In a mirrored similarity to this morbid fascination, Nel grows excited when she witnesses the accidental murder of neighborhood boy Chicken Little. Just “as Sula watched her mother burn, gripped by the purely visual excitement, Nel had taken pleasure in the sight of Chicken Little drowning” (Abel 429). Watching Sula accidentally fling Chicken Little into the river and later reflecting on seeing the boy’s dead body, Nel does not remember the thought of the bloated and decaying corpse in horror. She instead is disturbed that she only feels “the tranquility that follows a joyful stimulation” (170).

Despite the negative judgment readers might place on the two girls’ seemingly unfeeling morbid interest, Grosz notes that Nel and Sula’s feelings are completely understandable, as the space of the abject in which embodied borders dissipate is always simultaneously attractive and repulsive to the subject (*The Body* 89). McAffe affirms the legitimacy of this troubled fascination, calling it “sickening yet irresistible” (47). Shildrick goes further, granting this indulgence in the abject with the ability to form new kinds of relational economies outside of bonds that deny the body and rely on at least two singular and closed subjectivities. Indeed, Sula and Nel embody a temporarily liberating and different kind of relational bond—one that is based on their mutual desire to entertain the irresistibility of the abject. For the two girls, this bond does blur the embodied distinction between one body and the next, symbolized by Sula and Nel’s holding hands

as the coffin is lowered into the earth. As adolescents, by watching human flesh burn and bloat, both girls confront the base materiality of their own bodies and tentatively accept the breakdown of meaning in the representation of the subject as always separate from its waste, as "the corpse seen without God and outside of science is the utmost of abjection…a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer 'I' who expels, 'I' is expelled…It is death infecting life" (Kristeva 4). Sula and Nel refuse to look away as they watch bodies transition from life to death, from subjects to objects, opening themselves to an understanding of human subjectivity outside of the closed and transcendent human body.

Through their mutual excitement in contemplating subjectivities outside of the "monumental, closed, static, self-contained, symmetrical body" (Russo 8), Sula and Nel create a space for their alternative subjectivity, using their mutual bond to construct a "reparative world" in which their interdependent subjectivity can flourish: "Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they set about creating something else to be" (52). In her depiction of their bond, Morrison, like many other contemporary women novelists, uses the relationship between these two friends to create an intellectual, spiritual and emotional space separate from the larger community, in which her female protagonists can flourish—"a safe harbor of each other's company" (55). She writes that the girls "found relief in each other's personality" and when with each other, "they could afford to abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perceptions of things" (53-55). In each other's company, bound in another version of the self, both girls manage to escape many of the wounds of a racist and sexist society, and instead promote mutual

"healing and survival" for one another (Sy 33). Morrison departs from traditional scripts of contemporary women's novels by extending the notion of protective alternate spaces typically created by psychic affinities, to the imagined and actual contours of the body. It is only when twined together in this psychic twinship do the girls find pleasure in dreaming outside of the embodied limitations of race and sex. Only when together do both Nel and Sula find themselves imagining a life outside Bottom, "stumbling into Technicolored visions" when they "shared the delight of the dream" (51). Together, Sula and Nel do not ignore the social limitations on their black female bodies; they simply imaginatively recreate the contours of their corporeality to suit the demands of their dreams.

This ability to shape shift into corporeal permutations that bring both pleasure and efficacy also provides the girls with a physical protectorate against society's prejudice, as Sula and Nel create and sustain the fusion of their twinship through the exchange and parodied imitation of the abject. The first exchange of the abject between Sula and Nel occurs after the girls have grown weary of a group of white boys blocking their way home. After daily assaults, Sula decides to parody the boys' threats by cutting off part of her own finger in front of them: "She slashed off only the tip of her finger. The four boys stared open-mouthed at the wound and the scrap of flesh, like a button mushroom, curling in the cherry blood that ran into the corners of the slate" (54). Afterwards, she says to the boys, "'If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I'll do to you'" (54-55). Although Sula's self-mutilation, which mirrors Eva's previous self immolation, highlights the embodied sacrifice that black women must make in order to gain freedom from the multiple oppressions they face, her act of cutting also functions as a refusal to adhere to

the strictures of closed and static bodily integrity. Sula makes her fingertip an abject object, now a "button mushroom" of blood-coated flesh lying in the dust, in exchange for the safety of her and her friend. Dickerson notes that through her bodily sacrifice, Sula "makes a statement about owning her own body and her capacity to act upon the bodies of those who would assault it" (205). However, for Sula the exchange of the abject is not simply meant to claim self-protection; instead, the act is meant to protect both girls' sense of merged embodiment—a claim Jane Bakerman underscores when she asserts that the fingertip binds the girls as "blood sisters" (31). The mutual protection the slicing of one finger grants both girls elides the distinct borders between one body and the next, creating a twinned sense of bodies conjoined by the sacrifice of flesh.

Sula and Nel's understanding of themselves as inhabiting a protective shared embodied space is compounded when Ajax, a local man, publically declares their bodies to be "pig meat" (50). In Ajax's sexually charged utterance, the boundaries that separate animal from human are muddied, as the girls readily admit their excitement in the bestial reminder of their own sex; it was "the thing that clotted their dreams" (51). Although both adolescents are all too familiar with the racist rhetorical conflation of the bodies of black women and animals—the assumption that a black female body is "an ugly body," simultaneously a "nonhuman…beast of burden" and "an object of desire"—the thrill in Ajax's declaration offers both a liberating transgression through parody and opens a space for alternative modes of relational being in the abject (Griffin 520). By embracing the elision between animal and human, the girls again transform the contours of their bodies and place themselves in the realm of the grotesque. Their mutual acknowledgement of the body's imagined and actual ability to break boundaries and

change shape opens a space for a reparative world created by acknowledging and celebrating a grotesque corporeality, of their bodies together as "open, protruding…secreting, multiple, and changing" (Russo 8). Yaeger highlights the liberation that the thrill in this boundary breakdown provides for the pair, claiming that the acknowledgement of one's embodied borders as always in flux and changing, "becomes the stuff of rebellion, the foundation for play, the ground for racial protest and gender unrest, as well as the earthly basis for children's delight in sullying grown up categories" (265). Although Sula and Nel's response to Ajax can be understood as their acceptance of the role of women as sexual objects, their reaction also deconstructs the tenuous borders of the autonomous, singular subject—sullying the easy binaries between human and nonhuman, clean and unclean, subject and sexual object. Both young women satirize the sanctity of the virginal female form by making their walk through town an exciting game. Sula and Nel imagine themselves to be circus "tightrope walkers, as thrilled by the possibility of a slip as by the maintenance of tension and balance. The least sideways glance, the merest toe stub, could pitch them into those creamy haunches spread wide with welcome" (51). Through their parody, Ajax's comment is evacuated of power and fails to make either girl feel like the sexual refuse of a perverted older man; instead, they derive power and pleasure from this encounter through their own satirized imitation of themselves as abject.

Sula and Nel's shared sense of embodiment reaches its apogee in Morrison's illustration of her protagonists' simultaneous sexual awakening. By the river, both girls use a twig to make concentric circles in the ground, each symbolizing their sex. The girls highlight their psychic twinship, as they construct these holes in the ground in perfect

synchronization without ever speaking to one another or making eye contact. As Sula and Nel continue to tear the grass with concentric circles, they eventually fuse the two holes to make one: "Together they worked until the two holes were one and the same" (58). This concerted exercise without speech or eye contact again extends Sula and Nel's psychic twinship to the body, underscoring their views of one another as extensions of the self. After the hole is dug to their satisfaction, they both, still without speaking, begin to fill it with nearby trash: "paper, bits of glass, butts of cigarettes, until all of the small defiling things they could find were collected there" (59). Once finished, the girls carefully replace the soil over the hole. Contemplating this scene, most critics contend that this filling of the hole with trash and refuse symbolizes the girls' reaction to society's "trashing of their female identity," (Gillespie and Kubitscek 42). Although this reading is valid, more seems to be at stake here for Sula and Nel. Just as they reject the label of racialized or sexualized trash from the white bullies and Ajax, they again reject being labeled as sexual abject in this incident. Again, Sula and Nel also seem to be embracing the abject through a synchronized parody of the ingestion of the unclean that sits at the borders and threatens to disrupt the boundaries of a symbolic identity that is static and closed.

Sula and Nel's sexual awakenings have fused both bodies through a mutual acknowledgement that the abject is always already within us—an acknowledgment that the borders of coherent subjectivity are tenuous at best and that possibilities exist for subjectivity outside of traditional repressive strictures that often fragment and constrict women's bodies through discourses of fear and bodily pollution. Instead, an embrace of the abject creates a more encompassing sense of being-in-relation, whose borders are

always polluters and being polluted. These eruptions of the abject, seen in Sula and Nel's embrace of the unclean—urine, refuse, animal flesh, and the human corpse—allow them a fleeting space of an alternate, mutually created world, in which the fusing of their adolescent bodies temporarily protects them from the cultural obligations and limitations of black womanhood. Nel and Sula reject the enforcement of these strictures by white men, by black men, and by other women in the community. Both girls use "detritus as a source of creativity," allowing this space of rejection, of the abject, to open a space where pleasure can be explored (Yaeger 272).

Only after the intervention of the patriarchal symbolic order, the demand that one draw borders around oneself, is this embodied twinship replaced with the loneliness of individuated subjectivity. Wyatt notes that in many contemporary women's fictions, maturity ultimately demands that the female protagonist feel "compelled to gather herself because the world cannot comprehend the multiple, contradictory, expanded selves, events, processes we really are" (123). For Sula and Nel, the intervention which brings them back into the sanctioned boundaries of individual subjectivity comes from Nel's marriage to Jude. Morrison makes clear that Jude's attentions to Nel are what force her into a coherent, singular selfhood, as he always views her "singly"(84). Through Jude's adoration, symbolic of patriarchy's intervention into the young women's friendship, the contours of Nel's individual embodiment are defined and made clear as separate from Sula: "[Nel] didn't even know she had a neck until Jude remarked on it, or that her smile was anything but the spreading of lips until he saw it as a small miracle" (84). Barbara Christian marks Nel and Jude's marriage as the moment of demise of the formerly merged subjectivity with "two throats and one eye," noting that "this wedding seems to

mean death" for both Sula and Nel's friendship and their previous understandings of themselves as one (147; Christian 82). Sy underscores this mutual loss, noting that "the marriage endangers the friendship because as soon as Nel gets married, she in effect renounces the blurring of boundaries between self and other she acquired with Sula, choosing to define herself solely as an 'other' in taking care of Jude" (52). For Nel, marriage to Jude only comes with the myth of individual and autonomous subjectivity. In reality, she simply becomes an object that aids in the defining of Jude's individuated male subjectivity. Because Nel has abandoned their merger, it is Sula alone who fulfills their adolescent dreams and leaves Bottom immediately following the wedding.

Upon Sula's return to the hilltop town, following a mysterious ten-year absence, Nel makes a brief reference to the united embodied being—the one eyed creature—the two women used to mutually inhabit through their exchange of the abject:

> It was like getting the use of an eye back, having a cataract removed. Her old friend had come home. Sula. Who had made her laugh, who made her see old things with new eyes, in whose presence she felt clever, gentle and a little raunchy. Sula, whose past she had lived through and with whom the present was a constant sharing of perceptions. Talking to Sula had always been a conversation with herself. (95)

However, Nel, having participated in an "individual initiation" (Sy 52) into the patriarchal symbolic, has subscribed to an understanding of herself as singular. Consequently, the melding of two subjectivities can only be a fond memory unless she is again willing to transgress the lines of the closed and static body. Nel's refusal to sacrifice belief in her own rigid embodied borders becomes clear when she walks in on

Sula sleeping with her husband, Jude. Sula, who still imagines the two women's relationship as the twinned bond of their adolescence "cannot conceive of the possibility of hurting Nel if Sula herself is pleased, and she has sex with Jude with no idea of the likely consequences to her friendship with Nel" (Gillespie and Kubitschek 42). Sula is still immersed in their relationship of abject twinship, in which "the closeness of their past friendship makes her think they are the same" (Sy 57). Because Sula herself has no firm embodied boundaries, she fails to understand how Nel's marriage has removed her from the mutual world the two created together: "[Sula] had no center, no speck around which to grow…For that reason she felt no compulsion to verify herself—to be consistent with herself (119). In contrast, Nel sees Sula and Jude's sexual encounter as both an assault and a betrayal of her sense of individuated embodied identity, making Sula finally realize that her friend now believes "that self and other are different" (Sy 57).

Nel's declaration of an "I" through the angry claim that Jude belongs to her reifies her sense of herself as a single, closed entity, once again affirming the tenuous borders of her own embodied selfhood and placing her within the restricted symbolic—the realm of appropriate feminine identity. Although now embodying the traditional status of Bottom women, Nel unconsciously grieves the loss of the abject through cataloguing the death of parts of her body: "For now her thighs were truly empty and dead too, and it was Sula who had taken the life from them…who left her with no thighs and no heart just her brain raveling away" (110-111). No longer in the realm of the abject, Nel feels no exhilaration in the reminder of the tenuous borders of the body through the decay of flesh; instead, she only feels grief in how Sula inflicts wounds on *her* body. This declaration of an "I" is later mirrored by Sula on her deathbed, as she raises her voice to Nel, declaring the

borders of her sense of an individuated self: "I got my mind. And what goes on in it. Which is to say, I got me…my lonely is *mine*" (143). Both women's use of the first person pronoun highlights the rigid borders each has created around not only their own minds, but also their own bodies, ultimately shifting their perceptions about the process of abjection. Nel's feelings that Sula and Jude have assaulted her own body highlights the rigid and closed borders tightly drawn around her sense of self. In turn, Sula's singular experience of the corporeal effects of death on her body severs any residual embodied connection between the former friends. Nel expels Sula from their mutual sense of subjectivity, leaving her to be labeled death's abject in solitude.

The declaration of individuated subjectivity signals a kind of death for both women, as Sula and Nel's subjectivities are unsustainable without the lifeblood of their twinship. Contrary to the Nel's grief over limbs that no longer have feeling, Sula must come to grips with the fact that although "she had clung to Nel as the closest thing to both an other and a self," she and Nel were no longer "one and the same thing…that no one would ever be that version of herself" (119-121). For Nel, the loneliness of losing Sula also means the loss of any kind of tenable subjectivity. Like the pain in a phantom limb, Nel cannot rid herself of her former twin, even after Sula's betrayal and death. Sula comes back to Nel as the same trash that cemented their passage into a new kind of womanhood: "A grey ball hovering just there. Just there. To the right. Quiet, gray dirty. A ball of muddy strings" (109). Nel's vision of the grey ball, which she first credits to missing Jude, is instead her faltering efforts to ignore the abject, which is always hovering "at the border of the subject's identity, threatening apparent unities and stabilities with disruption and dissolution" (Grosz, *The Body* 87). However, for both Nel

and Sula, the life-sustaining power of embracing what is trash—cultural, sexual, personal refuse—as a means of strategically changing the contours of their bodies to achieve the pleasure and protection denied to them is rediscovered too late.

For Sula, this realization comes as she feels her body slipping from life into death. Unlike Nel, who grieves the loss of body parts she believes to be dead after both Jude and Sula abandon her, Sula instead is fascinated with the snuffing out of her life through the mortality of her flesh: “Then she realized, or rather she sensed, that there was not going to be any pain. She was not breathing because she didn’t have to. Her body did not need oxygen. She was dead. Sula felt her face smiling. ‘Well I’ll be damned,’ she thought, ‘it didn’t even hurt. Wait’ll I tell Nel” (149). For Nel the realization of the power and happiness that came from their abject bond comes later, when she visits Eva Peace in the nursing home. Eva confuses Nel and Sula, blaming both girls for the death of Chicken Little. At first Nel tries to protest, saying “I didn’t throw no little boy in the river. That was Sula” (168). But Eva is unmoved, retorting, “You. Sula. What’s the difference?” (168).

After being haunted by Eva’s words, Nel eventually realizes that the older woman’s assertion is correct—both girls only survived as bodies merged. Conjoined through their transfixion by the possibilities in the abject, both were fused through the thrill of the underside of the symbolic, of the blurring of the body’s waste with the subject’s understanding of self. She cries out, recounting the freedom their twinship provided, and once again, fusing herself with Sula in the novel’s final words: “‘We was girls together,’ she said as though explaining something. ‘O Lord, Sula,’ she cried, ‘girl, girl, girlgirlgirl’” (174). Sy notes that this fusing of Nel’s last utterances reflects the intensity

of Sula and Nel's girlhood friendship (60). In addition, the stringing together of the word "girl", with no spaces indicating the ending of one word and the beginning of the next, stresses the power of both the permeability and the potential for fusion in the their twinned corporeal existence. The adhesive that binds this twinship bond is the eruption of and sharing in the abject, which provided Sula and Nel with temporary respite from the symbolic rules of individuated subjecthood through their girlhood merging. A female bricolage, created through refuse and encompassing multiple bodies, "sustain[ed] and expand[ed] the self rather than destroying it," until broken apart through patriarchy's overwhelming demand toward singular "object"ivity (Wyatt 125).

B. *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*

Despite the ten year gap in their novels' publications, the vastly different cultural locations of their female protagonists, and the different twentieth-century time period each author recounts, Morrison's *Sula* and Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* still share important similarities in their descriptions of both twinning and the realm of the abject. Gunn Allen's novel episodically and nonlinearly charts the development of her protagonist, Ephanie Atencio, a "halfbreed" Guadalupe Indian who lives in New Mexico and California during the latter half of the twentieth century (3). These places become the geographical backdrop for the protagonist's near-fatal emotional breakdown, which stems from Ephanie's attempts to navigate the "conflicting demands and beliefs of two cultures" (Holford 99). Gunn Allen's stylistic complication, "pil[ing] one thing atop another, fold[ing] this within that," reflects Ephanie's own emotional and spiritual turmoil after the loss of her childhood best friend, Elena, and her

subsequent disconnection from both her body and from her mythic female ancestry (Gunn Allen, *Shadows* 69).[5] The narrative catalogues Ephanie's efforts to re-member her past in order to become an integrated whole in her present, while straddling her native heritage and the strictures of her Catholic education. Ephanie's efforts take her on a quest westward, forcing her to engage in conversations with tribal family members and friends, church officials, white women, a therapist, and her lover, Teresa, in order to better understand and access her "point of entry" in the present (Gunn Allen, *Sacred* 100). This path leads Ephanie to a new sense of interdependent female wholeness across lines of time, space, race, and culture, which requires "the positive, creative influence of…Elena and later Teresa with whom she achieves the twinning she seeks to create her own identity" (Holford 108-109).

Much like Morrison's description of twinship's erasure of the physical differences between Sula and Nel, Gunn Allen also highlights the disappearance of corporeal contrasts in the intense girlhood friendship between her protagonists, Ephanie and Elena. Although the girls give each other descriptive nicknames that highlight their physical differences—calling Ephanie "Rose Red" because of the Laguna Keres' "duskiness" of her skin, and calling Elena "Snow White" because of the Chicana's "fairness"—these bodily distinctions are erased through a mutual belief in their likeness, in their twinning:

> [T]heir identity was such that the differences were never strange…All those years, in spite of distance, in spite of difference, in spite of change, they understood the exact measure of their relationship, the twining, the twinning. There were photographs of them from that time. Because Elena's gold-tinged hair looked dark

> in the photograph's light, no one could say which was Elena, which Ephanie.
>
> With each other they were each one doubled. They were thus complete. (22)

This erasure of the strict lines between the physical dimensions of self and other through twinship is representative of a theme that runs throughout Gunn Allen's novel—her belief in what AnaLouise Keating calls "embodied mythic thinking." This kind of thinking implies "a nondualistic knowledge system in which thoughts, ideas, and beliefs have concrete material effects," positing "an intimate interconnection between the psychic and physical dimensions of life, as well as a reciprocal relation between consciousness and bodily experience" (Keating 27). In the case of Ephanie and Elena, Gunn Allen connects their shared psychic affinity, or psychic twinship, by extending it to their corporeality, revising the boundaries of the physical contours of their adolescent bodies to create a "doubled" whole.

The girls' mutual childhood ability to "alter their physical surroundings as well as themselves" (Keating 27) is a comforting practice Ephanie finds hard to reverse as an adult. Long after Elena has abandoned their adolescent friendship, Ephanie still imagines herself and Elena bound together as a single entity that defines and inhabits her adult body, hiding "carefully behind her own eyes…coiled in her belly and weighing on her tongue" (133). Reminiscent of Sula's grotesque musings of a twinship-inspired form "with two throats and one eye" (Morrison 147), Ephanie imagines her relationship with Elena as also grotesquely expanding the contours of individual embodied subjectivity: "Certainly there was no cure, no rewiring possible to change this lifelong duality, dichotomy, twinning of her own self with a monstrous other. They were so completely intertwined" (133). In this instance, instead of "abjecting or rejecting what is other to

oneself" (McAffee 45), Ephanie acknowledges, like Sula, the breakdown of the boundaries of her own body. As she rejects the borders between inside and outside, the abject manifests itself as alien elements residing behind Ephanie's eyes or coiled on her belly, the residual effects of the bond of twinship.

What separates Gunn Allen's protagonist from Morrison's, however, is Ephanie's initial negative understanding of her own adolescent body as abject. The young girl's halfbreed status within the Native community both isolates and forces her to believe that she is cultural refuse. Instead of being able to use the abject to create a subjectivity outside of the Native community's construction of the symbolic, the community applies the process of abjection to Ephanie, making her the unclean—that which must be ignored or expunged in order to stabilize the ever-tenuous notion of the Native community as closed and autonomous. Indeed, the sense that her own body is abject has been ingrained in Ephanie since childhood: "And Ephanie's people weren't exactly the enemy. They just took care of business, and if that business included her exclusion, well that was only right. They had to draw the line somewhere, she supposed" (72). Unlike Morrison's Nel, who revels in the abject as a pathway of freedom from her mother's oppressive reminder of appropriate femininity—using the abject to instead provide her with an alternative subjectivity to the one communally defined for her through her embodied twinship with Sula—Ephanie's enforced isolation makes the choice to separate out a sense self from community lose its potential for personal empowerment. However, it is the harmful understanding of herself as cultural abject, which prompts Ephanie to make friends with Elena, "who was also an outsider, a stranger" (151). Gunn Allen stresses the girls' shared belief that they are both a kind of cultural abject, the belief that their bodies will always

warrant their violent exclusion from appropriate femininity, as the foundation for a twinship bond between Ephanie and Elena.

Instead of employing the abject to separate themselves from the community as Sula and Nel choose to do, Ephanie and Elena are already involuntarily placed within the realm of the abject. Additionally, Ephanie's self-disgust is further compounded by her memories of being raped as a child by Stephen, one of her only friends within the Native community: "She remembered something. That had no words. That had no pictures. About Stephen, the light…The sun blazing, hurting her head, stupefying her brain. The numbing sun. The fire. A shadow coming down over her. A hand. A mouth. A feeling of suffocation. On her chest heavy" (14). This rape, in conjunction with the narrative's suggestion that a doctor molests Ephanie in the presence of a nun while she is attending convent school, becomes "an essential part of Ephanie's 'education'" about herself as abject (Holford 107). The tenets of this education force Ephanie to believe that her own body is unclean, guilty of the Christian Eve's original sin. Instead of exhilaration in the abject, sexual violation, religious doctrine, and communal exclusion force Ephanie to conclude that in order to survive, she must separate her sense of self from the pollution of her corporeality. Holford confirms this separation as a necessary component of achieving a Christian sense of individual selfhood, concluding that Ephanie's fear of her own corporeal existence as sinful and abject ultimately requires "a forced detachment from her body" (107)

However, before Ephanie feels complete disconnection from her physical form, she does find brief respite from her embodied alienation through celebrating the abject with her best friend Elena. According to Diane Lawson Martinez, this alienation, or

sense of being cultural abject, only "intensif[ies] twinship selfobject needs" (43). For both girls, the need to feel accepted and included within a community is filled, even if only temporarily, through the imitation and exchange of the abject with one another, creating a reparative world in which their embodied twinship can flourish. Ephanie and Elena demonstrate their propensity toward the abject, the dark underside of the symbolic, by choosing to create their alternative world in the shadows—shadows made by their bodies over the places they roamed and in the shade under the branches of their favorite apple tree:

> [L]ying languorous and innocent in the blooming boughs of the apple tree. Amid the fruiting limbs. And had known themselves and their surrounding in terms of each other's eyes…The events that measured their shared lives were counted in the places that they roamed, and Ephanie always remembered her childhood that way. The river, the waterfall, the graveyard, the valley, the mesas, the peaks…They had especially loved the shadows…on the mountain's slopes and closer by, beneath the shading trees (22).

Although the shadow world for both girls is forced upon them by the surrounding community's exclusion, their adaptation of the shadows into a mutually created and shared world of pleasure provides them a degree of embodied freedom formerly denied to them when they existed alone.

In the shadows of the surrounding communities, the young women create a twinship bond, which provides "a reassurance of similarity," without which both girls would "feel isolated, anomalous, and alone in the world" (Kegan Gardiner 170). Within the shared psychic and physical space of this mutual bond, the girls develop "talents,

skills, and efficacy [which] occurs in the context of shared human experience" (Martinez 41). Gunn Allen's extension of their psychic affinity to the body is important, as this relationship allows for fluid, imaginative physical contours that provide corporeal freedoms, which are only curtailed once the girls separate. The shared physical bond between Elena and Ephanie becomes representative of one of the only times in either girl's life when their imaginations and bodies work in tandem:

> "Together they had dreamed. Sharing…They had ridden horses, pretending to be ranchers, chasing the village cattle around the town…They learned to be trick riders. Roy Rogers and Hopalong Cassidy. Maybe they could be stunt men in Hollywood if they got good enough at it, if they could learn to jump from the rooftop onto the horse's back. They had chased clouds" (21-22).

In the shadows, the superficial physical distinctions that separate the girls from their respective communities are dimmed enough for Ephanie and Elena to imagine their bodies as powerful, as moving, and as existing beyond the definitions assigned to their bodies as cultural outsiders. Hanson highlights the imaginative importance of the dark and voided "empty spaces" Gunn Allen uses to create an "alternative world view which she believes may better a future not yet invented but still felt and dreamed about" (73).

The alternate world of the girls' twinship, what Morrison calls the "safe harbor of each other's company," is sustained through mutual embodied imitations and exchanges of the abject (55). The interdependent psychic growth and protection of both Ephanie and Elena, provided in the likeness they share, is poignantly extended to their adolescent bodies through the corporeal bond of merger in their simultaneous sexual awakening. Much as Morrison breaks down distinctions between what is natural and what is waste—

filling the earth with human refuse—both to corrupt traditional notions about feminine sexual maturity and to fuse interdependent female subjectivities to the abject, Gunn Allen also questions the borders between what is natural and what is waste in her metaphorical depiction of Ephanie and Elena's entrance into sexual maturity. In concert the two girls use a single finger to open up oranges for one another, skillfully and simultaneously sucking out the "precious" and "sustaining" juice, and eating the pulp (24). However, after the edible parts of the orange are consumed, Elena convinces Ephanie to eat "the white furry lining of the rind," calling it both sweet and healthy (24). This furry lining of the orange, which is usually discarded as waste, becomes a symbol for what Grosz defines as a threshold—an "interface between the outside and inside of the body" (*The Body* 88).

These thresholds generate spaces of abjection, as they mark the places on the body which are most vulnerable to breaking down boundary distinctions of individual bodies. By readily engaging in the consumption of these abject sexualized juices and the forbidden furry lining together, each girl embraces a tabooed lesbian sexual awakening, transgressing the boundaries of bodily integrity and adapting their abjected status in order to provide a merged sense of mutual pleasure. Both Ephanie and Elena choose to ignore the process of abjection—a process that clearly delineates the boundaries between inside and outside, edible and inedible, self and other, clean and unclean. Instead of feeling shame or fear at losing a sense of self with tangible and distinct borders, Gunn Allen highlights Ephanie's joy and comfort in this realm of connection through the abject. The protagonist happily recalls how "she loved the smell of oranges…Its fragrance…she would sniff it, dreaming" (25).

However, their short-lived revelry in this space ends when Elena tells the convent nuns of the two girls' sexually charged "hugging and giggling" (30). In her confession, she returns to an adherence to the process of abjection, calling the girls playful interactions "dirty things" (13). Elena details her profession of guilt to Ephanie after both girls have hiked up a mountain and are "sweating and lightly streaked where the sweat has washed some of the dust of their climb away" (28). As Elena recounts her confession to Ephanie, explaining that the nuns have subsequently demanded the girls be separated, Ephanie takes hold of Elena's arm. Through her touch, the binding of the girls' sweat merges their bodies together in the abject, making them momentarily physically indecipherable for the last time. Shildrick notes the power of this sweaty skin-to-skin touch, claiming, "the skin is also a primary organ of communication…[a] sensitive surface which both registers sense impressions of the external world and transmits information" to our states of being ("You are There," 165). For Ephanie, this touch, bound in sweat, is her desperate effort to again conjoin their once-mutual embodiment before it is completely severed through Elena's betrayal.

After Elena's confession on the mountain's peak, Ephanie can only see her friend in terms of embodied singularity. The mutual empathy the girls once felt through the embodied merger of their skin-to-skin touches is replaced for Ephanie through the separation of blame, as she uses corporeal wounding to redraw the borders between self and other. This blame transforms Ephanie's memories of her past to reflect her separation from Elena. For instance, the adolescent now blames a traumatic childhood fall from a tree, which resulted in a broken rib, on her one-time best friend. Even though Elena actually issued a warning before Ephanie attempted to jump from a tree, the girl no

longer remembers these cautionary words of protection as she reflects back on their broken friendship:

> And of Elena. Of the long buried conviction Ephanie had harbored that Elena had made her fall. Believing that Elena had commanded her to fall when she had shouted that last warning that Ephanie had barely heard…The confusion, the fugue she had fallen into for days, for a lifetime, after she fell…The branch split. The branch the rope was tied to had split, spilling her from her height far up in the huge tree onto the ground. Where something had broken, something that had taken her a lifetime to mend. (205)

Ephanie's broken rib signifies the fracturing of the abject bond between herself and Elena—their bodies are now distinct, as Ephanie's body is broken and Elena's remains whole. After this fall, which Holford notes has "obvious allusions to Eve's fall" (106), and after the skin-to-skin rejection from Elena, Ephanie loses "the old ease with her body," as her body becomes limited and stationary after her corporeal merger is severed: "She no longer cavorted along the roads, over the mesas, among the branches of the sheltering trees. No cartwheels. No flying leaps from rooftops to horse's back" (202-203).

Instead, this separation from Elena, which also signifies a separation from her own body, forces Ephanie to embrace the strictures of Christian female propriety, "sitting demure on a chair, voice quiet, head down," thus effectively "cutting herself off from the sweet spring of her own being" (202). Ephanie believes that it was "the shadows [the abject world she and Elena created together] that betrayed her" (25). By denying the world of the shadows, Ephanie can easily comply with the process of abjection,

employing Catholic Christian doctrine to negatively judge those relations in her childhood that did not respect the boundaries of the clean and proper body. Her separation from Elena is made complete when Ephanie, like Elena, denounces her old pleasure as morally corrupt, admitting that she "never ate an orange that way later. It didn't seem right" (25). Engaging again in the process of abjection, the same process that originally taught her to view herself as cultural refuse, Ephanie recreates the boundaries of the individuated, base and shameful body—this time through a Catholic doctrine of moral uprightness that condemns both homosexuality and female sexuality. Ephanie relearns that both her body and its past actions must be negatively regarded as abject for her to be even marginally accepted by Catholic or Native societies. Despite the fact that imagining her body as conjoined with Elena's brought her a sense of wholeness, dictums of fear become more powerful in her adult life: "They should be ashamed. They should be afraid" (13). Holford highlights this transition from the embracing of the abject to the symbolic, claiming that "Ephanie's childhood dreams…were replaced by Anglo-European society's prescription for femininity" (Holford 106). Ephanie herself marks this transition from her twinship with Elena to individual subjectivity as one of self loss: "'I abandoned myself,' she said. 'I left me'" (204).

After being abandoned by Elena, Ephanie refers to herself as half-formed, and feels her sense of communal isolation much more profoundly. She thinks of herself as "almost functioning. Half-minded, half-remembering," and wonders whether she will be able to emerge as an individual or be forever "cut in two" (36, 149). Ephanie's feelings of being somehow incomplete or only one half of a whole when not merged in twinship are often attributed to her halfbreed status, which forces her to navigate both Native and

Anglo worlds. However, this familiar critical assertion, used to describe many modern Native protagonists, fails to account for Ephanie's embodied bond with Elena—a bond that, even if only temporarily, changed the physical contours of her own body to accommodate the fluidity of corporeal mergers and exchanges between the two young women. Understanding her lost friendship as deforming or losing parts of the physical body, Ephanie's feelings of isolation and loneliness closely resemble those felt by Sula and Nel during their estrangement. Like Nel, a patriarchal demand of female propriety forces Elena to declare herself a separate entity from Ephanie. Elena's first words in the novel assert this newly forming separation: "Ephanie there is something *I* have to tell you…*I* can't come over to your place…*I* can't see you at all" (28, emphasis mine). Her first-person declaration leaves Ephanie wounded, but also dumbfounded, as the young woman has never before imagined Elena as having feelings about their relationship that are distinct from her own. Ephanie feels the "enormity of the abyss" growing between the girls that was not there before, as she weakly asks, "How did you know, what made you ask?" (30). The void that now exists between Ephanie and Elena's thoughts, brought on by the singularity patriarchy demands, is symbolic of the deterioration of their twinship in both spiritual and embodied terms.

Holford asserts that this separation is not uncommon, but is simply a consequence of a "male-oriented society [which] distrusts the spiritual bonds that exist between women," stifling these bonds under the guise of piety (108). To extend Holford's argument, the actual threat to the patriarchal symbolic is not simply the spiritual or psychic bonds between women, but the concurrence of these ties with same-sex embodied bonds. After all, the nuns separate the girls not simply because their twinship

bond makes them psychically indecipherable, but because they have failed to respect the process of abjection, transgressing the singular bodily integrity that friendship between women requires. This failure to respect physical boundaries, not their psychic affinity, incites the disapproval from the church. It is the evil of the body, the abject, that should be distrusted and transcended: "That evil made Ephanie and Elena play dirty things. That the sister had said they must stop playing with each other like that. They should be ashamed. They should be afraid. They would have to go to confession about it if they kept on playing like that, between each other's legs" (13).

Because their twinship is extended to the body, Ephanie feels their separation as an embodied absence, what Shildrick compares to phantom limb syndrome, while trying to adhere to the strictures of Catholic womanhood as an adult ("You are There" 168). Despite her efforts, when not merged with Elena's body through imitation or abjected exchange, Ephanie's own body is either an alien entity or simply lost to her altogether. She tries to regain a sense of individuated embodiment by rejecting a more encompassing sense of self and imitating others who seem to understand the parameters of their bodies as both rigid and their own—"She would imitate their gestures, their words. Their expressions" (36). Ultimately, Ephanie is unsuccessful, and so she spends long hours gazing "into the bathroom mirror under the hard, brittle light at a face she did not know" (83). Indeed, as Baker Miller points out, the disruption of Ephanie and Elena's twinship is not just a "loss of a relationship, but…something closer to a total loss of self" (83). For Ephanie, the contours of her body outside of twinship are so unrecognizable that any sense of self is completely erased when not in relation. Consequently, Ephanie can only re-member her corporeal self through again engaging with the abject of embodied

twinning, an alternative subjectivity that will allow her to "make a new friend. Who would be like Elena. A friend she could be safe and sure with. A friend who was like home" (33).

To make Ephanie's return to the abject of embodied twinning lasting, Gunn Allen re-imagines both Native and Christian traditions as providers of positive examples of sustainable corporeal bonds between female friends. To this end, Ephanie gradually reinterprets the formative Native and Christian traditions that have informed her self-hatred through embracing the abject bonds that exist, but are communally ignored, in both doctrines. In studying her Native heritage, Ephanie continues to come across the mythic twin sisters, Uretsete and Naotsete: "the double women, the women who never married, who held power like the Clanuncle, like the power of the priests, the medicine men. Who were not mothers, but who were sisters, born of the same mind, the same spirit. They called each other sister" (211). Ephanie understands the positive and creative powers of these twinned mythic beings, "who made all that lives on earth…who made the world," as their bond mirrors the relationship between two Catholic nuns at her convent school (2). Within the convent school, in which rigid attention to rule and order replaces empathy and human kindness, the compassion of two nuns—Sister Mary Grace and Sister Claire—stands out to Ephanie. She remembers these women as physically affectionate, always laughing and dancing. Eventually Sister Claire is transferred from the convent school for her behavior, resulting in Mary Grace's psychic and physical devastation. However, when an adult Ephanie connects these women's pleasure-filled physical bond, created through their shared "laughing and giggling…their faces growing rosy and gleaming from sweat and exertion" (155-156) with the psychic twinship bond of

Uretsete and Naotsete, the reconnection with her own body begins to return: "But somehow it gave back to her, whole and entire, the memory of racing with the sky, the clouds, a piece of ripe juicy fruit, full of moisture and joy. She danced then in recognition. Alive at last" (156).

In this instance, the mythic ancestry of female Native twinning, actualized through the illicit affair between two Catholic nuns, clears a renewed space for the abject in Ephanie's understanding of her subjectivity. Indeed, the joy these mythic and actual women take in embracing abject physical bonds alongside psychic connection comes full circle when Ephanie employs these relationships to better understand her past with Elena. Gunn Allen makes the correlation between all six women clear, as she adapts the language of psychic doubling, employed to discuss the twins Uretsete and Naotsete. Using this doubling language, Gunn Allen extends the psychic twinning of these mythic ancestors to account for the physical bonds of the lesbian affair between Sister Mary Grace and Sister Claire. While Uretsete and Naotsete serve as reminders of the ancestral power that comes from female twinship, the nuns, in turn, act as living examples of the pleasure and spirituality that can be derived through physical relationships between women. Connecting myth and reality, Gunn Allen reinterprets the narrow ideologies of Native spirituality and Catholicism by offering a legacy of women's bodies that fail to respect the borders of the western-mediated symbolic order through their conjoined psychic and physical twinning—disrupting "identity, system [and] order" (Kristeva 5), by playing "dirty things" (13). Although these hidden Native and Christian narratives of support for the blurring of the boundaries of women's bodies are not realized soon enough for Ephanie and Elena to restore their relationship, they do become what Gunn

Allen calls the “point of entry” for Ephanie to accept her love for women and to again embrace the abject in the present. Ephanie demonstrates her new realization as she recounts her story as an adult to her white lover, Teresa: “‘I had forgotten that, I suppose, or I never knew,’ she said when she was telling Teresa about what she had discovered. She was elated. She knew she had uncovered something…it gave back to her, whole and entire, the…piece of ripe juicy fruit” (156).

Just as Ephanie registers Elena’s absence through its effects on her body, the new presence of her friend, and later lover, Teresa similarly evokes corporeal consequences:

> Ephanie’s eyes registered Teresa’s face with affection. Over the years of their friendship she had grown very fond of the planes and lines of it, the pale, freckled skin, the wide blue-green eyes that slanted slightly at the tips. It was a sturdy face, broad and flat, framed by lank dark hair that curled slightly in a damper climate…Ephanie had felt very warm and safe with Teresa… (131)

Essential to Elena and Teresa’s psychic twinning with Ephanie is “the irreducible materiality and corporeality as a condition of subjectivity” (Grosz, *The Body* 81). Gunn Allen depicts a sense of psychic and physical interdependence that is braided so tightly together that Ephanie employs the body’s senses to understand the intensity of emotion behind her bonds with both Elena and Teresa. Recalling her friendship with Elena, the woman says, “[I]f the mesas I see in memory, the water my skin recalls, the food my tongue thinks it tasted, the painful tearing, ugly beautiful, loving, tender words my ears think they heard, my mouth thinks it ever spoke are…not mine…how will I know which is me and which is the other…the not-me?” (35,136). With Teresa, Ephanie’s inability to distinguish her body and her experiences from her lover’s body and experiences is

repeated, as it is through Teresa's mouth that Ephanie first is connected with her grandmother's spirit during a psychic reading. It is Teresa's body that goes into the waves and saves Ephanie's from drowning—a touching of two wet feminine forms that rewrites the betrayal of Elena's skin-to-skin rejection on the top of the mountain. And finally, it is the embodied sexual relations with Teresa that allow Ephanie "a reconciliation with the body, a renewed ability for twinning, and a new realization of feminine power" (Holford 106).

Ultimately, Teresa—a white woman who embodies the lessons taught by a mythic Native feminine twinship—re-teaches Ephanie the possibilities in the shadowed abyss. By engaging with Teresa's body, through touch, sight, and taste, Ephanie erases old fears of the shadowed abyss as a dangerous disappearance of her subjectivity, of "dying…of sliding away" (42). Instead, her physical bond with Teresa grants Ephanie renewed freedom in imagining her body outside of traditional Catholic or Native doctrines of uprightness, recalling that it was her pleasure, "her daring, [which was always] leading her to leap into the abyss from which there was no return" (196). Hanson underscores the renewed encompassing embodiment created by the acknowledgement of this outside space Ephanie now shares with Teresa, claiming that "falling into the void occurs not just for herself, but as a being who is more than a single individual" (73). Kristeva goes further, labeling this void a kind residue left after symbolic functioning, the threshold to the space of the abject: "an abyss at the very borders of the subject's identity, a hole into which the subject may fall…this abyss is the locus of the subject's generation and the place of its potential obliteration" (Grosz, *The Body* 87, 89).

Ephanie first encounters this abyss as she falls off the tree branch in her youth, and it is this same abyss that she falls into after cutting the noose she had tied around her neck in order to commit suicide as an adult. In this second moment of falling, Ephanie's body regains the same active momentum that characterized her youth: "she finally came to, got her breath again moving through her bruised, knotted throat. After she could feel again her legs, her hands" (164). Ephanie's fall into the abyss of the abject, which frees her body from the restrictive axioms of misunderstood Catholic and Native doctrine, is incited through her embrace of both the lineage of double women's psychic bond and her physical bond with Teresa—a white woman, who is her "sister…the one who waits…[who] is ready to know (210). This interdependent friendship, which requires the skin-to skin touches that erase corporeal distinctions and arbitrary erotic-platonic divides, does not decimate the self by eliminating its claims to autonomy; instead, it "comes to have a unique existence beyond the individuals, to be attended to, cared about, and nurtured" (Surrey 62).

C. *Everything Good Will Come*

Removed from Morrison and Gunn Allen's works both by a decade and a continent, Sefi Atta's 2006 novel *Everything Good Will Come* nevertheless locates strikingly similar parallels of twinship founded on and sustained in the abject. Atta's novel, set in late twentieth-century Nigeria, charts the friendship of Enitan Taiwo, a well-mannered Yoruba girl, and her intrepid half-caste Hausa friend, Sheri Bakare. Beginning with the oppressive effects of the Biafran war in the city of Lagos, Atta's narrative catalogues over twenty years in the young women's lives against a backdrop of internal military

strife. In her candid style, she presents readers with the conflict between the power of her protagonists' willful determination to live freely and the material limitations placed on all Nigerian female lives. Such limitations fester in Enitan and Sheri's adolescence, forcing them to face the abject as they experience boarding school politics, rape, self-abortion, and social cruelty. Their mutual disenchantment with marital and social restrictions grows with each passing year, as the women undergo military imprisonments, the social repercussions of Sheri's inability to have children, and the birth of Enitan's first child, Yimika. Ultimately Enitan and Sheri's disillusionment with patriarchal rule, conveyed indirectly by continual military violence and directly by husbands, fathers, and members of the community, leads both women to find respite in a twinned sense of the female abject that promotes a new way of relational being and offers future hope in the legacy they actively pass on to Yimika.

Much like the relationship between Morrison's protagonists, Atta lays the foundation for twinship in Enitan and Sheri's childhood propensity to embrace the abject. In the opening pages of the novel, a youthful Enitan details one of her favorite pastimes. As she sits on the jetty outside her parents' home, feet in the water, waiting for the muddied river to lap at her toes, she reveals that the attraction to these lazy afternoons with her feet hanging in the water is twofold. First, the river gives "off the smell of raw fish" and is of a dirty brown hue she knows "would taste like vinegar;" and secondly, "the currents…could drag a person away. Bodies usually showed up days later, bloated, stiff and rotten" (Atta 12-13).[6] Instead of being repulsed by the stench of putrid fish or afraid of the gruesome death falling off the jetty represents, Enitan declares the border where the small pier meets the water "my protectorate," a borderland space where the

strictures of appropriate femininity are quelled by the thrill derived from embracing the taboos of decay and death (13). This "protectorate" offers her temporary reprieves from the symbolic, a bounded and closed system that traps her parents within an unhappy but socially sanctioned marriage, and that promises Enitan a similar fate when she marries

In contrast, Sheri's relationship to the abject is somewhat more complicated than Enitan's, requiring her to make a double move to reap its rewards. Sheri must first reject her status as cultural abject in order to garner personal power from the different avenues of subjectivity the abject opens. As the child of an impoverished white Englishwoman and a wealthy Black Moslem, Sheri's skin tone is lighter than most in the city of Lagos. This difference prompts her classmates to ridicule her, calling her "yellow pawpaw" or "yellow banana" as she passes by (21). Despite the self hatred her half-caste status should provoke in her, Sheri claims it with pride, physically terrorizing a boy who taunts her and choosing to wear pink lipstick to show off the "sunflower" hue of her lighter skin (17). Unlike Gunn Allen's Ephanie, Sheri uses her body's halfbreed status as a gateway to freedom from normative femininity. In fact, her position as cultural abject seems to only intensify her fascination with both the body's construction and destruction. In one of her first meetings with Enitan, Sheri asks her new friend if she has been allowed to watch the public executions of robbers on a local television station. When Enitan reveals that her parents did not permit her to watch, Sheri describes the killings to her friend in graphic detail: "She smiled. 'Ah, it was good. They shot them on the beach. Tied them, covered their eyes. One, two, three…*Pafuka*,' she said and dropped her head to one side" (18). Like Enitan, Sheri is intrigued with the liminal space between life and death, the space in which the clean and proper body becomes abject waste.

This fascination with the abject continues into their adolescence, as the girls experience a boarding school life that revolves around the exchange of bodily waste:

> It was a wonder we survived the spirit of samaritanism, or communal living. The toilets stunk like sewers and sometimes excrement piled up days high. I had to cover my nose to use them and when girls were menstruating, they flung their soiled sanitary towels into open buckets. Still, I preferred boarding school to home. (47-48)

Enitan and Sheri, like Sula and Nel, are curiously captivated by the vision of corporeal waste and of human flesh, as they regularly burst the boils, quell the convulsions, and watch the asthma attacks of their fellow classmates (47). This mutual attraction to the boundary where the abject haunts the symbolic, where waste infects "the clean and proper" body becomes the symbiosis upon which Enitan and Sheri's embodied twinship is constructed (Grosz, *Volatile* 195).

Like Morrison and Gunn Allen's adolescent protagonists, the mutual desire for this symbiosis stems from what Lang calls the profound "empathetic failures" created by their mothers' emotional ambivalence or absence in their lives (60). For Enitan, after her brother's death, her mother becomes a born-again Christian, wearing only bleached white church robes and constantly trying to save her only daughter from the sins of the flesh. Enitan sees her mother as completely disembodied now, admitting that in her white gowns the older woman "resembled a column," not a body of flesh and blood (21-22). Mirroring the actions of Morrsion's Helene Wright, Enitan's mother condemns her daughter for any step outside the bounds of upright Christian womanhood. When an eleven-year-old Enitan is caught coloring her lips red with a marker, she notices even

then that her mother looked at her as if she'd caught the young girl playing with…[her] own poop" (23). For Enitan's mother, ideas around one's sex or sexual availability are closely linked to fecal excrement. To her, both are reminders of the baseness of the human body, which even the cleanest white robes do not ultimately allow her to transcend.

Despite the devout woman's "attempted expulsion of the improper, disarranging, the unclean," Enitan remembers a time before her brother's death when her mother more readily embraced the abject (Grosz, *Volatile* 201). In what she calls her mother's glamour days, Enitan muses about the woman "with broken crystals in her stomach. They were in her eyes. She was a beautiful woman. I had long forgotten" (174). This musing reflects the simultaneously beautiful and horrific image of the ingestion of broken glass, of shards of waste mixed with human flesh, provoking one of the only feelings of affinity Enitan ever has with her mother. Even after her brother's death, Enitan is unwilling to give up the freedom that resides in the abject to deny the porous interconnection "between mind and body and between body and body" (Shildrick, "You are There" 162). After all, in order to keep her body both clean and stable, Enitan's mother must uphold the unified body image "continually renewed, not through the subject's conscious efforts but through its ability to conceive of itself as a subject and to separate itself from its objects and others" (Grosz, *Volatile* 44). Enitan's preference for ignoring the distinction between her mother's subjectivity and the illuminating shards of broken glass in the woman's stomach is a direct refusal to embrace the process of abjection by upholding the body as singular and closed. This rift in perspective separates the two women throughout their lives,

leaving Enitan to feel "anomalous, and alone in the world," without the mirrored reassurance of similarity with her mother (Kegan Gardiner 170).

Just as Enitan holds onto an image of her mother embracing the abject, Sheri holds onto the image of her now-dead grandmother, Alhaja. In contrast to her real mother, from whom Sheri is taken as an infant and who never makes an effort to seek out her daughter again, Alhaja teaches her granddaughter to take pride in her culturally unappreciated body and to unapologetically embrace her sexuality. Like the mythic and actual matrilineal ancestors of Nel, Sula, and Ephanie, who re-employ their abject status to create power within their own lives and in the larger community, Alhaja also reclaims her status as social abject to financially provide for and protect her family for as long as she is alive. Refusing to apologize for her success as an unmarried powerful businesswoman in the community, she runs a "liberated household" that makes traditional Christian women in Lagos shun her family on the grounds of moral corruption (Sy 105). In addition, Sheri's family's status as social abject is compounded by its polygamous organization and the young girl's own sexually provocative attire. The embrace of these social taboos is what makes Enitan's mother, again closely paralleling the actions of Helene Wright, forbid her daughter to be friends with Sheri, even though she is the only girl of Enitan's age in close proximity. Ultimately, both Sheri and Enitan are left searching for relational merger, as Alhaja's death and Enitan's mother's corporeal denial do not quell the girls' desire for connection through the abject. It is the emptiness in singularity both girls feel that prompts the departure from the classic separation/individuation model of the traditional male *bildungsroman*. Instead of embracing their newfound singularity, both young women seek a different kind of self-

identity, one in which they are "'being[s]-in-relation'…developing all of one's self in increasingly complex ways, in increasingly complex relationships" (Baker Miller 21).

One of these more complex relationships is Enitan and Sheri's embodied twinship with one another. Searching for psychic merger during adolescence makes corporeal consequences of the mergers they seek more likely, as "the physiological changes of female puberty seem to work against the cultural pressure to ignore the body" and the common adolescent desire toward rebellion gives both women the courage to temporarily ignore the strictures of clean and proper female corporeality (Rishoi 12). Madelaine Hron also highlights the years of adolescence as a "hybrid space" without clear definitions for subjectivity:

> [T]he child, figured as not yet a (civilized) adult, becomes initiated to the relations of power, social discourse and their embodied practices. However, in many ways the child is constantly negotiating, questioning or even resisting these cultural constructions, even by virtue of its own constructedness (29).

Both physiological change and psychological rebellion collide twice during Enitan and Sheri's adolescence to cement their hybrid twinship bond, first creating then destroying the reparative embodiment they have crafted together. Contrary to Morrison and Gunn Allen's depictions of adolescent girls who find affinities that erase physical difference, Atta conveys a twinship not through identical physicality, but instead through sexual sameness and embodied imitation that eventually become involuntary. The imitation of the abject begins at Enitan and Sheri's first meeting between the hibiscus bushes separating the properties of the two girls' homes. As the young women peer at one another, Enitan is amazed by eleven-year-old Sheri's appearance: "Didn't anyone tell her

she couldn't wear high heels? Lipstick? Any of that? (20). However, despite Enitan's shock, the Yoruba girl immediately goes home and tries to emulate Sheri's large afro and bright makeup. Enitan recounts: "As I stood before the mirror, I traced the grooves around my plaits. My arms ached by the time I finished and my hair flopped over my face. From the top drawer, I took a red marker and painted my lips red" (21). Despite a warning from the family's gardener that her mother would disapprove, Enitan tries to mirror her new friend's provocative appearance. Kegan Gardiner underscores this mirroring transference as essential to the twinship bond—necessary extensions of the desire to both affirm and imitate in order to create the space for mutual acceptance and confirmation (164).

This initial imitation scene, which is the first gesture toward the blurring of distinctions between one body and another, begins the process of creating a mutually reparative and encompassing embodiment for Enitan and Sheri, eventually inflected on both adolescent bodies through the girls' simultaneous sexual awakening. This literary motif, which grounds the first moment of adolescent sexual awareness in the abject, is common to all three novels: first in Morrison's depiction of Sula and Nel's fused circular holes in the ground filled with trash, and then in Gunn Allen's illustration of Ephanie and Elena's carving of the orange with only their tongues and fingers. Like Morrison and Gunn Allen's literary illustrations of refuse confused with human flesh as a means toward celebrating subjectivity outside the borders of the symbolic, Atta also grounds Enitan and Sheri's sexual awakening in the abject to create a grotesque image that takes shape by exceeding the bounds of singular, closed subjectivity. In the safe haven of Sheri's room with the door closed and locked, the Hausa girl relays to Enitan her new knowledge about

sex, originally given to her by Alhaja. Sheri gives Enitan a mirror to place between her legs so that the young girl will be able to recognize her own sex. After the girls reflect on what they see, Enitan is first angry and disgusted as she peers down at the mirror, combating the desire to abide by the process of abjection she has been taught from childhood on: "It looked like a big, fat slug…I pulled my panties up, wondering whether I was angry with her, or what I'd seen between my legs" (35).

To calm Enitan's frustration, Sheri legitimizes both girls' bodies through a matrilineal legacy of grotesque women. First, she details her grandmother, describing her as a beautiful woman who "had an enormous gap between her font teeth" and "cheeks…so plump her eyes were barely visible" (37). Next, Sheri describes her stepmothers, products of her father's multiple marriages, as wicked but nice, her favorite having a single gold tooth in the front of her smile. Indeed, the women Sheri illuminates in order to create a lineage that celebrates femininity are not the classic beauties that she will later compete against in the Miss World pageant. Instead, this female legacy creates for both girls a lineage of abject excess, of grotesque yet decidedly feminine bodies that are "open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing" (Russo 8). Sheri rejects her friend's initial disgust at what is between their legs, instead framing their sexual awakening within a libratory line of female bodies that reject classic aesthetic models of normal "closed, static, self-contained, [and] symmetrical" bodies (Russo 8).

After Sheri's explanation, Enitan's childhood flirtations with the abject are strengthened, as she immediately asks to borrow the pink lipstick she has seen her friend apply countless times. As she reaches for the lipstick, Enitan mockingly acknowledges the cultural abject the girls are embracing by making themselves look sexually available

at so young an age, informing Sheri one last time that "It's bad, you know" (37). When Enitan shows her friend her lipsticked mouth, Sheri playfully informs her, "You've just kissed me" (37). Although Enitan comments on how forward Sheri is, she says it in awe, as the Yoruba girl admits she is impressed by her young friend's disregard for the rules. Prior to this new sexual awareness, Enitan has at least in part subscribed to her mother's view of her body as individual and closed, "the independent and proper body sealed into singularity by its own skin" (Shildrick, "You are There" 166). The sharing of both the lips of vagina and the mouth disrupt the ideal of the closed and singular body, instead prompting a corporeality that is shared, "mediated by touch, by mucus" (Shildrick, "You are There" 166). The simultaneous visual pleasure and disgust in the slug-like mucus of her vagina's lips and the swapping of spit in the girls' lipstick kiss bind Enitan and Sheri in the early stages of a twinship founded on a legacy of abjected and grotesque women's bodies.

The celebration of the grotesque body makes each girl a willing participant in embracing the abject, as each praises a bodily ideal that "continually violates one's own borders…is sickening yet irresistible" (Grosz, *Volatile* 47). Indeed, Enitan and Sheri's mutual acknowledgement of mucus and saliva as literally the material ties of similarity that imbed their subjectivity within a reparative community of women's bodies temporarily places them outside of the symbolic, and its necessary and continual expulsion of the abject from consciousness. Their mutual exchange of these fluids through a kiss foreshadows a twinned bond of similarity that blurs the distinct bodily boundaries between self and other. Much like the merger of imagined worlds and corporeal experience Morrison and Gunn Allen's adolescent protagonists create, Enitan

and Sheri's shared embodied space allows them to employ the abject to create a renewed sense of efficacy in the world, sharing "confidences about their future ambitions" and discussing "the restrictions on women's power in a politically unstable country" (Sy 110). Proof of this safety comes when Enitan's parents resume their fighting. The girl no longer goes to the jetty in solitude; instead, she simply returns to Sheri in her mind: "I shut my eyes and imagined I was on the balcony with Sheri. We were laughing and the sun warmed my ear. Their voices faded" (40). Embodied warmth is something the young girl does not experience at home, which is why Enitan feels a constant pull toward the safety and freedom of Sheri's house, where women wake up late, are rude and brash when they are insulted, and eat as much as any man.

Sheri, too, is temporarily protected from the taunts her difference provokes: "In school you were teased for being yellow or fat; for being Moslem or for being dumb, for stuttering or wearing a bra…because it meant that you were Biafran or knew people who were" (21). In Lagos, those unfortunate enough to have clear embodied differences are linked to the war-torn ravaged bodies shot through with holes, as those that are both responsible for and victims of the violence of the Biafran war. As a child, Sheri is often associated with a single category of cultural dissention and waste for her difference, but her relationship with Enitan allows her a temporary safe-harbor. Despite their ethnic and religious differences, Sheri seems to assert that the girls' embodied likeness, grounded in the female abject, is a more powerful link of similarity when she declares herself Enitan's best friend.

However, despite the fleeting protection Enitan and Sheri's psychic and physical merger creates, embodied twinship is based on the shared corporeal effects of psychic

similarities of lived experience, and ultimately that lived experience is an interaction between embodied subjects and the surrounding world. This interaction, as Moi asserts, is one in which "each term continuously constructs the other": "The body is our perspective on the world, and at the same time that body is engaged in a dialectical interaction with its surroundings, that is to say with all the other situations in which the body is placed" (56, 68). Twinship complicates the singular body's interaction with external situations, as it is a corporeal form that is always overstepping its bounds, an embodiment that rejects an "affective and effective autonomy that is fully realized only by a singular…[body] sealed by skin" (Shildrick, "You are There" 167). Unlike Morrison and Gunn Allen, Atta more fully illustrates the dangers of adolescent twinned embodiment that, to varying degrees, must always function within a socially and historically specific world.

Atta brings the outside world into the young women's tight bond when Sheri Bakare is raped by school boys in front of Enitan. While the two girls are at a festival together, Enitan realizes that she has begun to menstruate for the first time: "It was blood. I was dead" (64). When she goes to find Sheri in order to help her escape from the festivities without being noticed, Enitan discovers that her friend is being sexually assaulted by a gang of teenage boys. After the rape, which both Enitan and Sheri are helpless to stop, the young women walk home with their heads down in humiliation. Once they arrive at Enitan's house, Enitan bathes Sheri's body, noticing "There was blood on her pubic hairs, thick spit running down her legs. Semen" (66). Similar to her realization of the sluggish mucus between each girls' legs that moved Enitan from childhood to adolescence, the realization of blood on both young women's pubic hairs violently indoctrinates these two friends into the embodied bonds of womanhood. Atta's

description points to the freedom and danger of Enitan and Sheri's twinship, which is marked by borderless and uncontrollable bodily fluids: "they seep, they infiltrate; their control is a matter of vigilance, never guaranteed…they assert the priority of the body over subjectivity; they demonstrate the limits of subjectivity in the body" (Grosz, *Volatile* 194).

Atta highlights the potential possibility and the potential danger in the abject, illuminating it as both restorative and destructive bodily fluids. For Atta, the same bodily fluids that allow the girls to temporarily escape the strictures of appropriate femininity behind Sheri's closed bedroom door also allow their female bodies to become interchangeable based on another inherited legacy. Through social discourses that categorize rape as female ruin and menstruation as hygienically unclean, the girls are easily labeled as cultural and corporeal abject. The blood from Sheri's rape is no longer distinguishable from that of Enitan's menarche. Contrary to the image of their blended saliva—a blending of spit that promises a merged sense of efficacy and freedom within a world of their own creation—the merger of blood instead becomes a twinship based on women's bodies as interchangeable abject trash, human flesh that exists to be a sexual object. The twinship built on embodied sameness and forged through abject bodily fluids now includes the shared physical threat of sexualized violence such sameness has come to represent in their emergence into womanhood. This threat is embodied both by the devastation of Sheri's body, catalogued as waste alongside the "cigarettes, alcohol, sweat…blood [and] semen" that seeps from her broken form and by Enitan's now-menstruating woman's body (66). Grosz contends that menstruation is closely linked to

the waste, as Atta confirms in her representation of Sheri's sexually ravaged body, claiming:

> [M]enstrual blood…becomes associated with the characteristics of excrement. The representation of female sexuality as uncontrollable flow, as seepage associated with the unclean, coupled with the idea of female sexuality…has enabled men to associate women with infection, with disease, with the idea of festering putrefaction. (*Volatile* 206)

Through the shared blood on their pubic hairs, both women are conjoined by and reduced to their genitals, and both quickly embody patriarchal symbolic scripts of female rape and menstruation that not only create a negative, yet binding, twinship between the girls, but also link female corporeality to the abject body. For Enitan and Sheri, mutually embracing the abject is no longer a choice that provides them with temporary moments of pleasure through the joining of flesh outside of the strictures of appropriate feminine subjectivity; instead, the idea of the singular body violently collides with the idea of plurality, or interchangeability, of female bodies in patriarchal discourse: "what happened to her could happen to you" (Kingston 5).

In addition, Enitan and Sheri's now-corrupted twinship is also bound by the shared acknowledgment of embodied failure. Because her own embodiment is understood through a corporeal relationship of sameness, when Enitan realizes that she cannot protect Sheri's body, she also realizes by extension that she cannot protect her own. It is this forced twinship, a twinning based on the likeness of all women as sexual objects, which prompts Enitan to mediate her fears by making an effort to separate out her sense of embodiment from Sheri's. Much like Nel and Elena, she asserts a first

person pronoun in order to define the individual contours of her body for the first time and to align herself with the patriarchal symbolic. Enitan accepts and employs the process of abjection that makes victims of rape separate from other women, cultural refuse—"the improper, disarranging, the unclean" (Grosz, *Volatile* 201). She does so by couching them and Sheri in a rote script of female culpability for rape: "Yes, I blamed her…Bad girls got raped. We all knew. Loose girls, forward girls, raw, advanced girls. Laughing with boys, following them around, thinking she was one of them. Now I could smell the semen on her and it was making me sick" (68-69). Enitan tries to save herself from the internal and external subjugation of being labeled abject by redeploying disgust and blame at Sheri's unapologetic acceptance and provocative display of her body, denying that these are the qualities in her fair-skinned friend that she used to admire. By incriminating Sheri's singular body, the Yoruba girl does not have to implicate her own corporeal subjectivity as unclean or abject.

Following the rape, Enitan continues to make efforts to distinguish her body from Sheri's ruin by declaring her own virginity and placing it within the order of the proper and clean body: "my virginity belonged to Jesus Christ, my mother, society at large. Anyone but me" (77). In this move, Enitan disembodies her subjectivity in order to rid herself of the trauma that comes with acknowledging embodiment. However, Enitan's severing of twinship ties is not successful; Patricia Yaeger points to its inevitable failure, claiming, "Temperamentally, these…[women] function as a hybrid body; each depends on the other; the death of one necessitates the death of the other. But spatially, ideologically, and socially…[they] are defined in opposition (226). Indeed, Enitan's declaration of her singularity—accomplished by placing her virginity in opposition to

Sheri's sexual activity—temporarily alienates the young women spatially from one another. However, their shared vulnerability, now bound by blood, ultimately makes such bodily disconnection impossible. Despite her continual efforts to separate herself from her former best friend, Enitan has recurring dreams of Sheri's running toward her and slamming into her body. Enitan cannot extricate herself from the now encompassing embodied subjectivity the girls have created together, and she calls this new twinship bond, founded on their mutual position as sexual abject, "the misfortune that would bind us" (47).

Atta structures and sustains this misfortune through a twinship of embodied likeness that is derived from the protagonists' continual and synchronized creation of abject fluids. Both Enitan and Sheri's sexual awakenings, through the recognition of their mucus laden sex as beautifully grotesque, and their new label as sexual abject, through the streaming of blood from their simultaneous rape and menarche, are concurrent events marked by bodily fluid that create parallel contours in each girl's conception of her embodiment. Even after Enitan rejects the girls' twinship, the twinned synchronization of their bodily fluids seems inescapable. The most poignant example of the extent to which their bodily fluids bind them occurs during the girls' simultaneous social cleansing, through Enitan's forced vomiting and Sheri's self-abortion. In a single section, Atta details the girls' mutual experiences of society's ritual purging of the abject from their bodies, as "it is only through the attempted expulsion of the improper, the disarranging, the unclean…that the representation of order can continue (Grosz, *Volatile* 201). To restore this symbolic order, Enitan's mother takes her daughter to her priest early one morning. As her mother informs the priest of what happened to the girls

at the festival, Enitan notices that he listens as if "he was sniffing something bad" (72). Enitan's mother is told to give her daughter holy water to drink for the purpose of cleansing her flesh from sin, and the young woman is commanded to drink the green water and then to stick her finger down her throat: "Two attempts brought the entire contents of my stomach onto the ground, but I continued to retch. My eyes filled with tears. Some of the water had come through my nose" (73). After Enitan is finished, her mother replies with a simple "Good" (73). Deciding that the vomiting has erased the detritus of sin from her daughter's body, Enitan's mother believes that her daughter is safe again through the process of abjection. For Enitan's mother, her daughter's vomiting is an act of catharsis, a cleansing ritual enacted "to create and maintain a particular culture, a particular set of assumptions by which experience is controlled" (Douglas 128).

In the novel, Enitan's cleansing occurs concomitantly with Sheri's self-abortion. Hearing the news of her friend's abortion, Enitan retreats more fully into the mind/body dualism, which rejects the body as basely inferior and limiting to a more "enlightened" subjectivity. Frustrated, Enitan cries out "Didn't a womb know which baby to reject? And now that the baby had been forced out, how did it look? The color of the hibiscus?" (73). In this passage, Atta links both the fluid of vomit and that of forced birth as symbolic of those elements considered to be social waste, abject refuse, that which must be expelled in order to restore appropriate feminine subjectivity to both young women. These abject fluids, which are "borderline state[s], disruptive of the solidity of things, entities, and objects" (Grosz, *Volatile* 195) are forced out so that both young women can redraw the borders of themselves, not through exchange, but as singular bodies that are

invested in the prevention of the collapse of the closed and separated subject. Enitan and Sheri's foray outside of religious, ethnic, and embodied rules of femininity offers them the chance to use "detritus as a source of creativity…to risk getting dirty, to soil oneself, to go out of bounds" (Yaeger 272-273), but their threat to the status quo is swiftly punished by a violent push back into the fold of the symbolic and a ritual cleansing that demands the erasure of their hybrid embodiment. Ultimately, this forced catharsis does not eradicate the girls embodied bond. Even in Sheri's absence, Enitan is haunted by dreams of the two bodies conjoined, and upon her first sexual encounter, she emulates the language she used as an adolescent to describe Sheri's rape: "he licked the walls of my mouth clean. After I thought he pierced my bowels, I burst into tears…'I'm sorry," I said. 'I have to wash.' It was his semen. I couldn't bear the thought of it leaking out of me and rolling down my legs" (77). Sex for Enitan has become abject, and the fluid of semen has become its most putrid and polluting representation.

Their choice to revel in the abject brought the girls together in a corporeal twinning that celebrated female bodily fluid as a means to disrupt sanctioned female subjectivity. It is that choice, temporarily taken away by a patriarchal intervention, which both lumps their bodies indistinguishably together into a gendered category of the sexually unclean and separates them through Enitan's desire to escape cultural castigation as waste. However, as adults, the reclaiming of bodily fluid as a source of female power again recreates a liberating twinship for Enitan Taiwo and Sheri Bakare, promising the continuation of a legacy of the abject female grotesque to future generations of Nigerian daughters. Contrary to Morrison's depiction of the missed opportunity of adult twinned embodied reliance between Sula and Nel, and Gunn Allen's depiction of the hope in

twinships reformulated with other women in adulthood, Atta instead offers the only successful reclaiming of adolescent embodied twinship in adulthood between her protagonists. Unlike the chance events that create and destroy the girls' embodied bond, the road back to twinship in adulthood is an intentional mutual frustration with the mores of Lagos society and a slow reintroduction to the freedom of the abject grounded in female communities.

This process begins when Enitan returns to boarding school and befriends Robin, an English girl with a speech impediment. Robin is the first to tell Enitan that nothing a woman does justifies rape. Enitan resists, assuring her friend that some girls encourage it: "bad girls got raped was all I'd heard before, and of the bad girls I knew, not one had taken her matter to court" (78). Robin finally convinces Enitan that Sheri is not to blame, which forces Enitan to no longer consider her childhood best friend to be a deserving victim. Enitan exhibits the shift in her understanding, saying of Sheri, "she was the most powerful girl I knew, and then she wasn't anymore, and I became disappointed with her" (104). However, Enitan's new perception of her old friend is tenuous at best, as she later accuses Sheri of making advances at her now divorced father. Only after Enitan finds that her beloved father cheated on her mother, conceiving a secret child outside of his marriage, and that her boyfriend, too, is engaged in an affair with another woman, does she realize that it is not Sheri who is to blame but the current system that encourages men to treat women as indistinguishable, replaceable sexual objects. Sheri comes to a similar realization, as she suffers the effects of the limited options her barroness, derived from her self-abortion, has caused in a society that prizes women simply for their ability to reproduce sons. Her inability to bear children limits her social opportunities so much that

she becomes the mistress of an abusive and controlling brigadier. Although both women's disillusionment with the system of patriarchy in place happens separately, their frustration similarly repositions both of them to look for options of subjectivity outside of this restrictive symbolic order.

This frustration reaches its peak for Enitan when she is imprisoned for her involvement in an activist group that questions the military's unfounded arrests of those who speak out against the Nigerian government. A now-pregnant Enitan is thrown into an overcrowded cell with countless other women. While there, she is quickly reminded of her boarding school days, as Enitan again encounters a female community of women bound through the abject. Repulsed by the putrid smell of disease and excrement, Enitan initially begins to feel sick: "The smell was already in my nostrils, in my stomach, churning it over…One or two people slapped mosquitoes from their legs. Someone coughed and swallowed. I gritted my teeth to control my nausea" (259). As an adult, Enitan has become protective of the "border separating filth from cleanliness…[the] demarcating system separating inside form outside, high from low, man from woman, lady from prostitute…"(Yaeger 264). However, the women in the prison remind Enitan of the vulnerability of these borders, and one woman in the cell speaks out, saying "You're no better than me. Not in here. We all sleep on the same floor, shit in the same bucket" (260). This woman's words reflect the truth of what Grosz points to as the abject's ability to be the ultimate equalizer, the "undignified, nonpoetic, daily attributes of existence, rich or poor, black or white…[that] all must, in different ways, face, live with, reconcile themselves to" (*Volatile* 194).

Yaeger similarly asserts that human refuse is “a community creator,” a hypothesis proven when Enitan vomits in the corner of their shared cell. This vomiting, which parallels the forced purging her mother insists upon to rid her of her sexual filth, reacquaints Enitan with the abject, not as that which should be expunged in order to separate oneself, but that which ultimately bonds women together. After she throws up, the women in the cell lay their hands on her until so many bodies are in such close proximity that Enitan feels she might suffocate. Instead of recoiling again, Enitan chooses to join this community of the abject, listening to women’s stories of oppression at the hands of their husbands, their families, the prison guards, and the military. As night approaches in the prison cell, the end of one body and the beginning of the next is indistinguishable. As Enitan notes, “There was not enough space for us unless our legs and arms touched” (268). During her one-night stay in the prison, Enitan realizes “the domain of possibilities in which what is rejected, useless, or edged with decay becomes charged with value” (Yaeger 272). From the experience, she gains a renewed sense of ambition to reject the roles allotted to women in Lagos and adds the woman with “hair in patches” and “sores [that] had eaten into the corners of her mouth” to the lineage of grotesquely beautiful women that supply a life-sustaining female community for both her and Sheri (273).

With this renewed energy, Enitan and Sheri begin to reconstruct the ruins of their adolescent friendship together. Sheri leaves the abusive brigadier and begins a restaurant catering business with her stepmothers. Although barron, Sheri becomes a healer of children within the city of Lagos. Enitan watches in amazement as her friend relieves a constipated child, prodding his belly to restart the movement of his bowels. In a similar

move toward freedom, Enitan leaves her husband shortly after the birth of their baby girl, Yimika. She departs their suburban life together because he will not allow her to continue her political fight to secure the release of innocent female prisoners in Nigera. The novel ends with the women mutually caring for Yimika, while continuing their struggle to change women's daily lives in their community.

The shared space both protagonists come to embody at the end of the novel should not be read as simply escapist or utopian, as Rita Nnodim concludes the women inhabit "dystopian spaces in their different personal manifestations [in order to] finally recuperate the potential for imagining a different world and for transposing these imaginings into activism" (330). However, although they are both are feminist-minded, Enitan and Sheri do not share the same radical viewpoints. Sheri is more of a realist, who often reminds Enitan to take into "consideration the political and traditional realities in Nigeria where patriarchy and greed for political power hold women in bondage" (111). Sy notes that Enitan's feminist idealism and Sheri's more conservative beliefs "foreground the complexities facing African women" (111). At the same time, the different, sometimes conflicting, beliefs of these two women, who still manage to live in a state of merger, begin the work of realizing Sula's dream of a hybrid encompassing body with "two throats and one eye" (Morrison 147). This grotesque body's multiple throats allow both women to speak from various, frequently contradictory, vantage points, but it does not dissolve the mutual embodied space formed through the joining of abject fluids, which has shaped the contours of their twinned existence. Enitan and Sheri are still bound by the bodily fluids that signaled the coming of adolescence, the loss of innocence, the disenchantment with Nigerian women's roles, and the birthing of children

(dead and alive). Enitan's final words, which also conclude the novel, are fitting, providing a final testament to spiritual power in base bodily fluids: "My sweat baptized me" (326).

D. Conclusion: Toward the Conjoining of Twins

In Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* a grief-stricken and road-wearied Janie returns home to Eatonville, Florida after a prolonged and mysterious absence. Upon her return, she is met with the curious gazes of the townsfolk, but she has neither the energy nor the inclination to tell them her story. To put an end to their curiosity, Janie enlists her friend Pheoby to explain her absence to the town, reasoning that "Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf" (Hurston 6). Upon reading Hurston, it is easy to look over this exchange, steeped in lazy southern dialect and couched in a conversation about food and aching feet. Furthermore, the thought of a tongue extracted and placed in another's mouth seems to be an odd metaphor to convey the intimacy and mutual confidences of female friendship. Yet while this image is both unsettling and grotesque, Hurston's metaphorical prose undoubtedly communicates the intensity of the women's bond by framing it in the abject joining of their bodies. Like Hurston, Morrison, Gunn Allen, and Atta all employ the grotesque restructuring of embodied boundaries, through the imagined and actual melding of body parts and the exchange of bodily fluids, to highlight bonds between women that exceed and overflow traditional definitions of friendship.

Like Hurston's allusion to the temporary fusion of Janie and Phoeby's flesh, these authors' repetitive returns to bodies twinned through mutual exchanges of sweat, saliva,

blood, and vomit underscore the body's inextricable connection to psychic bonds of twinship. Through Morrison's two-throated cyclops, through Gunn Allen's skin-to-skin touches, and through Atta's wet kissing of lips, each author employs the conjoining of flesh to create a grotesque body as testimony. This encompassing whole, which privileges neither one nor two, testifies to the permeability of human boundaries and to the arbitrariness of autonomous and singular subjectivity. Each twinned entity uses what Yaeger terms "detritus as a source of creativity" to construct new ways of relational being between, among, and through the permeable boundaries of the female self (272).

For Sula and Nel, for Ephanie and Elena, and for Enitan and Sheri, different divisive social discourses encourage them to distance themselves from one another. Divisions of class, race, religion, and ethnicity are presented to each girl as reasons to separate, to individuate, and to create the autonomous singularity, which the stereotypical adult subject position demands. Yet each one, at least for a brief period in adolescence, refuses to cohere, refuses to retrace the dividing lines that separate the self from the other, the Hausa from the Yoruba, the Native from the Anglo, the Christian from the Muslim, and the clean from the dirty. Even as adolescents, the young protagonists realize that constructing a singular self means defining one's boundaries in opposition to others, and those oppositions are rife with discriminations derived from difference. These divisions are the ones written into the narratives of their daily lives—in the racial discrimination of citizens in Medallion, Ohio, in the ideologies of racial purity by both Native and Anglo communities in New Mexico, and in the divisive violence between Biafrans and Nigerians in southern Nigeria. Rejecting autonomous selfhoods constructed through difference, Morrison, Gunn Allen, and Atta each imagine different kinds of relational

economies through twinship bonds that rely on similarity, likeness, community, and an embodied sense of responsibility.

Their creations deviate from popular criticism, which celebrates conclusions of female *bildungsromane* that feature a "female alone at the end of the novel…[as] a symbolic feminist triumph" (Detore-Nakamura 32). Although critics praise such endings for granting female protagonists the independence to walk off into their own sunsets, free from the either/or marriage/death binary allotted to their predecessors, the isolation at the end of these novels still resonates as a kind of communal process of abjection. Women, who exceed the boundaries of the static closed self, or the static closed community, are cast out and kept at the borders. The body's abject, the social abject, the sexual abject, the cultural abject—all are expunged, kept on the outside, isolated from the individual, from the community.

In contrast, Grosz points to the conscious acknowledgement of the abject as the ultimate community builder, as its processes are the "undignified, nonpoetic, daily attributes of existence," which we all, without exception, must "face, live with" and reconcile ourselves to (*Volatile Bodies* 194). By creating a twinship bond, which relies on the abjected permeability of the body both to eradicate feelings of isolation and to create a literal embodied connection, Morrison, Gunn Allen, and Atta all create corporeal communities that function much like twins conjoined by flesh. Sharing one's body does not mean that difference is ignored; different discourses bind particular bodies in specific ways that cannot be denied or completely erased. However, when flesh is joined, the encompassing body must always work to better understand difference, requiring continuous mutual responsibility and forgiveness to achieve pleasure and efficacy in the

world. Indeed it is in these abject mergers that the protagonists feel the most comfort "in their skin," physically protecting one another, pleasuring one another, using one another to grow on. Furthermore, it is the separation from these mergers that create singular female bodies that become personally unrecognizable or cease to exist altogether. In abject twinship, the feminist triumph is not isolation, but the imagination of new types of relational economies, in which Yaeger argues "bodies are never alone or unique but always double, mutual, mixed with their environments" (223-224). This relational economy uses detritus both inside and between female bodies to disrupt autonomous singularity as the only model of subjectivity, conjoining the left over, the refuse, the abject to build grotesque two throated and one eyed twins. Adolescent bodies, already in flux, embrace their grotesque corporeality to strategically exceed the bounds of restrictive social roles in order to ultimately expand, multiply, and conjoin definitions of self.

Notes

[1] For a representative example of feminists who criticize the notion of sisterhood, review bell hooks' *From Margin to Center*.

[2] In this dissertation, the use of "self-psychology" refers to Heinz Kohut's theory of empathetic human development. Fundamental to Kohut's theory of self-development are fundamental experiences with other people to fulfill human developmental needs. These include: idealizing, twinship, and adversarial attachments.

[3] By symbolic order, I mean the system of signifiers one must embrace in order to enter into language or when becoming a speaking subject. To make oneself recognizable as a subject in the symbolic order, one must accept the body as a unified whole through acknowledgement of oppositionally coded cultural signifiers—signifiers that distinguish subject from object, inside from outside, normal from abnormal, man from woman, etc.

[4] For the remainder of the chapter section entitled *Sula*, references to the primary text, Morrison's *Sula*, will be notated with only a page number.

[5] For the remainder of the chapter section entitled *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, references to the primary text, Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows*, will be notated with only a page number.

[6] For the remainder of the chapter section entitled *Everything Good Will Come*, references to the primary text, Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* will be notated with only a page number.

Chapter 2

You Be My Eyes and Ears: Idealization and Bodily Transference Across Race in *The Bluest Eye* and *Can't Quit You Baby*

> "I'm putting it down for you to see if our fragments match anywhere, if our pieces together, make another layer, a piece of truth that can be part of the map we are making together to show us the way to get to the longed-for world"
>
> Minnie Bruce Pratt "Identity: Skin Blood Heart" (16)

In Sue Monk Kidd's 2002 novel *The Secret Life of Bees*, successful both as a New York Times Bestseller and later as a feature length film, the author depicts the 1960s story of Lily, a young white girl who becomes infatuated with a wooden figurine of a black Virgin Mary. Wounded by both her mother's death and her father's abuse, Lily begins to idealize and become physically attached to the statue, called "Our Lady." The girl obsessively places the figurine against the skin of her abdomen, bathes it in honey, holds imaginary conversations with it in her head, and caresses its heart when she is certain she is alone. Eventually Lily's obsession is brought to the attention of August, a black woman who is acting as her temporary caregiver. Placing her hand on Lily's heart, August informs the girl that "'Our Lady is not some magical being out there somewhere, like a fairy godmother. She's not the statue in the parlor. She's something *inside* of you'" (Kidd 288). Despite the empowering message of cross-race female bonding readers or viewers are supposed to garner from the saccharine smile of a middle-aged black woman as she bestows the narrative's climactic wisdom upon this girl-becoming-woman, the simultaneously elicited image of "Our Lady's" black body trapped inside of the adolescent's white body casts a dark, but familiar shadow on Kidd's narrative.

This chapter opens by examining a larger pattern of problematic embodied mergers like this one, which begins with the idealization of bodies across race and ends with the imagined overlaying or acquisition of black and white female body parts. By first charting a tradition of attempted literary cross-racial alliances, the initial section identifies a pattern of contemporary narrative shortcomings based on a resilient racist binary that continues to define black and white female bodies as oppositional. Then, the chapter moves to focus on patterns of cross-racial idealization between protagonists in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Ellen Douglas' *Can't Quit You Baby*. Specifically, this section explores how a culturally covert black/white binary of race constructs protagonists' desires to imaginatively acquire bodies and body parts across racial lines in order to manage or correct perceived problems with their own bodies.[1] Finally, the conclusion proposes how both Morrison and Douglas attempt to re-imagine bonds between black and white women outside of a destructive and dualistic racial paradigm, through the celebration of the abject body as an ultimate human equalizer.

Perhaps, however, it is misleading to begin this analysis by highlighting *The Secret Life of Bees'* depiction of the white consumption of black female bodies, since this twenty-first-century image gains much of its power from being read through a longstanding tradition in American culture and literature—the pattern of denigrating, exploiting, and even idealizing black female bodies in the service of constructing meanings of whiteness. One of the most recent iterations of this pattern appears in contemporary Southern white women writers' efforts to re-imagine cross-racial friendships across the stubborn color line of the 1950s and 60s. Sharon Monteith underscores the potential promise of these fictions, which adapt the popular

contemporary female friendship plot to redefine race relations in the years surrounding the Civil Rights Movement. Through the creation of cross racial friendships, Monteith concludes that these narratives have the potential to "expose the context in which friendship may be seen as transgressive, trespassing the borders of what is socially expected or countenanced" (2-3). Indeed, well before Kidd's twenty-first century depiction of cross-racial female friendship, late-twentieth century white Southern novelists like Rita Mae Brown, Kaye Gibbons, Ellen Douglas, and Carol Dawson took up this creative challenge. During this period, each author wrote novels that in different ways employed interracial friendships to promote a sense of racial harmony and to overcome accusations that liberal feminism was built only on the stories and experiences of affluent white women.

Falling short of their initial promise, however, these literary cross-racial friendships generally begin and end in the course of the novels, only existing within the strict narrative bounds of the books themselves. Because these friendships fail to acknowledge the unequal power structures on which they are founded and refuse to engage with the entangled historical baggage of white female guilt and black female rage, they often depict *not* an antiracist feminist awakening but the privileging of "the moral growth of their white female protagonist" through the physical sacrifices of a black friend (Monteith 5). In these narratives, white female protagonists rarely realize their ongoing complicity in and perpetuation of white supremacy, never fully engaging with the commodification and exploitation of the black women they call friends. In almost all of these narratives, black women continue to be reduced to literary devises that serve to facilitate, through the protagonist's appropriation of stereotypical black female emotional

resolve and physical potency, a false transformation from white female innocence to mainstream feminist strength.[2] This story line, as Patricia Yaeger notes, has become cathartically routine for many white women writers who came of age during the civil rights era: "Coming-into-knowledge-about-race is a typical story for white liberals who grew up in a pre-civil rights South" (40).

However, contemporary Southern white female writers are not the only ones constructing imaginative cross-racial friendships. Yaeger and Monteith note that black women writers within and outside of the South have continued to create narratives that focus on such relationships. These novelists also contemplate the complicated historical cross-race relationships between women in the U.S., making efforts to fill in the narrative void Adrienne Rich highlighted as late as 1979: "The mutual history of black and white women in this country is a realm so painful, resonant and forbidden that it has been barely touched by writers of political 'science' or of imaginative literature" (276). A short list of contemporary black women writers who have depicted protagonists engaged in interracial relationships includes Alice Walker, Dori Sanders, Sherley Anne Williams, Lucille Clifton, and Toni Morrison. However, despite an overlap in subject matter with their white contemporaries, Monteith is quick to point to the paradigmatic differences in which each group of authors typically portrays these cross-racial relationships. Although the "idioms white protagonists deploy are frequently much more utopian and therapeutic…the paradigms writers use when advancing the ideas of sisterhood," black women's writing more often "explore[s] and expose[s] a history of cross-racial association between black and white women [that] tend[s] to emphasize the difficulties and improbabilities of the association, looking back to slavery and to the black rancor

over white women's suffrage, where the empowerment of one group of women made manifest the disempowerment of another." (Monteith 5)

However, despite such paradigmatic differences in perspective, commonalities still exist between the two groups of contemporary women writers. First, most if not all of these novelists are engaged in dialectical interactions with second-wave feminist claims to universal sisterhood. In addition, most of these novels employ uninterrogated racial ideologies of blackness and whiteness that are constructed as fundamentally oppositional. Indeed, as Rich notes about most U.S. narratives and cultural rhetoric, black and white women are still most often "cast as antagonists in the patriarchal drama" (201). These shared themes of the tension surrounding and the desire toward race affiliation in contemporary literature are often attributed to late-twentieth-century U.S. conflicts regarding racial exclusion and sisterhood. Shortly before many of these novels appeared, liberal feminism came under attack from feminists of color for its non-nuanced and difference-effacing celebration of feminist women as "sisters" in a common struggle. Critics like bell hooks have since underscored sisterhood's inherent failure to unite all women, citing the ideology's "refusal to draw attention to and attack racial hierarchies…reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women…[could] bond across ethnic and racial boundaries" (3). In response to this feminist history, which pretended "a homogeneity of experience that is difficult to prove or even imagine" (Monteith 36), many feminist theorists and creative writers have since constructed narrative cross-racial relationships that work to avoid the naïve belief in a common sisterhood. Instead, these writers have employed and still employ friendship bonds, constructed around respecting difference, hoping to simultaneously engage and

transgress the silence around black and white women's mutual, yet segregated, history. All too often, however, these literary endeavors end in therapeutic, utopic versions of false sisterhood or in the bitterness over a still-present racial divide.

In these novels, the narrative impasse is no longer based on indulging difference-effacing bonds, which silence distinctions of race, class, sexual orientation, and region. Instead, the impasse most often stems from an effort to avoid these generalizing identifications of sameness through relying on non-nuanced or stereotypically constructed notions of absolute racial difference. As a result, authors often assert racial difference through historical constructions of stereotypical binaries that antithetically define black and white female protagonists in an effort to avoid false commonalities between their characters. In turn, just as the assertion of absolute similarity falsely effaced all difference in the sisterhood movement, current notions of absolute racial difference efface any similarities between black and white female protagonists. This ideology of absolute racial difference gains much of its contemporary power through late twentieth-century ideologies of neoliberal white feminist guilt and prevailing U.S. cultural standards of ideal embodiment—both of which permeate the relationships and bodies of black and white women in these narratives and facilitate friendships built on the cross-racial idealization of bodies culturally constructed as physical opposites.

A. Guilty Idealizations and Embodied Acquisitions

The pervasiveness of white guilt in U.S feminism, beginning in the 1970s and 80s, is famously reflected in the textual exchange between Jane Gallop and Deborah McDowell. Gallop, a white woman and former Lacan student, said in an interview that

although her previous writings were driven by a desire to please Lacan (a stand in for collective white male power), she recently felt a shift in that desire, now feeling the need to please black feminist critics. This category of "black feminist critics" took shape in Gallop's mind through her imagination of the specific body and persona of McDowell as judge of her academic work. Although Gallop had never met the woman she imagined, McDowell had attended a talk given by Gallop, and was later critical of the absence of any analysis of race in the woman's presentation. Gallop's subsequent guilt over the incident led her to appropriate McDowell as "an idealized figure of ultimate discursive authority who knows (and judges)," while simultaneously eclipsing "the place of Deborah McDowell as a separate subject in the external world" (Wyatt 106). McDowell later rejected her putative status as Gallop's "venerated fantasy object," in her essay "The Changing Same," furious that Gallop had reduced her to serve the white woman's own rhetorical purpose.

This exchange, which is representative of the widespread guilt within white liberal feminist ideologies in the late-twentieth century, is rejected by black feminist critics bell hooks and Audre Lorde (among others), as an insufficient motivator to create interracial bonds between black and white women. According to Lorde, these affiliations refuse to "allow women of Color to step out of stereotypes," especially when such a rhetorical move might "threaten…the complacency of those women who view oppression only in terms of sex" (118). For Lorde, these kinds of interracial relationships cannot be trangressive, because they simply become "device[s] to protect ignorance" and rationalize political inaction (130). In addition, using guilt as a means to deny power differentials, in which many white feminists acknowledged complicity during the 1980s,

creates a mind-set, clear in Gallop and others, which often manifests as a dangerous idealization of their black female peers. Just as guilt becomes a substitute for creating change, "Idealization can engender political passivity … seeing an African American woman as the locus of female power absolves me from acting on my own power to help her in her struggles—in the struggle to combat racism, for example" (Wyatt 116).

In cases like Gallop's, idealization grows out of guilt over an acknowledgment of personal racial privilege and the resulting frustration. However, just like racism and racial guilt, idealization relies on the same oppositional ideologies to define black and white women. Wyatt points to the safety of white feminist idealizations of their black female counterparts in the context of relationship-building, claiming "idealization is paradoxical: at the same time that I identify with the other, taking in her image and making it part of myself, I also require her to be absolutely different" (115). This opposition, sustained through white guilt-turned-idealization, alleviates white responsibility for racial inequality by falsely aligning black women with political and personal power, thus reifying power differentials and condoning the continuation of objectifying and denigrating black women.

This denigration, as Wyatt points out, is almost always located on the physical body: "[T]he body often figures as the site of the ideal; even when it is the black woman's mental qualities or cultural authority that the white feminist in question admires, she tends to perceive those qualities in terms of the racialized body" (102). At a time when many contemporary feminists are in the process of actively rejecting a traditional ideology of white womanhood that suggests "femininity requires a general contraction of the body so that women can take up as little space as possible," white

idealizations of the black female body are imagined as a "liberating departure from the stifling conventions of femininity" (Wyatt 103). However, these white idealizations all too often rely on the stereotypical invocations of black female strength, while abstracting the racist social and material conditions that have historically cultivated cultural ideologies of the physical power of black women.[3] By effacing the socio-historical context of black female strength, the ideal of black female physical potency continues to promote an antithetical ideology that pits the brute power of black women's bodies against traditional notions of ideal white feminine beauty and physical vulnerability.

The binary between black female strength and white female frailty is continually strengthened by cultural definitions of ideal physical beauty or embodiment. For instance, white beauty is almost always constructed through raced definitions of oppositional physical characteristics between black and white women. Patricia Hill Collins writes that prevailing standards of beauty are still constructed via binary thinking about race, claiming that "Within binary thinking, White and Black women as collectives represent two opposing poles" and that the "blue-eyed, blond, thin White women could not be considered beautiful without the Other—Black women with African features of dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair" (89). Susan Bordo blames the contemporary use of these beauty standards on modern media's exacerbation of difference to describe ideal images of the female body. Bordo asserts that "the hegemony of white Anglo-Saxon standards …continually play[s] upon and perpetuate[s] consumers' feelings of inadequacy and insecurity over the racial characteristics of their bod[ies]" (263). She claims that the generalized message from the media is an insistence that women of color must straighten their hair and lighten their eyes and skin to be considered beautiful (263-

264). Griffin also cites the pain that “white supremacist and patriarchal discourses” have caused in black women’s self-understanding, consistently constructing their bodies as “abnormal, diseased, and ugly,” while defining their physicality as “extreme examples of otherness…evidenced by their color, their hair, their facial features, their buttocks and their genitals” (521).

Within a culture that continues to reduce women to their physical embodiment, both “beautiful” and “ugly” bodies are still defined and constructed along racial lines. This pervasive binary, which is built into cultural prescriptions of female selfhood, is also foundational to most literary depictions of both black and white female identity, becoming a part of contemporary literary patterns of cross-race appropriations. In particular, white women writers have made the white appropriation of stereotypical black female psychic and physical strength to quell contemporary feelings of feminine frailty and racial ignorance a common literary devise. In turn, both black and white writers create black protagonists, who react to their perceived embodied failures—dark eyes, dark skin, kinky hair—through the idealization and yearning for the acquisition of culturally desired Anglo-Saxon characteristics—blue eyes, light skin, and blonde hair. These above examples not only represent the continuing theme of cross-racial idealization in contemporary literature, but also highlight idealizing transferences between black and white women as almost always written on the body. This phenomenon is a part of both the reduction of all women to the specularized female body and the demand, which follows this reduction, that women pay rigorous and constant attention to the containment, control, and coherence of their bodies. Bound by these strictures, and in conjunction with culturally and historically specific racial guilt and embodiment ideals,

women often see race as part of their body's "disabled function," and seek to assimilate "the seemingly coherent bodily image of the other" in order to possess the cultural authority that achieving this "ideal" promises (Wyatt 104-105). This chapter begins at this intersection in contemporary U.S. women's novels, in which the repetition of antithetical racial language meets both current antiracist cultural standards of liberal feminist guilt and prevailing notions of ideal embodiment, together cementing narrative bonds or transferences of physical idealization across racial lines.

Self-psychology's idealization, as it functions in this chapter, is most importantly about supplying a language for a pattern of embodied misrecognition that occurs in the novels. Idealizing bodies across race requires a subject to falsely imagine and identify with a racial other, who is seen *not* as another subject, but as a static ideal. The body selected for idealization is chosen based on the belief that it possesses qualities that are culturally valued. These ideals are always inflected through the lens of the social—on markers that assign different value to various gendered, raced, sexed, and regionalized stereotypes: "idealization does not take place in some isolated psychic space...rather, the objects chosen for idealization are 'already framed in a broader sociality'" (Wyatt 99-100). Through idealizing identifications, the subject imagines a merger with the idealized self-object—in this case, the self-object is a particular characteristic of a body that is racially "other"—allowing the temporary transference and possession of socially valued ideals that she believes she lacks. The danger of idealizing identifications, such as Gallop's, is that they "tend to obstruct a perception of the other as the center of her own complex reality—as, in a word, a subject (Wyatt 87). Indeed, idealized transferences are meant to quell one's own fears about being both "fragmentary and inconsistent," so they

require an identification with a self-object who is seen as "a seamless whole," as part of what Wyatt calls the "rigid structure" of ideals (89). This desire for merger with an "all-powerful being" (Kegan Gardiner 169) is only frustrated when one is forced to see the subjectivity of the self-object, when s/he ceases to be an ideal and becomes equally human. However, in many novels that feature cross-racial bonds between women, long-standing physical stereotypes of a racist binary often allow protagonists to remain blind and deaf to human subjectivity across lines of race, never engaging beyond the superficial physicality of embodied ideal and anti-ideal.

Because idealization is founded on personal efforts to alleviate a perceived lack, and because contemporary women novelists often depict cross-racial friendships that ameliorate such physical inadequacies, the transition from physical lack to idealized appropriation across lines of race seems a predictable next step. However, despite their predictability, these imaginative acquisitions do very real bodily damage. Although all women must negotiate culturally-defined abject female bodily energies—menstruation, breast milk, afterbirth—the idealized object is "not allowed" to have these functions, as she is not seen as a human subject. In turn, her physical individuality is often imaginatively misrecognized, erased, or acquired to combat the constant threat these abject energies and flows pose to female bodily integrity. This idealization not only contributes to the denial of the idealized woman's humanity, but idealization across racial lines also fails to acknowledge the abject embodied similarities between black and white women—similarities that have the potential to break down absolute oppositions in any binary structure. By acknowledging the identical abject energies of the racialized other, it becomes both impossible to deny her the subjectivity, which is effaced through

idealization, and to continue to adhere to the ideology that insists on the antithetical construction of black/white female identity. As no language currently exists to describe the appropriation of body parts across race, this chapter adapts the self-psychological language of the idealizing transference to describe both the embodied idealization and the reductive misrecognition that occur in contemporary writers' depictions of interracial female friendships. This chapter ultimately highlights cross-racial idealizations as an impediment to both friendships and feminisms that fail to acknowledge the abject's potential to create bonds that crisscross lines of race.

This recurring thematic of rhetorical segregation and idealized embodied identification in the novels of this genre is prompted by what Yeager calls "the problem of repetition, or stutterance—of literature that keeps recycling the same themes in increasingly violent and macabre settings" (40). The next section analyzes Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, and Ellen Douglas's *Can't Quit You Baby*, which are enmeshed in the violent tradition of racial idealization and the imagined acquisition of body parts of a racial other. However, even as Morrison and Douglas depict cross-race idealization in their narrative attempts to speak across the racial divide of the 1940s and 1960s respectively, each author ultimately rejects the racist paradigm that informs the physical bonds of cross-racial bodily appropriation. Instead, both Morrison and Douglas highlight women's bodily energies and flows, which function identically across race, to define and equalize black and white embodiment outside of restrictive racist binaries.

The two novels are first analyzed separately, respecting each text as a unity written in a specific historical location and conveying a particular protagonist's evolution. However, each novel also follows the same general pattern, in which protagonists form

bonds of idealization across race in an effort to control a body that both the surrounding culture, and the protagonists themselves, have deemed defective or inferior. By detailing each protagonist's internalization of race-based bodily inferiority, which then leads to the idealization and imagined acquisition of body parts across lines of race in order to personally control a perceived physical lack, this chapter establishes Morrison and Douglas's novels within a literary tradition of cross-race embodied idealization. This tradition, which highlights friendships that encourage the continuation of white feminist guilt and black rancor into twenty-first century women's literature, also produces failed cross-race mergers for Morrison's Pecola Breedlove and Douglas's Cornelia O'Kelley. However, despite their novels' participation in a tradition of failed embodied mergers built on antithetical racial stereotypes, both Morrison and Douglas ultimately change this narrative tradition through protagonists' acknowledgement of anger and abjection across race. Instead of continuing a literary tradition that promotes absolute and insurmountable racial difference, Morrison and Douglas use the functionality of the female body as a middle ground—suggesting a new space of female affiliation based on abject embodied mergers and shared bodily processes outside of idealizations based on opposition.

B. *The Bluest Eye*

In the foreword to *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison discloses that in writing the novel she was not interested in exploring the fleeting feelings of personal rejection common to the lives of most men and women, but instead in "the far more tragic and disabling consequences of accepting rejection as legitimate, as self-evident" (ix). In the novel itself, Morrison constructs a material representation of this kind of internalized rejection, as she details the failed *bildingsroman* of Pecola Breedlove, an impoverished

black girl who is stunted in adolescence by racialized inscriptions of bodily self-loathing and communal shame. In Pecola's narrow existence, which begins and ends in the small town of Loraine, Ohio, the girl comes of age by gradually internalizing an understanding of her body as the "ugly" and abject antithesis to white physical beauty—the beauty that is valued by her family, by the surrounding black community, and by the inescapable images of 1940s commercial culture. As the youngest and darkest member of the Breedlove clan, one of the most emotionally and financially destitute black families in Lorraine, Pecola's body becomes a repository for her entire community's racialized shame. This heavy burden of felt unsightliness transforms Pecola's body into a personal purveyor of humiliation, a body the girl only understands through a series of what she interprets as physical betrayals—an appearance that creates visceral reactions of disgust from her family, classmates, and other townspeople; body parts and fluids that exceed the bounds of individual embodied integrity or refuse to disappear on her command; and an unwanted embodied sexuality that she wrongly blames for inciting her father's rape.

Although, Pecola consistently makes efforts to erase, control, or transform her body to better meet the cultural standards that deny her communal acceptance, no disappearance, merger, or interpolation of body parts can undo the racial binary that separates her black body from cultural understandings of beauty. In a final attempt to control her body through the acquisition of white beauty, Pecola wishes for and believes she has attained the blue eyes of child icon Shirley Temple. However, because this imagined miscegenation with whiteness is founded on an oversimplified, culturally-constructed opposition, which underscores Pecola's own body as ugly, wrong, and dirty in contrast to Temple's body, as that which is beautiful and ideal, the imagined merger

does not create the beauty the young black girl desires. Her idealized acquisition does not produce a stable synthesis of black and white female bodies, but instead demonstrates the impossibility of a subject that is, even imaginatively, allowed to transgress these culturally defined and maintained racial borders of beauty. Instead, in the town of Lorraine, Pecola's dark skin coupled with her imagined blue eyes rob her of subjectivity and function as a testimony to the real physical violence that results from rhetorical and cultural racial segregation, "a figure that registers the body's social contamination and becomes itself a contaminant" (Yaeger 235).

However, long before readers are privy to the self-destructive nature of Pecola's communally inflicted madness, they are forewarned by what Bordo terms the "pedagogy of defect," which plagues all of the townspeople in Loraine. Bordo defines the "pedagogy of defect" as a paralyzing sense of bodily self-contempt, common to most twentieth-century women who have been subjected to unattainable cultural and media-motivated beauty standards. Like many contemporary women, Pecola comes to see her body as defective and intolerable in comparison to surrounding cultural and commercial images of beauty, a "repellent [and] unacceptable" physical form in an "image-saturated" environment of embodied perfection (37, 3). For Pecola, however, this bodily disgust is compounded by a hegemonic discourse tainted with 1940s racial bigotry, which demands that she and all other black members of the small Lorraine community see their race as the cause for their status as abject subjects in a larger cultural context. This racial abjection, which requires "sustained and persistent exposure to disempowerment and denial of their autonomy" creates an entire community that "internalize[s] a uniquely pernicious psychological system of self-loathing and insecurity" (Hwangbo 22).

Although Pecola's community only contains a freckling of white faces, J. Brooks Bouson emphasizes how feelings of being racially abject function even within all-black communities. He explains that racially-motivated self-loathing pathologies often manifest as communal color complexes or as "intraracial color prejudice and discrimination" between community members of the same race (53). bell hooks affirms this assertion in *Outlaw Culture*, explaining that frequently in black communities of the 1940s and 50s, before the "black is beautiful" movement began to change thinking about race, having light skin meant living life "with an advantage recognized by everyone," and, in turn, having dark skin meant living "handicapped, with a serious disadvantage" (174). Indeed, within the parameters of Morrison's mostly black community, in which skin color is "the constant source of internalized self-contempt," dominant-culture discourses, incorporated into individual psyches and into a communal sense of worthlessness, force community members to perpetuate "the very system that oppresses them" in order to achieve even a curtailed sense of self-worth (Hwangbo 23, 28).

Employing cultural stigmas like dark skin, lack of hygiene, and sexual impropriety, members of the community protect their own sense of self-worth by projecting their racial shame onto the town's most vulnerable member, Pecola Breedlove: "All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed" (Morrison 205).[4] In turn, Pecola's internal acceptance of the worthlessness of her dark skin, dark eyes, soiled body, and destitute family make her the antithesis, the ultimate other, to the white standards of beauty toward which all members of the town of Lorraine desperately strive. Bouson highlights the young black girl's precarious position within the community, asserting that "because the standard of beauty—that is, the idealized version of the black

self—is based on whiteness, the Pecolas…of the world cannot help but feel a deep shame about the body and the self" (58). Pecola's abject status—reinforced not only by her immediate family, but by her peers at school, by their parents and other townspeople, by the lone white shopkeeper in Lorraine, and by the commercial images that inundate her daily life—motivates her to spend "long hours…looking into the mirror, trying to discover the secret of her ugliness that ma[kes] her ignored or despised" (45). However, because she has completely internalized the community's contempt for her dark body, the mirror offers Pecola no relief from a sense of self-shame. Because of the girl's deep conviction of her own ugliness, for which support is offered from "every billboard, every movie, every glance," Morrison makes it clear that Pecola's body has only ever inspired humiliation and inadequacy, creating the girl's perception of her corporeality as a thing that must be erased or drastically altered (39).

As Morrison charts Pecola's evolution from childhood into adolescence, the author simultaneously maps the concentric circles of shaming that prevent the girl's successful entrance into adulthood and incites her desperate desire to merge with the powerful protection of Shirley Temple's blue eyes. The earliest and most intimate shaming Pecola suffers occurs within the Breedlove family circle, specifically by her mother's own displaced self-hatred. Pauline Breedlove begins her personal idealization of white beauty when she starts to frequent the town's local theater as a young adult. Once in the dark, alone with the silver screen, Pauline expresses her mixed emotions in watching the white stars: "Them pictures gave me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard" (123). After her movie star education, she can no longer look at her own black face, or the black faces around her, without assigning them "some category in the

scale of absolute beauty" (122). Consequently, Pauline "collect[s] self-contempt by the heap" and loses her sense of a selfhood apart from idealizing the white faces she sees projected onto the big screen (122).

In order to preserve this imagined culturally valued self, Pauline spends much of her free time trying to displace her blackness by emulating white actresses she admires, setting out to fix her hair just like Jean Harlow, "a part on the side, with one little curl" (123). Pauline's disgust with her family's appearances, and her denial of her own similar appearance, emphasizes the extent to which she has imaginatively come to embody popular 1940s cinematic white personas. The images' transformative powers allow Pauline to temporarily forget her own black body, instead becoming "a perfect personification of white beauty while she immerses herself in the movies and identifies herself with the images she sees" (Hwangbo 43). Pauline continues to use this kind of imagined delusion to align herself with the social status whiteness provides while she is employed in an affluent white family's home. Amidst the "stacks of white pillow slips," the shiny white porcelain bathtub, and the pinky-white skin of the family's youngest daughter, Pauline "put[s] all of the pieces together, mak[ing] coherence where there had been none" (126).

Her new coherent self-perception as the white family's matriarch, who wields power as a negotiator of perfection and cleanliness, allows her to forget the "frustrating reality of being born black, poor, and ugly" (Hwangbo 41). Ultimately, Pauline manages to thrive in this white household by segregating her black life from her preferred, imagined white one. Part of the success of this compartmentalization depends on Pauline's displaced self-loathing, for which her daughter becomes the repository. Pauline

is the first to teach Pecola that her body is abject and unwanted waste, saying of her daughter, “I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly” (124). By distancing her own appearance from Pecola’s, the woman makes her daughter the abject part of herself, “what must be expelled or repressed by the subject in order to attain identity and a place within the symbolic” (Grosz 88-89). In displacing her own feelings of black physical inadequacy onto Pecola, Pauline is freed to embrace her imagined white-identified existence.

Pecola’s mother, however, is not the only one who uses her daughter as the site for the inscription of her own abject, defiling elements in order to gain temporary release from the daily physical and cultural devaluations of blackness. Because the abject always exists on the boundaries of one’s subjectivity, carrying with it the reality of the “impossibility of clear-cut borders…between the clean and the unclean, the proper and the improper, order and disorder” (Grosz 89), many in the Loraine community practice the denial and suppression of themselves as cultural abject by displacing these perceived faults onto Pecola’s body. This transfer of racialized denigration occurs most pointedly when the boys at Pecola’s school taunt her with cruel chants about the darkness of her skin and the impropriety of her relationship with her father—both embodied “afflictions” over which the young girl has no control. Morrison highlights the boys’ chant: “Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked,” as a result of the adolescents’ “contempt for their own blackness…[T]hey seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it up into a fiery cone of scorn” (65). This same self-contempt encourages the “peals of laughter” in the hallways of Pecola’s primary school when her fellow classmates insult

boys their age by mockingly implying that they have crushes on Pecola Breedlove (46). This hatred for what Pecola stands for is not only limited to students; the revulsion and disgust directed toward her body is issued "by teachers and classmates alike" (45). Ultimately, their mocking laughter and their cruel gazes provide Pecola's classmates and teachers' temporary freedom from their own cultural position as abject, as the most vulnerable member of the community becomes the ultimate other, a talisman of security to their own embodied self-value.

The daily harassment Pecola suffers is brought to a temporary halt, however, when Maureen Peal, a "high yellow dream child" with "sloe green eyes," demands that the boys stop their hateful chants. In this moment the town's color complex is laid bare, as the black boys' "budding male instincts" impel them to quickly end their taunts under Maureen's "watchful gaze" (62). At school and around town, the mulatto girl's long hair, green eyes, light skin, and expensive clothes grant her the encouraging smiles of teachers, the kindness of white boys, and the genuflecting of black girls who always, without even thinking, allow her to use the sink and toilet first. Because of her almost white status within the schoolyard community, Maureen's brief kindness to Pecola seems to offer the black girl some hope of relief from the constant cruelty her body evokes.

Pecola's subsequent idealization of both Maureen and the friendship that she temporarily offers happens without any critical consideration of what the green-eyed girl's motivations might be. This blind conflation of friendship and idealization acts as a precursor to Pecola's future relationships, when the girl's desperate attempts for love and embodied acceptance lead her to embrace the promise of white commercial images and their assigned cultural value without question. Indeed, just as quickly as Maureen slips

"her velvet-sleeved arm through Pecola's and beg[ins] to behave as they were the closest of friends," the rich girl turns on her impoverished peer and aligns herself with the boys' cruel insults. As she runs from Pecola, she screams "'I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute!" (73). In this cruel exchange, Bouson blames the "white, racist standard of beauty…a standard that favors the 'high-yellow' Maureen Peal and denigrates the 'black and ugly' Pecola Breedlove," for the power that the young girl wields over her peers (58). Morrison also highlights the danger in Maureen's schoolyard power, calling it the "*Thing* to fear…the *Thing* that made her beautiful" (74).

This same "*Thing"* that labels Pecola abject in comparison to individuals in her community, who can then align themselves more closely to the cultural value whiteness promises, only intensifies as she circles farther and farther away from her home. The severity of Pecola's abject status becomes poignantly clear when she enters the home of Geraldine without the explicit invitation of the middle-class black matriarch. Geraldine, a "sugar-brown" woman with "patience, good manners and high morals" sees Pecola's presence in her house as a threat to the clean and proper order she continuously establishes and re-establishes to separate herself from the impoverished people she lives alongside (82-83). Geraldine insists that this border must be drawn as "the line between colored and nigger was not always clear; subtle and telltale signs threatened to erode it, and watch had to be constant" (87). In response to this perceived threat, Geraldine has dedicated her life to ridding her body of the "funkiness" that threatens the borders of polite black identity. Consequently, she lashes out when she finds a dirty and disheveled Pecola in her home:

> She looked at Pecola. Saw the dirty torn dress, the plaits sticking out of her head, hair matter where the plaits had come undone, the muddy shoes with the wad of gum peeping out from between the cheap soles, the soiled socks, one of which had been walked down the heel of the shoe. She saw the safety pin holding the hem of her dress up…She had seen this little girl all of her life…Hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt…The end of the world lay in their eyes, and the beginning, and all the waste in between. They were everywhere. They slept six in a bed, all their pee mixing together in the night as they wet their bed each in h[er] own candy-and-potato-chip dream. (92-93)

Like Pauline Breedlove, Geraldine separates herself from Pecola, and all of the dirt-ridden black girls she represents, when the woman delineates the impeccable cleanliness of her home and her own current appearance from the "nasty little black bitch" that now exists in her direct line of vision (92). By expelling Pecola from her home with a firm "Get out," Geraldine once again draws borders around herself as a subject by refusing to see Pecola as anything other than a collection of the abject defiling elements—the filth of soiled socks, the grime of chewed gum, and the disgust of urine-soaked sheets—that make up the imagined unhygienic black identity she rejects (92).

However, even though Pecola's presence in the black community is only registered through her "othered" opposition to those who are already racially abject, the few white community members she encounters barely register her existence at all. When Pecola finally builds the courage to buy candy from the convenience store in town, the white store owner, Mr. Yacobowski, "does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see" (48). Although the girl is first taken aback by the void in the man's gaze in place

of the contempt or disgust she is used to, she soon realizes that Mr. Yacobowski's hollow glance is something worse than displeasure; it is "the total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness…She has seen it lurking in the eyes of all white people. So. The distaste must be for her, her blackness" (49). Once outside the store, Pecola takes in the man's reaction and "feels…inexplicable shame ebb" (50). At this moment, she realizes that worse than ridicule is the complete erasure of her embodied self by dominant culture. Pecola resides in a place so far from white standards of beauty that she is not even registered as human by the white shopkeeper. For Mr. Yacabowski, Pecola's body is simply defined through lack: "her body bespeaks the absence of traditionally defined beauty...She has no beautiful body and thus becomes nobody—nothing to see" (Mermann-Jozwiak 194). In a culture that ties all women's subjectivity to their physical beauty and defines only white bodies as beautiful, Mr. Yacabowski's vacuous stare confirms for Pecola that dominant culture sees her body as completely other, an anti-ideal, a void, a non-subject.

This shame, although brought on by a slightly different reaction to her body, becomes more familiar to Pecola with every social encounter, and it is ultimately internalized and embodied by the girl as an accurate account of herself. She understands her body as a physical form that provokes either revulsion or does not even register as human—as in the faint embers of distaste in Mr. Yacabowski's blank stare. The overwhelming weight of this shame plagues Pecola's brown eyes constantly, as they glance at the billboards of Jean Harlow and Shirley Temple, as they stare at the candy wrappers featuring a blue-eyed Mary Jane, and as they read about the safe and happy home of Dick and Jane in school primers. In every social context, real or imagined,

others are looking down on Pecola's body with a condemnatory or contemptuous view. These cultural and commercial judgmental gazes concentrically encircle Pecola's existence and provide her with one clear message as she enters adolescence: her body is "inferior, bad, inadequate and flawed" (Gilbert 5).

Because Pecola knows of no other way to escape her ugliness, the only coping mechanism she has to avoid the shame evoked from her own embodied inferiority is to hide herself from the ideal images and encounters that bring on this humiliation. In order to evade communal gazes of contempt and revulsion, Pecola sets out to discipline her body into temporary, but complete, disappearance on her command:

> She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was the hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. (45)

Amidst communal and commercial reminders that her body is inferior, Pecola's efforts toward disappearance become efforts to regain a sense of personal worth by completely separating her sense of self from a body that she believes to be irreparable. Eventually, Pecola decides that the erasure of her actual, physical body might provide her with at least a temporary reprieve from an understanding of herself as other. Hwangbo affirms this assertion, claiming that "invisibility becomes a mask protecting the shamed person from further harm caused by the vicious and threatening gaze" (53). Ultimately,

however, complete bodily erasure eludes Pecola's control, as she can never fully make her eyes disappear and thus avoid visually absorbing the constant looks of disgust directed toward her body.

Her failure to achieve complete invisibility leads the child to instead imagine drastic alterations to her body in order to escape the menacing glances her eyes are forced to take in: "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (46). Because Pecola has come to idealize blue eyes—associating her attainment of them with the achievement of white beauty and cultural value—and because her brief comradeship with Maureen Peale has taught her that alignment through friendship is not enough to provide her with the self-worth she seeks, the girl sets out to physically transform herself. As Pecola's personal ambivalence about her body stems from a profound "anxiety about not measuring up to an ideal," she thinks attaining the physical characteristics of the ideal will grant her the love and safety she currently lacks (Mermann-Jozwiak 191). Pecola's efforts toward embodied alteration occur when she first tries to orally ingest the iconic blue eyes and creamy white skin of popular white child icons by drinking quarts and quarts of the MacTeer family's milk in a Shirley Temple cup. When these efforts are thwarted by Mrs. MacTeer's refusal to supply what she sees as a greedy child with more milk, Pecola saves what little money she earns to purchase Mary Jane candies. Once she purchases the candy, her ingestion of each piece becomes a practice of ritualized idealization:

> Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes

> looking at her out of a world of clean comfort…She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane. (50)

Although Pecola repeatedly tries to alleviate the anxiety of her appearance through training her body to change drastically or disappear altogether, she ultimately realizes that no matter how much milk she drinks or candy she eats, her sense of self will always be tethered to a body that is culturally other.

This inescapable entanglement with her corporeal form, which she perceives as without value and out of her control, forces Pecola to understand the most natural female bodily functions as traumatic embodied betrayals that she thinks eventually elicit her father's incestuous advances. For instance, Pecola's menarche, both unwanted and without warning, occurs while the girl is sitting on the MacTeer family's stoop, with their two daughters, Claudia and Frieda. After she sees blood, the only reaction Pecola can muster is one of sheer horror, as she "bolted straight up, her eyes wide with terror. A whinnying sound came from her mouth…Blood was running down her legs. Some drops were on the steps. A brownish-red stain discolored the back of her dress" (207). Although Frieda tries to soothe an obviously distraught Pecola, explaining that a woman's period is a natural occurrence, the girl will not hear the explanation and keeps crying out in horror "with her legs far apart" (27). Although Grosz notes that it is often at the moment of menarche when most girls feel "the greatest discord between the body image and the lived body, between its physical idealized self-image and its bodily changes" (*Volatile,* Grosz 75), for Pecola, this discord is compounded by the fact that she already feels completely out of sync with a dark-skinned body that has denied her the

safety and love that a lighter complexion promises. Because her "physical idealized self-image" has always been a racial impossibility, this moment of disconnection between reality and ideal is not simply read as an acute trauma, but as an affirmation of her own body as both abject and out of her control.

As Pecola has always understood her body as a social pollutant—a physical intruder that protrudes, leaks, and inspires revulsion or indecipherability—this newest bodily betrayal only heightens her shame over what she believes to be her uncontrollable physical inadequacy. After all, her first menstruation occurs in public and without warning, immediately inciting a young white onlooker to accuse Pecola of being "nasty" (30). Although Frieda and Claudia condemn the white girl for her comment, they too seem to think that this blood is dirty, rushing to bury Pecola's soiled panties and washing her body so that their mother will not find out. This situation of chaos and panic only intensifies what Grosz underscores as a traumatic experience for all adolescent girls: "for the girl, menstruation, associated as it is with blood, with injury and wound, with a mess that does not dry invisibly, that leaks, uncontrollable, not in sleep, in dreams, but whenever it occurs, indicates…an out-of-control status" (205).

Morrison concretizes Grosz's claims, pointing to a feeling of uncontrollability that specifically parallels one's entrance into black womanhood, explaining that Pecola, and all black women who undergo the onset of puberty, must heighten their attempts to discipline their bodies to fit within white standards of feminine beauty: "They hold their behind in for fear of a sway too free; when they wear lipstick they never cover the entire mouth for fear of lips too thick, and they worry, worry, worry about the edges of their hair" (38-39). For Pecola, this pubescent fear amplifies an already present anxiety about

her inability to control the "edges" of her body. Just as her eyes refuse to fade into invisibility, just as her chewed gum insists on peeping out of the toe of her shoe, and just as her dirty hair refuses to remain neatly within the plaits on her head, the leaky blood of her period becomes yet another border, or edge, which Pecola Breedlove's body fails to respect. This ultimate lack of control separates Pecola from the other women of Lorraine, who, in her eyes, appear to more successfully manage their bodies, reaffirming the girl's place in the community as an abject social contaminant.

Despite continued frustration over a body that refuses to respect its borders, disappear, or positively change its contours, Pecola's efforts toward healing her racial "affliction" do not tire as she enters adolescence. Instead, her entrance into puberty causes her to increase her efforts toward physical alteration, especially after she blames her new body for inciting the rape of her father, Cholly Breedlove. Cholly's own embodied shame is derived from an incident in the woods, in which he was forced to have sex with his teenage girlfriend in front of a pair of white hunters. Not only does this incident rob Cholly of the masculine control associated with the sex act, but as Mermann-Jozwiak points out, it constructs the man's perception of his body "as dysfunctional and in need of control" (197). Cholly Breedlove reasserts this lost sense of embodied control by raping his only daughter. After he molests and impregnates Pecola, forever changing the contours of her body, he can again regain control of his own embodied integrity by literally displacing his fears about his abject body into the repository of his daughter's womb.

Although Laurie Nardone contends that "Pecola thinks she can control everything but her eyes" (36), the girl's sexual encounters with her father prove otherwise. Cholly's

rape becomes the final frustrating blow that forces Pecola to take drastic action to forever change the physical characteristics that have caused her so much shame. Just as the girl catalogues her body's failure to disappear or to control its leaks and flows as embodied betrayals, Pecola's inability to prevent the sexual advances of her father are internalized as further affirmations of her physical inadequacy. In order to rid her body of its defiling elements—a body that is beginning to again betray the girl by showing the first swells of pregnancy—Pecola seeks help from a spiritualist who has a similar disgust for black corporeality: "[Soaphead] abhorred flesh…Body odor, breath odor…the sight of dried matter in the corner of the eye, decayed or missing teeth, ear wax, blackheads, moles, blisters, skin crusts—all natural excretions and protections the body was capable of—disquieted him" (166). Although Soaphead is unaware that Pecola has been raped by her father, he too, like the surrounding community, considers the "ugliness" of her dark skin and disheveled appearance as impediments to achieving the clean and proper elements of a beautiful body. Consequently, Soaphead promises to fulfill Pecola's request for blue eyes, as he sees it as an honorable desire for beauty and cleanliness—a request that if granted will remove the young girl from "the pit of her blackness" in which she is currently isolated (174).

As whiteness is the only thing that is assigned cultural value in Pecola's community, the girl's idealized desire for blue eyes—physical symbols of embodied cultural value based on the beauty, power, and safety they have come to represent—is a logical step toward self-preservation. Indeed, under what Gardiner deems completely normal development conditions, most children form idealizing transferences or imagined mergers with figures who possess cultural power "in order to participate in

[their]…strengths and ideals" (169). For Pecola Breedlove, who exists within a 1940s U.S. culture in which each member of her black community is devalued based on the physical markers of race, and in which "the idealized version of the black self" (Bouson 58) is based on whiteness, idealized body transferences revolve around ideals of blond-haired, blued-eyed white feminine beauty. For Pecola, just like her mother, the "strengths and ideals" of an entire culture are wrapped up in her ability to physically emulate the beauty of white children her age, who appear well-dressed, clean, and perfect. This skewed misunderstanding, based on oppositional values assigned to white identity, as that which is "seamless," "self-complete,…[and]self-possessed" (Wyatt 88), in contrast to her own embodied identity, as that which is fragmented, out of control, and a repository for racialized shame, motivates Pecola to knock on Soaphead's door. Wyatt makes plain the necessity of Pecola's one-dimensional culturally and commercially informed understanding of white bodies as seamless wholes, as idealization relies on an imagined image of the other as "the empty form of the body—the form that makes mirror-style assimilation possible" (89). Indeed, because Pecola knows nothing about the personal lives of Mary Jane or Shirley Temple, their blue eyes alone become the promises of cultural worth that the girl desires to incorporate into her own corporeality. Because Pecola experiences her body as physically defective, this idealized acquisition promises her the subjectivity that she has always been denied.

However, Anne Anlin Cheng points to the futility of Pecola's desire for these blue eyes, as the logic of idealization is built upon a racial binary that must have an inverse or anti-ideal to make the ideal function: "The dreams of sovereignty and virtue…the fulfillment of social health, eloquence, and compassion…are realized through the alibi of

the other, the negative image" (201). In the town of Lorraine, white beauty is only visible through the racial abjection of blackness; in turn, black members of the community are only made beautiful by abjecting the blackest and most vulnerable member. Thus, these relationships of idealization must be built on an absolute binary between black and white. Using this logic, Pecola's acquisition of blue eyes is impossible, as it would dissolve the racial binary and, with it, the initial desire for blue eyes. Granting Pecola blue eyes would blur the distinct lines between beautiful and ugly, white and black, and ultimately, "would spell the demise of the white-identified and slimmed-down model self-image" (Wyatt 95).

The unshakeable resilience of this absolute binary is all too clear as Pecola leaves Soaphead's house, believing that her eyes are now a beautiful shade of bright blue. Predictably, this imagined merger does not grant her the beauty and communal acceptance she seeks. As the novel closes on Pecola's narrative, readers are presented with a girl whose sense of her body is so outwardly determined that she has finally gone mad, creating an alter ego to constantly reaffirm her belief in her new Shirley Temple blue eyes: "They are bluer, aren't they? *Oh yes. Much bluer*" (197). Pecola's schizophrenic creation of a second self is a result of the twentieth century cultural power placed on the personal appearance of the female body. Because she only knows an embodied self that is constructed by the cultural and commercial images she constantly fails to live up to, she must create an other to provide the outside perception through which she can recognize herself as valuable. The creation of this alter ego, which Pecola uses to affirm her imagined beauty, protects her from a community that sees her madness as exacerbating her abject status. Now, she is not only labeled non-human by the white

shopkeeper; instead, the entire community begins to see Pecola's body as bestial and out of control: "Elbows bent, hands on shoulders, she flailed her arms like a bird in an external, grotesquely futile effort to fly" (204). The community has no desire to humor Pecola's imagined acquisition, as seeing the black girl as anything other than grotesque and abject would require them to reassess how they understand their own cultural value through comparison to Pecola's ugliness:

> All of us—all who knew her—felt so wholesome after we cleaned ourselves on her. We were so beautiful when we stood astride her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her guilt sanctified us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor. Her inarticulateness made us believe we were eloquent. Her poverty kept us generous…and she let us, and thereby deserved our contempt. We honed our egos on her, padded our characters with her frailty, and yawned in the fantasy of our strength (205).

Morrison's novel concludes with the image of a girl given over to madness, digging through dumpsters on the edge of town. Ultimately, the racial wounds projected onto Pecola "assassinate" her sense of self, finally reducing her existence to the hollow physical embodiment of the grotesque "stain of blackness" or anti-ideal (206, Bouson 64). Pecola, no longer obsessed with maintaining the integrity of her own body's "edges," now exists even beyond the borders of the community's definition of human subjectivity. By making it impossible for Pecola to integrate either version of her real or imagined embodiment into a tenable sense of selfhood, the adolescent eventually succumbs to the split between mind and body that has always maintained her sanity. Her idealization and imagined cross-racial acquisition leads to a madness that renders Pecola silent; she has

become her body—a physical testimony to racial shame, a non-subject, a void, a "nobody—nothing to see" (Mermann-Jozwiak 194). In Pecola's place is a hollow body that bears physical witness to a racist binary that prevents synthesis between Pecola's black body and the cultural value of whiteness, to a life that is subsumed under the false promises of idealized whiteness, and to a town that is unmoved to interrogate their own culpability in perpetuating stereotypes detrimental to both individuals and the community. If criticism solely focuses on Pecola's failed idealization, Morrison's novel ends in a stuttering tone of hopelessly resilient racial divisions and missed opportunity.

C. *Can't Quit You Baby*

Almost twenty years after Morrison's literary portrayal of a rigid racial binary that makes Pecola Breedlove's dark body an object of interracial scorn and a 1940s cultural symbol of defective embodiment, Ellen Douglas tells a similar story about racial divisions that manifest themselves through physical inadequacy and cross-race idealization. Despite differences in the age, race, and class of their individual protagonists, both authors detail the pernicious embodied effects of self-construction that relies on a racist binary, in which black and white women are "cast as antagonists in the patriarchal drama" (Rich 201). While *The Bluest Eye* describes a racist pedagogy of defect that catalogues raced characteristics of one's body as ugly or defective in comparison to a white (read "non-raced") ideal, *Can't Quit You Baby* portrays the same racist pedagogy by grafting feelings of defective embodiment onto a white female body through the intellectual and physical restraints of white racial privilege and guilt. Although Pecola's desire for whiteness is directly informed by a coming-of-age that

teaches her to understand her dark body as a purveyor of shame, Douglas's white protagonist, Cornelia, must first exchange a traditional racist Southern ideology for a more contemporary sense of feminist racial guilt before she can begin to understand her own body as shameful or abject. Only after Cornelia makes the transition from racism to racial guilt does she idealize the black female body as "a liberating departure from the stifling conventions of [white] femininity" (Wyatt 103). As a result, just as Pecola's imagined blue eyes become a visible symbol for an entire black community's racial shame in the 1940s, Cornelia O'Kelley's middle-aged *bildungsroman* transforms her deaf white ears into auditory registers for contemporary feminist guilt over a region's shared racist past.

Although *Can't Quit You Baby* depicts a 1960s relationship between two Mississippi women, one black and one white, which precedes the neoliberal white feminist guilt that resulted from 1980s criticisms of mainstream feminist ideology by women of color, Douglas is still able to convey the latter, more contemporary viewpoint in her novel through the use of metafiction.[5] By creating a present-day narrative voice, who speaks directly to readers about her concerns regarding the complexities of portraying a cross-racial friendship between Cornelia, an affluent, deaf white woman and Julia, her working-class black housekeeper, Douglas compounds the racial tension of the 1960s with a narrative strand of contemporary white feminist guilt.[6] Indeed, as the novel charts the limited friendship between Julia (or Tweet, as she is familiarly called) and Cornelia, whose daily interactions are mediated through an unwavering racist ideology of traditional white Southern womanhood, the contemporary narrator simultaneously

catalogues how this resistant racist binary contributes to the corrupt self-construction and broken embodiment of her white protagonist.

However, as the novel details the tragedy that spurs Cornelia's evolution from conservative Southern womanhood to a more liberal-minded self-discovery, the once clear temporal and ideological separation between the narrator and her white protagonist falters. As Cornelia rejects the overt racism that she once used to define herself in opposition to Tweet, and instead aligns herself with the narrator's sense of contemporary white racial guilt, the 1960s housewife believes that she has transcended the Southern legacy that has kept her separate from her black housekeeper. Instead, Cornelia's new sense of racial guilt masks a continuing racist ideology. This new covert racism allows Cornelia to heal her own white body, broken by a regional ideology that spurs her husband's death and encourages her family's betrayal, through the temporary idealization and appropriation of the stereotypical physical features of Tweet's embodiment. By taking the stereotypical physical potency she imagines her housekeeper possesses as a black woman, Cornelia refashions herself as an independent progressive white woman against a Civil Rights backdrop. Yet, as the novel closes, Cornelia's salvation is paralleled by both the narrator's unresolved guilty conscience and Tweet's physical deterioration, detailing the persistence of a stubborn racial binary and the real embodied damage that results from even imagined bodily idealization and appropriation across racial lines.

Douglas, like Morrison, uses the opening pages of her novel to set up scripts of antithetical racial difference—scripts Monteith refers to as both "knowable and exacting" (113). The familiarity of these racial oppositions becomes apparent, as the narrator

agonizes over the most politically appropriate words to describe Tweet and Cornelia's relationship. Considering a series of culturally loaded oppositions—"black, white"; "servant, Mistress"; "last, first"; "poverty, wealth"; "security, deprivation"; "back, front,"—she finally decides that the least offensive way to describe the women's relationship is to say that it is one of housekeeper and employer (Douglas 4-5). [7] After generating this list of possibilities, the narrator immediately claims that both Cornelia and Tweet "would be uneasy with these words" (5). However, the real uneasiness seems to come from the narrator herself, as she confesses to readers that she is also hesitant about her terminology: "and so am I" (5). This discomfort only continues, as the narrator depicts the women's physical features, describing Cornelia as a "fair and sensible," "blue-eyed fresh-faced beauty, [who] looks nearer thirty-four than forty-four" (13). Cornelia's youthful beauty is then pitted against Tweet's "scarred face," "thin and skimpy hair," and "unnerving" eyes (7, 39). Although the narrator initially asks readers to be absentminded about race as she describes the women's bodies, she later admits that such obliviousness is impossible for a contemporary audience, as even she knows that the oppositional nature of race is key to informing the way each protagonist is viewed and physically described. Joel Kovel affirms the narrator's unease in his 1980s description of racism, explaining:

> Racism abstracts the color of the living body into non-colors of extreme value, black and white. With this organization, black represents the shade of evil, the devil's aspect, night, separation, loneliness, sin, dirt, excrement, the inside of the body; and white represents the mark of good, the token of innocence, purity, cleanliness, spirituality, virtue, hope. (232)

Based on her 1980s hesitation about being associated with a now taboo racist binary, the narrator tries to create a clear temporal and ideological separation of her personal voice from the story she tells. After she first admits her shared racial and class affiliations with Cornelia, the narrator then immediately asserts the backwards nature of her white protagonist's adherence to a now defunct tradition of aristocratic Southern womanhood. Despite the fact that they share the same racial and economic privileges, the narrator claims the similarities end here, as she describes Cornelia as a 1960s holdover of plantation society:

> Such women as Cornelia—sheltered women—would have been the commonplace of her mother's generation and class. In her day, as everyone knows, upper-class girl-children had nursemaids or nannies or mammies, depending on where they lived. At five or six they went to private or public schools or had governesses, depending on how wealthy they were. At fifteen they went with properly brought up young men to properly chaperoned parties and dances. At twenty-two they married and had husbands and children and servants. Their cooks lived in or came to fix breakfast before the husbands left for work …. (12)

Although the narrator's depiction of Cornelia's persona reads like a caricature of traditional Southern values, in which mythic legacies of Civil War era women are read as "sacred invocation[s] of the South's 'epic' (meaning white, aristocratic) past" (Roberts 101), this cartoonish characterization is important because it informs Cornelia's own understanding of her life as a perfect representation of a dying Southern ideal.

As it functions in the novel, the homogenizing ideology of traditional Southern womanhood defines "good" women as those who protect the literal and intellectual

landscape of the South on the domestic front, refusing to give up the racism that has come to define the successful operation of their homes and the intellectual restraint that has come to define the South's lasting "unwillingness to be reconstructed after the Civil War" (Wyatt-Brown 230). Indeed, from the novel's beginning, Cornelia is invested in upholding these fading conservative values, as she has been taught to measure her self-worth through domestic perfection—perfection that not only requires her to be "pure, dutiful, beautiful and self sacrificing," but also demands her family's faultlessness and her vigilant watch over her less-than-competent black domestic help (Shoemaker 93). To sustain this hollow ideal, Cornelia must "restrain every thought, action, and word by virtue and religion" (Wyatt-Brown 230), a continuous restraint that has led critics like Charles Fister to describe the white woman's character as a hollow void (103). These critiques stem from the narrator's own disappointed description of Cornelia, as a woman who is "cautious about overexposure…like a dancer, a skier—skimming over the surface of her life as if it were a polished floor or a calm summer lake" (3, 127). Similar to Morrison's physical pedagogy of defect that functions even in an all-black community, Douglas's narrator maps a contemporarily defined ideological pedagogy of defect that has been passed down through generations of white Southern women.

Much like Morrison's description, the characteristic female intellectual restraint of this defective ideology manifests itself on the body, as Cornelia's real disability—being hearing impaired—is only exacerbated by her choosing to remain oblivious to anything that would threaten the perfect picture of Southern domesticity she imagines her life to be. The narrator highlights Cornelia's abuse of her hearing aid to avoid listening to anything unpleasant, explaining that when these things arise in her life, the woman "lays

aside the tiny packet with its dangling wire and flesh-color earpiece, or clicks a switch and closes out the world" (15). By literally having the power to chose what she will and will not hear, Cornelia has in turn become "adept at creating imaginary people and imaginary lives," as she falsely believes her husband is the picture of spousal fidelity and that her children are "lovely, safe, young people—straight backs, straight teeth, straight A's" (128-129). In addition, Cornelia refuses to betray her "crippled auditory nerve" in public, feigning that she hears things that were spoken too softly for her to pick up: "Techniques must be acquired, for example, to make the speaker comfortable. Cornelia…wears an alert, intelligent expression on her face and has a rich stock of responses which serve a general purpose and enable her to navigate around mounds of silence" (14). Even as Cornelia acknowledges to herself that she knows people frequently speak low purposefully so that she will not hear, the white woman refuses to get offended, assuming that this inaudible chatter is all in her best interest. The narrator expresses frustration at her protagonist's acquiescence to living in this uninformed silence, as Cornelia's refusal to think forces a narrative translation of the woman's life in "surfaces" and "scenes" (66).

This same refusal to engage only increases when Cornelia's interacts with her housekeeper, Tweet, with whom she feigns interest, while "never by word or gesture betray[ing] the boredom, the condescension she sometimes feels" as the black woman tells her stories (13-14). The narrator, informed by contemporary vantage points on race relations, is particularly troubled by Cornelia's refusal to contemplate why Tweet is required to sit in a certain seat when her employer takes her home from work, her refusal to determine whether or not it would be possible to take Tweet to register to vote, and her

starkly different reaction from Tweet's muted acknowledgement upon hearing about the assassination of President Kennedy. Cornelia's viewpoint instead remains entrenched in racist white Southern values, as she condescendingly disparages her housekeeper through what Monteith deems an "accumulation of powerful controlling images—maid, aggressor, emasculator, Sapphire, Aunt Jemima" (116). Indeed, these categorical assessments are laid bare as Cornelia refuses to really listen to Tweet's stories, instead rejecting the black woman's tales, claiming personal moral objection. Although Cornelia thinks she hides her personal thoughts from her maid, the white woman's outward disapproval and disbelief reveal her true feelings when Tweet tells stories that grey absolutist moral codes. In response, Cornelia rebuffs Tweet's rationalization of immorality, saying "Stealing is stealing, Tweet …You can't steal by accident … Right is right and wrong is wrong" (25). And later, of a past white employer's sexual harassment, Cornelia expresses a sense of disbelief, saying, "I don't believe it …Tweet, I just don't believe it" (10).

More important than Cornelia's immediate responses of disapproval or disbelief are the "overdetermined" (Shoemaker 87) implications of what these reactions indicate the white woman *does* believe about her black housekeeper. Not only does Cornelia translate Tweet's stories through the stereotypes of questionable morality and sexual promiscuity commonly assigned to black domestics in the 1950s and 60s, the white woman also interprets Tweet's actions through personal fear. Cornelia sees her housekeeper as both an aggressor and an emasculator, learning that Tweet violently threatened a former white employer and shot her own husband over his infidelity. In response to these fears, Cornelia reacts by intentionally forgetting Tweet's stories: "She

accepts the tales like the flowers that she sticks in a jelly glass and sets in the window by the kitchen sink and forgets" (14). Yaeger defines this white Southern refusal to critically consider the race relations that impact daily living as an adherence to the "unthought known," an ideology in which racism functions covertly as "a repetitive, everyday terror—a set of practices so incessantly, so boringly enacted within the everyday that they seem to be hiding in plain sight" (99, 101). At this subconscious level, "a cloud of unknowing…extends over everyday racial interactions" so that there is an active "refusal to think about what one already knows," and later the "genuine shock at encountering a world they see everyday" (103-104). Mirroring Yaeger's description of white women's racism, in which women know they are complicit but refuse to think about their complicity, Cornelia listens to Tweet's stories but refuses to hear them. Instead, she ignores Tweet's message by either relying on stereotypical interpretations or by feigning ignorance: "Expressionless, absentminded, Cornelia listened and did not listen" (36).

In an embarrassed response to Cornelia's behavior, the narrator simultaneously justifies her white protagonist's actions and creates more temporal distance between her narrative voice and the time of the novel, reasserting the past tense of the lives she describes: "There would have been no way in that time and place—the nineteen-sixties and seventies in Mississippi—for them to get acquainted, except across the kitchen table from each other" (4). By underscoring her story as one that functions within a cultural ideology that is now obsolete—overt racism that only allows for cross-race intimacy when power divisions are clearly present and acknowledged by both women—the narrator emphasizes her contemporary voice as separate from the lives of her characters. However, the narrator's need to justify Cornelia's actions—"There would have been no

way…except”—also implies a deeper connection to the protagonists’ lives. The narrator later directly admits just such a connection while speculating about what readers must think of her: “It’s as if she [the narrator] has some buried connection with these lives, a connection she must explore and understand” (38).

The narrator’s disclosure of her tie to her characters’ lives is made more clear in an interview Douglas gave shortly after the novel’s publication, in which the author describes her creation of a contemporary narrator in this novel as an attempt to demonstrate to readers the tension she felt between “the writer and the material”(Jordan 58). Although this comment seems to imply some narrative confusion between Douglas herself and the novel’s narrator, a more profound slippage occurs earlier in the interview when Douglas is asked to describe the character of Cornelia. The author explains that she invented Cornelia based on “Having known a good many white ladies who, if not literally deaf, are deaf to what they don’t want to hear” (Jordan 56). However, shortly after describing Cornelia in this way, Douglas describes herself as a “sixty-eight-year-old Southern white woman who has…been a party to injustice, party to blindness, *party to deafness* all my life” (emphasis added, Jordan 58). These authorial admissions have led Leslie Petty to call the novel not a meta-fiction, but a “meta-autobiography” (125), and have led Fister to speculate that the narrator is herself Cornelia, “hiding behind a mask” (102). Ultimately, these slippages among Cornelia, the narrator, and Douglas help to create a backwards looking dynamic of guilt over past racist indiscretions, a narrative guilt that makes room for Cornelia’s embodied transformation as her views evolve into the narrator’s own.

Just as a profound sense of racial shame creates Pecola's desperate desire to gain blue eyes in order to escape feelings of her own body as defective, an increasing sense of white racial guilt spurs Cornelia's desire to heal her broken body through the physical strength she imagines all black women possess. However, before the white woman can transition from racism to racial guilt, her life must first shake her out of the obliviousness she self-imposes. Douglas provides this jolt through the betrayal of Cornelia's family, followed immediately by the sudden and unexpected death of the deaf woman's husband. Firmly believing that her children are perfect, Cornelia becomes furious when she finds out about her son Andrew's secret marriage to a poor divorcee with two young children. After she realizes that her entire family has conspired to keep Andrew's marriage a secret from her, the domestic perfection Cornelia values begins to deteriorate. In response, Cornelia is shocked into a silent "burning," refusing to speak to her husband and children (149). However, these embers finally do erupt. Thinking her husband is extremely drunk when, in fact, he is having a heart attack, Cornelia reveals what her family's betrayal has made her realize about herself, asking, "Am I so ugly, so awkward, so stupid…? She broke off" (153). Before she can fully relay to her husband that her family has made her feel the full effects of her body's disability by denying her the chance to *hear* and understand vital information about their lives, her husband dies, leaving her alone to address the destruction of her dream of Southern perfection. No longer able to "delude herself into thinking that the world is a perfect place" (Bomberger 24), Cornelia is forced to see the reality of her literal and metaphorical deafness: "What else in their lives is hidden from me? And why? What else do they not say, or say only in whispers?...They

had been excluding, deceiving, betraying her, had constructed their life together as if her presence were a hole in its center" (43).

Before her family's betrayal, Cornelia understands her body through an ideology of Southern womanhood, which insists that women practice restraint. In turn, her deafness became a tool for Cornelia to personally enforce this restraint, more adequately achieving the purity and innocence required of her. However, after her husband's death, these expectations dissolve, and the white woman's helplessness forces her to interpret her body through traditional scripts of female disability, under which "women associate disfigurement and disability with having a damaged, abjected body and spoiled identity" (Bouson 163). Although Cornelia's coming-of-age occurs in mid-life, she, like Pecola, first becomes truly self-aware through an acknowledgement of her body as lacking and physically inadequate. For Cornelia, these feelings of her own body as abject begin directly following the discovery of her family's duplicity. Immediately after, the middle-aged woman claims that her brain is a collection of grey worms that have sabotaged her ability to smell and recognize new faces. In addition, Cornelia has temporary bouts of lost motor control, imagining her fingers to be "swollen, fat and tight as sausages, clumsy with the pins of the clothesline" (163). Since her realization that her family used her defective body to carry out their betrayal, Cornelia now understands that same body as out of her control, as "a liability, something that can be a source of rejection, to be covered and hidden" (Gilbert 29). This feeling that her abject body is responsible for her family's betrayal haunts Cornelia as a recurring "pain in her left breast, a burning pain that trickles down into her belly"—a pain that comes every time she reflects on the tragedy that has brought her to this knowledge (137).

To avoid feeling this crippling pain and the worried glances of family and friends, Cornelia takes long silent walks in the woods without her hearing aid. However, the pain can no longer be ignored after a menstrual hallucination while in the woods, which results in Cornelia's complete abhorrence of what she now sees as her abject, broken body. The hallucination itself occurs while Cornelia is lying on her back amidst a grouping of tall trees and imagining she is holding a bundle of fresh mushrooms during a hike with her family. However, the mushrooms suddenly turn into menstrual blood, which runs down her hands and legs and separates Cornelia from her husband and children, who continue walking ahead: "Wait, she calls, wait for me, looking down at her hands… The mushrooms are dissolving, turning to slime, black blood dripping from her hands to her thighs, trickling like menstrual blood down the insides of her thighs. John and the children are gone. She hears their voices fading, far off" (169). Like Pecola's horror over the sudden onset of her menarche, Cornelia's imagined menstruation symbolizes a larger feeling of physical uncontrollability. For both women, unannounced menstruation forces them to see their individual bodies "not only as a lack or absence but with more complexity, as a leaking, as uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as a formless flow…entrapping, secreting" (Grosz 203). And, just as Morrison's Pecola catalogues her inability to control her menstrual flow as one of many embarrassing reminders that her own body is an abject betrayal, Cornelia, too, sees menstruation as part of her body's larger system of betrayals. These betrayals, beginning with her deafness, confirm her body's status as abject and warrant her family's perfidy. Indeed, menstruation, either real or imagined, becomes a physical register for both women's deep feelings of embodied

shame, ultimately symbolizing more general feelings of physical inadequacy and abject lack.

Surprisingly, during Cornelia's menstrual hallucination and during other physical reminders of her loss of bodily control, interjections by the narrator are largely absent from the novel. In fact, the narrator's only interruption comes before readers are privy to the details of the harm will befall Cornelia after her husband's death, as the 1980s voice issues a warning that the life of her white protagonist will now begin to crumble (130). Yet, even as the narrator provides this warning, she anticipates her readers' knowledge that she, as the narrator, controls the story: "But you—you're the one, I hear you say. You're the driver of this boat. You're pulling the skier" (131). In this admission, the narrator acknowledges a stronger connection to Cornelia, confessing that as narrator, she not only chooses the events that spur Cornelia's awakening from the intellectual and physical confinement of Southern womanhood, but also directs how the white woman will respond to each event. After this warning, the narrator does not interrupt her story with her own contemporary narrative voice for almost thirty pages. Given the straightforward explanation of Cornelia's tragedy and the glaring absence of the narrator's judgments (which have been extremely prevalent until this point) during the white woman's subsequent transformation into a sense of guilt, and later cross-racial merger, readers are left with the assumption that the narrator both chooses and approves of Cornelia's character evolution.

Shortly after Cornelia's menstrual hallucination, the story again changes course—this time toward New York—as the grieving protagonist convinces her family that she needs time alone to process her husband's death. Like Pecola, Cornelia decides that she

will use this time to either fix her broken body or rid herself of it altogether, imagining her own suicide in a city far from her family's watchful gaze. However, as Cornelia contemplates this decision while roaming the snow-covered streets of New York City after dark, she gets lost and begins to worry about getting back to her rented apartment. In this state of panic, she continues distractedly, hearing the voices of both Tweet and her mother, telling her what the narrator terms "stories about betrayal, about helplessness and cruelty, about guilt and innocence" (193). Tweet's voice, as Cornelia imagines it, speaks out of anger, saying "Listen to *me*…I'm too polite to say, but I notice you don't hardly ax a question, and sometimes you *seems* like you're listening—you put on listening—but you ain't. Seems like you think you don't need to ax, don't need to listen, you already got answers, or else you don't want to hear none" (194). Soon after Cornelia imagines Tweet's voicing of frustration, the white woman's mother begins speaking, using disparaging racial slurs against Tweet. The housekeeper responds saying, "You think I hadn't heard her? Saying them risings come from dirt and ignorance. Ignorant niggers, that what she say…*I* hate her, but she ain't my mama" (199). Cornelia's new sense of embarrassment over the racist insults she has heard her mother recite countless times denotes a shift in the white woman's thinking, as she begins to abandon an overtly racist Southern cultural ideology that relies on race to define social class.

After several more pages of this imagined argument between Tweet and Cornelia's mother, Cornelia begins to feel Tweet's presence physically, as a "dragging weight" that serves as a continuous corporeal reminder of the white woman's newfound racial guilt (201). Cornelia's guilty conscience takes over, after she remembers a particular incident in which she wanted to fire her housekeeper after being physically

repulsed upon learning that Tweet once had severe "boils on her face" (201). After recalling the boils and her own repulsion, Cornelia looks up to find herself on a street in Harlem staring at a black youth, who returns her gaze "with burning hatred" (206). In this instance, the white woman does not question the youth's hatred, and instead seems to understand that she is to blame for the burning accusations in his eyes and in Tweet's imagined voice. During Cornelia's transition into this guilt, the narrator is silent, and Tweet, instead, becomes Cornelia's guide. Bomberger asserts that in this moment of guilty white conscience, Cornelia reinscribes Tweet as the mammy figure, who in a "cantankerous, yet endearing, way will lead Cornelia across the River Jordan to emotional salvation" (19). However, the re-inscription of Tweet as a powerfully protective mammy also emphasizes Cornelia's resilient ties to a racist binary that, even under the guise of guilt, defines her as always already separate from, or oppositional to, her black housekeeper. As hooks points out, "By projecting onto black women a mythical power and strength, white women both promote a false image of themselves as powerless, passive victims and deflect attention away from their aggressiveness, their power…their willingness to dominate and control others" (15).

However, Cornelia's exploitation of her black housekeeper is not limited to emotional strength and guidance. As the white woman relies on Tweet-as-guide to lead her to the apartment she has rented, she relies on the same racist binary to appropriate the physical protection and street savvy she imagines her housekeeper possesses as a black woman. By imagining Tweet as a pillar of black female strength, Cornelia moves to idealize her housekeeper as "already liberated" from the strictures of femininity that assure the white woman's vulnerability on the streets of Harlem (hooks 47). This guilt-

turned-idealization allows the image of the strong black woman, who seems beyond "human foibles and flaws," to temporarily turn Tweet from human to ideal, making space for Cornelia to imaginatively appropriate the raced stereotypical characteristics of black female strength that will keep her safe on the New York streets. Although Bomberger describes Tweet's guidance as coming in the form of a "disembodied voice," the novel implies otherwise, describing physical effects that result from Cornelia's imagined exchange with Tweet. The suggestion that Cornelia appropriates the physical characteristics of her housekeeper, instead of just Tweet's disembodied voice, is illustrated by the white woman's imagination of two simultaneous scenes of racial merger during her fearful wanderings over the city's dark streets.

The first scene is Cornelia's sudden memory of herself and Tweet caring for the black woman's stepfather. As the two women lift the man to examine his bedsores, Cornelia imagines herself and Tweet to be acting as one body, as "their intimacy and mutual understanding is so perfect" (202). In another recollection that directly follows the first, Cornelia tries to recall the significance of a film she has just seen, which depicts love-laced violence between two women who work together. Although her memory of the film is unclear, Cornelia does recall "women's faces…that seemed somehow to be crushed together…they are at one" (214-215). These images of embodied female merger are paralleled with Cornelia's translation of Tweet's voice as a heavy weight that she first describes as dragging, and later expresses as "inside her ear" (201).

Much more than a disembodied voice, the images of female lives and bodies crushed together, compounded with the heavy weight of Tweet's physical presence transposed onto Cornelia's own, provide the white woman with a corporeal merger that

allows her to successfully navigate the streets of Harlem until she is safely inside her rented apartment. Because of her own increasingly guilty conscience over an insufficient and flawed ideology of Southern femininity, she has come to idealize her black housekeeper as a powerful source of female strength. Although Tweet's strength is not limited to the physical, Wyatt points to the common frequency of bodily appropriations like Cornelia's: "the body often figures as the site of ideal; even when it is the black woman's mental qualities or cultural authority that the white feminist in question admires, she tends to perceive those qualities in terms of the racialized body" (102). By temporarily appropriating physical strength, the white woman has not only refashioned her own body as strong, but also believes she has eradiated the racist deafness that made her feel superior to and separate from Tweet. Common to the idealizing transference, Cornelia's merger with an "idealized powerful figure" is imagined in order to participate in that figure's "strength" and "power" (Rhys 169). After this temporary bodily appropriation, a newly empowered Cornelia, who now believes she can truly hear and understand Tweet, plans to return home with her "hearing aid set higher than she used to" (231).

However, immediately after Cornelia appropriates both her housekeeper's body and voice while in New York, the white woman gets word that Tweet has suffered a stroke, losing the ability to speak or move. Although Cornelia is oblivious to the parallels between her theft of Tweet's corporeality and the black woman's simultaneous loss of her own self-possession and physical control, the textual proximity of these two events makes such oblivion impossible for readers. Not only does Cornelia obliterate Tweet's humanity by forcing her into a self-serving mythic ideal, but the white woman

also continues a now-familiar tradition in which a black woman's "strength bec[omes] a convenient justification for every atrocity committed on her" (Wyatt 107). Indeed, Cornelia's brief appropriation of black female strength has not only allowed the white woman to gain a budding sense of powerful independence, but this appropriation has also wrongly absolved Cornelia of feeling any guilt over her treatment of Tweet as a self-serving object to spur her personal evolution. As Cornelia only thinks of Tweet's strength in reference to her own self-construction—through the healing of her racial guilt and her newfound sense of independence—the white woman continues to exploit a tradition of black female strength that is derived from the historical "pain, domination, and exploitation of black female bodies" (Griffin 114), without an awareness of the connections between her theft of Tweet's body and voice and the black woman's subsequent voicelessness and paralysis.

Instead, Cornelia believes that by no longer rejecting the idea of a merger between Tweet's body and her own, she has achieved an anti-racist awakening and naively thinks her housekeeper will approve of this idealization and subsequent transformation. Believing in this false transformation, Cornelia returns to Mississippi to tell an ailing Tweet, "You don't know it yet, but you've been *with* me—I mean in New York. I've been in New York and you were—there. Oh, it's hard to tell about, but you were. I *heard* you (237). Failing to understand her own manipulation of Tweet's discourse, Cornelia does not comprehend the expressions of "rage and hatred" and the shutterings of disgust with which the immobile, voiceless woman responds to the words and soothing caresses Cornelia offers. Instead Tweet's voicelessness allows Cornelia's idealization of the black woman's strength to continue, as the healthy woman's imagination of a perfect and ideal

Tweet temporarily go unchallenged. And, as Wyatt rightly points out, "When white women idealize black women for embodying the strength that they themselves would like to have, then, they inadvertently champion and reinforce an oppressive, even damaging and dehumanizing gender identity" (108).

In Cornelia's misguided efforts to restore Tweet's health, the long absent narrator finally resurfaces. Interrupting Cornelia's dehumanizing care, the narrator stops the narrative to disparagingly align herself with her oblivious white protagonist:

> I was thinking then not of Tweet or of myself, but of Cornelia, of her refusal to plunge down through those layers, to lift them apart, even to admit their existence. And later, I said she skimmed like a skier over the surface of her life. Now—now that Cornelia seems willing to look, now as I struggle with my own difficulties, with the near impassivity for me of grappling with these events—I think that perhaps—no, certainly—I am the one who is skiing. (239)

Clearly, the narrator now realizes her own responsibility to Cornelia's incomplete transformation, asserting her inability to take Cornelia's character toward a friendship with Tweet that functions outside of embodied raced oppositions. Her own narrative imagination, informed by white guilt, only allows for a cross-race appropriation that still remains on the surface of the antithetical oppositions of Southern white female frailty and the imagined physical potency of all black women. Although the narrator temporarily inverts the value system of these oppositions, she seems to acknowledge that Cornelia's idealization and appropriation "maintains the binary of white skin/black skin and so…has not resulted in meaningful changes in the race ideology that regulates daily life" for her protagonists (Wyatt 109). Her failures force the narrator to revert to the same racist

binaries she has been unable to transcend by the novel's end: "[Tweet] is black. Cornelia is white. She is servant. Cornelia is mistress. She is poor. The measure of her poverty is that she considers Cornelia (who thinks of herself as modestly well-off) immensely wealthy" (240). It is this narrative failure that leads Fister to describe Douglas' work as "the autobiographical confession of a Southern female" and evokes Hazel Carby's question, "to what extent are fantasized black female…subjects invented, primarily, to make the white middle class feel better about itself?" (193).

Although the narrative closes with Tweet on the road to rehabilitation and with her angry confrontation of Cornelia's misinformed corporeal appropriation, the black woman still seems to remain, at the end of the novel, "in a world where she only exists in reference to Cornelia" (Bomberger 29). As even Tweet's first-person narration is mediated through the guilty conscience of a middle-class, white narrator, the black woman's status as human, instead of "venerated fantasy object" seems even more remote at the novel's end. Wyatt highlights the damage both the narrator and Cornelia do to Tweet's subjectivity: "to use the other to fill in one's own lacks is to perceive in the other only a figure derived from oneself, a figure who makes good one's own deficiencies; that projected ideal blocks the view of the other woman in herself" (Wyatt 110) This double-mediation, through both Cornelia and the narrator, has led many critics to read the close of Douglas's novel as a troubling reinscription of antithetical stereotypes concerning black and white women.

Given the narrator's unresolved expressions of white guilt, readers are left unsure whether Cornelia realizes her continued denial of Tweet's humanity. Does Cornelia comprehend her reconstructed racism, rebuilt using the same racist stereotypes that make

her black housekeeper into an ideal of physical strength, which ultimately only serves the white woman's project of self-recreation? Just as Pecola becomes a silent body, a physical representation of racial shame, Tweet is also reduced to her physical body, a physical representation of a white woman's guilty efforts toward personal and physical reconstruction. Because Cornelia imagines that she hears Tweet's guiding voice, she is able to re-craft an understanding of her own impaired hearing, and her feelings of physical vulnerability, as healed, as stronger. Indeed, as Monteith asserts, Cornelia's ideological and physical transformation might be "utopian and therapeutic" for the white protagonist and her narrator (5), but they also seem to imply a one-sided understanding of sisterhood that reifies stereotypes of black woman and their bodies as non-subjects present only in the narrative for white female use. After all, it is in the service of Cornelia's self-awakening that Tweet's sense of self becomes literally and figuratively paralyzed.

D. Conclusion: Anger and Equalizing Abjection

In her chapter on race and idealization, Wyatt highlights the danger of imaginary identifications, describing them as part of dangerous system of ideals that result "in the reduction of the other to the empty form of the body" (89). She goes on to explain that this reduction to the visual form of seamless embodiment "leaves out the body as a process—leaves out its perpetually shifting energies…and changes" (89). Robbing the body of its connections to subjectivity, as a valuable part of a living, breathing human subject, instead creates what Monteith calls a "bodily dislocation," in which the body is present only as "a disturbing way of bearing witness or giving testimony" to a still-

present racist binary (220-223). The black/white binary that operates in both Morrison and Douglas's novels classifies bodies into a system of ideals, constituting a dominant ideal of whiteness, which represents physical vulnerability, "innocence, purity, cleanliness, spirituality, virtue, [and] hope," through its opposition to an anti-ideal of blackness, which represents brute strength, "evil, the devil, night, separation, loneliness, sin, dirt, excrement, [and] the inside of the body" (Kovel 232). Both ideal and anti-ideal remain static in each novel, and the characters that come to represent them exist as hollow stereotypes of each—Shirley Temple is suspended as a perfect collection of blue eyes and blonde hair, and Tweet is arrested within a pejorative ideology of street-savvy and black female physical strength.

In contrast to this representation of static ideals and anti-ideals, humanity is demonstrated through the body as a moving process, through the abject energies of bodily filth, blood, disability, and lack. Although this humanity is temporarily rejected by Cornelia and permanently rejected by Pecola in each protagonist's quest to achieve an elusive white ideal, it is again grafted back onto the body through angry interjections of the abject. Protagonist anger, which Lorde lauds as "a liberating and strengthening act of clarification" in which "we identify who are our allies [and] with whom we have grave differences," becomes a literary devise deployed in both novels to arrest the covert operations of a racist binary through evocations of a mutually shared abjection (127). In brief, it is a device that highlights a climactic shift in ideas, an opening of blind eyes and a clearing out of deaf ears. Indeed, angry interjections from Morrison's Claudia MacTeer and Douglas's Tweet, demand reader and protagonist attention, as they not only pollute the white ideal as an empty and arbitrary social construction but also redefine women's

bodies outside of the subject-effacing stereotypes of the culturally-valued ideal of whiteness. Using anger as a "powerful source of energy serving progress and change" (Lorde 127), Claudia and Tweet, together, remove women's bodies from an arbitrary system of ideals and instead place black and white women within the common human realm of abject bodily processes. Celebrating the abject as both a source of beauty and a foundation for cross-race alliances, both Morrison and Douglas propose abjection as a physical equalizer between women.

Although Morrison leaves readers with a hollow version of Pecola, who is now nothing but the physical embodiment of racialized otherness, the adolescent is placed back within the realm of human subjectivity through the memories of her childhood acquaintance, Claudia MacTeer. MacTeer, who is the narrator and voice of critique throughout the entire novel, saves the memory of Pecola through her angry refusal to accept a system of racial ideals that always already defines blackness as other. Claudia's anger exposes the ideal of whiteness as a vacuous and arbitrary social construction, allowing her to reconfirm Pecola's subjectivity by imagining the physical image of the now-mad girl *not* as repugnant and other, but as a beautiful, pregnant mother-to-be. This anger that provides Pecola her only salvation first begins to build when Claudia is given a white baby doll as a gift. Although the young black girl knows she should love the doll, Claudia cannot escape her urge to instead violently rip apart the plastic figure:

> I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that has escaped me. Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window sings—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child

> treasured…I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was loveable. Break off the tiny finders, bend the flat feet, loosen the hair, twist the head around… (20-21)

Although her real desire is to find whatever is inside the plastic figure that makes it so valued by black and white women alike, when the girl breaks the doll's torso in half, she finds not moving blood and vital organs, but nothing—a void with a voice box. The plastic hollowness inside the doll infuriates the young black girl, as the "empty form of the body" the doll represents becomes a material representation of the empty and arbitrary social construction of whiteness (Wyatt 89). Instead of idealizing whiteness as a subjectivity that represents "a seamless whole, self-complete, and self-possessed," Claudia now views the ideal as a culturally-enforced sham that does not represent the realities of the human body. This realization allows Claudia to expose the ideal of whiteness, not the black body, as the real pollutant to her community, as she shifts the common perception of white baby dolls as feminine perfection to her own understanding of them as grotesque collections of plastic parts: "round moronic eyes," a "pancake face," and "orangeworms" for hair (20).

After Claudia's initial understanding of the self-corrupting powers that idealizing whiteness has on Pecola and other members of her community, the narrator counteracts this corruption through continuing to invert the white ideal's relationship to pollution. Claudia resumes this process of polluting the ideal of whiteness by identifying it as the source of her own contemporary discomfort with her black body. As she muses about her life prior to an understanding that she was supposed to desire the "cleanliness" of whiteness, the now-adult Claudia fondly remembers a time when she and her sister were

"[g]uileless and without vanity … were still able to love ourselves then. We felt comfortable in our own skins…enjoyed our dirt, cultivated our scar, and could not comprehend this unworthiness" (74). In contrast to this pre-pubescent freedom, Claudia calls her adult adherence to this white ideal of cleanliness and beauty "adjustment without improvement" (23). Claudia's childhood memory not only suggests embracing the abject—embracing the humanity of one's dirt, scars, etc.—as a way to escape a self-denigrating system of ideals, but also proposes championing abjection as the stuff of human subjectivity. The dirt, scars, blood, sweat, and tears of the body are what separate human subjects from the lifeless plasticity of ideal and anti-ideal.

Claudia's valuation of abject human subjectivity in contrast to what she sees as idealization based on misrecognition is seen most poignantly when she lovingly imagines Pecola as the mother of a beautiful black child. She muses about Pecola's "dark, wet" womb, carrying a baby with a head full of "great O's of wool, the black face holding, like nickels, two clean black eyes, the flared nose, kissing-thick lips, and the living, breathing silk of black skin" (190). Claudia contrasts the inside of Pecola's womb, which holds a beautiful, living, breathing baby, to the static artificiality of the white ideal: "synthetic yellow bangs suspended over marble-blue eyes…pinched nose and bowline mouth" (190). The textual proximity of Pecola's womb to the poisonous synthetic of the plastic white doll imply that ultimately it is the ideal of whiteness that pollutes Pecola and her womb, killing off the abject—the "dark, wet" womb—in the service of an artificially constructed ideal. In turn, Claudia's furious determination to love Pecola and her baby in order to "counteract the universal love of white baby dolls," rescues Pecola Breedlove

from her lifeless status as a vacuous anti-ideal, reclaiming her as an embodied subject, who holds the corporeal power of reproduction.

Although readers are left with Morrison's assertion that it is "much, much, much too late" for Pecola, Claudia's complication of black subjectivity beyond the stasis of a stereotypical racial binary allows the woman to begin to see her own body outside of "the painful assemblage of someone else's codes and symbols" (Yaeger 223). By first denaturalizing the desire toward ideals of white beauty, Claudia asserts that real desire should be grounded in "a different, positive relation to one's body" (Mermann-Jozwiak 198). Employing the visual cues of the abject—the joy she takes in remembering the dirty body of her youth and the slippery insides of Pecola's dark womb—Claudia demands that readers witness the body as a moving collection of abject processes that together denote embodied beauty. This renewed sense of pleasure in relation to the black body locates beauty in the abject shifting energies and processes of pregnancy, swelling, bleeding, and sweat common to all female bodies. Claudia's determination to tell Pecola's story, reclaiming the girl as a human subject through a celebration of her participation in the abject, makes women's bodies the foundational requirement for mutual female understanding outside of the restrictive cultural binary of black and white women.

If Morrison's novel proposes a mutual embrace of the abject as an equalizer among all women, Douglas's novel, written almost twenty years later, more specifically imagines how mutual abjection opens a space for female alliances across the dividing lines of race. Similar to Morrison, Douglas also creates a black protagonist whose subjectivity is effaced through a racist binary that constructs a culturally valuable white ideal by devaluing a static idea of blackness. Although Cornelia idealizes Tweet for her

stereotypical black female strength, the white woman does not wish to, in turn, take on the cultural devaluation that the physical attributes of blackness promise. Instead, Cornelia exploits assumptions about Tweet's stereotypical strength to move her white body from one ideology of white womanhood to another—evolving from a now unpopular overtly racist ideology of Southern womanhood to a more covertly racist ideology of 1980s liberal feminism. This evolution requires both Douglas's narrator and her white protagonist, Cornelia, to rob Tweet of her subjectivity by equating the black woman with stereotypical ideals of black female strength. As a consequence, Cornelia's assumptions about her housekeeper's physical potency not only repeat "the gesture of equating the black subject with the body which founds racial categories," but also excuse the white woman from further action—as "a strong black woman c[an] be counted on to bear the blows of sexism and racism" (Wyatt 105,107).

However, Tweet's angry interjections at the end of the novel use the women's mutual abject bodily processes to refuse the women's culturally-constructed opposition, which has both informed Cornelia's stereotypical assumptions about Tweet's strength and placed Tweet within the subject-effacing realm of an idealized object. To reclaim her voice in a novel that is both written and narrated by white women, Tweet employs her angry assertions of the abject to demonstrate her subjectivity outside of the stereotypes of a racist binary. However, she stops here, denying the possibility that the narrator can construct an authentic or closed version of Tweet without revising the entirety of her story through the equalizing lens of abjection. Tweet begins this process of angry interjections when she furiously recounts to Cornelia the racism that has shaped the contours of their fifteen years of daily interactions. Next, in actions that closely mirror

Claudia's, Tweet pollutes the ideal of whiteness through her assertion that Cornelia, herself, is intimately connected with the abject bodily energies frequently used to denigrate black women's bodies. By demonstrating that Cornelia, too, is a woman of flesh and blood and by rejecting her own status as a stereotype for black womanhood, Tweet begins to shift the women's relationship outside of a system of white ideals, moving toward an understanding of their individual subjectivities as equally dictated by embodied processes.

Tweet, temporarily speechless after the stroke, demonstrates her anger at Cornelia through looks of "rage and hatred" and by shuddering in disgust every time the white woman touches her shoulders (238). However, when Tweet finally regains speech and is confronted by Cornelia about a stolen barrette, she angrily voices her pent-up frustration over Cornelia's imagined acquisition of her own black body. Tweet answers the white woman's charge of theft by borrowing from Cornelia's own moral absolutions that the white woman has used to separate the women: "Evil she says. I'm evil. Then, Right is right, yeah. Uh huh, And wrong is wrong. People don't do *bad* by accident" (254). Cornelia, who since her transformation in New York feels herself reformed, recognizes that Tweet's words are meant to demonstrate her knowledge of her employer's stereotypical assumptions that she is a dangerous thief. When Cornelia asks again, Tweet destroys the logic of difference—marking Tweet as racialized object and Cornelia as subject—that has always informed the white woman's understanding of herself and Tweet, shouting:

> Maybe your hair was caught in it? You think maybe I took your hair?...Fingernail clippings? Blood, too, like the blood from old used Tampax, Kotex? I throwed out

> enough in my day. From your panties when you—when you –fff-flooded? Washed enough of them. Shit? Cleaned enough of your toilets. (254)

Similar to Claudia tearing apart the white baby doll limb from limb, Cornelia feels Tweet's words like "her joints are being pulled apart, as if a jackhammer is sending its vibrations all through her body" (254). Through the metaphoric dismembering of white bodies that exist as exemplars of a white ideal, both Tweet and Claudia are laying the groundwork to reclaim their own subjectivities.

However, although Claudia is faced only with a plastic void, Tweet's assertions of the abject locate a white woman of flesh and blood. After Tweet's angry demand that Cornelia see herself as a human subject, entailing the ownership of the abject remnants of hair, fingernails, blood, and shit, the white woman can no longer create an "imaginary life" that exists as an exemplar of white womanhood—neither the pure ideal of traditional Southern womanhood, nor the empowered progressive white female ideal of the post-Civil Rights era. In turn, Tweet's assertions force an understanding of the black woman outside of stereotypes of African American female strength. Asserting her humanity through human folly, Tweet admits that she has purposefully stolen Cornelia's barrette. However, aside from employing this confession to highlight her identity outside of the system of abstract, imaginary ideals Cornelia has created, Tweet does not allow her white employer the right to stereotype this folly, saying she has stolen the barrette not for money or to own something nice. Instead, Tweet exclaims that she has stolen out of hatred: "I hate you, hate you, hate you. And I steal that barrette to remind me of it, in case I forget" (254).

After removing Cornelia's self-understanding from both past and more progressive ideals of white womanhood, and extricating herself from the black female stereotypes that structure those same ideals, Tweet then denies both the narrator and Cornelia the ability to know her beyond the women's mutual abject ties. As if answering the narrator's contemporary concerns that she has failed to allow her black protagonist to speak in her "authentic voice," Tweet says "You ain't never *seen* me, *heard* me in your entire life" (255). As the narrator has previously made plain, she is the one who decides the fate of her characters, so the fact that the white narrative voice ultimately demonstrates her inability to know or hear Tweet seems to suggest that she and Cornelia have reached a threshold beyond racial guilt and idealization. After employing angry interjections of the abject to remove the women from the straight-jackets of a racial binary, the narrator asserts that idealized appropriation does not lesson or alleviate the rift between black and white women in the post-Civil Rights South.

Imaginatively co-opting the eyes and ears of a culturally defined racial other will never allow women to see or hear the world from their perspectives or recast black and white women as something other than "antagonists in the patriarchal drama" (Rich 201). Instead, through Tweet's anger, the narrator proposes that interracial female relationships must first begin by uncovering the racist dualism that informs perceptions of subjectivity across race. The narrator asserts that this honesty must foreground any cross-race friendship, as we all share a human inability to know without seeing, and to understand without hearing. Douglas's narrator supplies the abject as an alternative to being deaf and blind. After the abject lays bare our common humanity to one another, open-ended cross-racial dialogue and a renewed embodied empathy are the only ways to move forward:

"Cornelia laughs. What can we do, she says, when we've shot somebody? Look around? See where we're headed? That's all I can see to do after you shoot somebody" (256).

Both Morrison and Douglas use cross-racial idealization to highlight a destructive and dualistic paradigm of race that obliterates black subjectivity in the service of a white ideal. To subvert this binary, each author suggests a new relational economy that uses the common abject energies of the female body to strategically expand, multiply, and conjoin the possibilities of enduring interracial relationships between equally embodied women. Instead of trying to defuse loaded stereotypes that define black and white women as embodied opposites, both authors draw on the commonalities of abject bodily energies and processes. With eyes and ears open, Morrison and Douglas teach feminist readers to map each other's moving bodily processes onto our own, employing anger to excavate abject bonds and embodied empathy to begin to chart female mergers that flow beyond the limits of singular bodies and raced oppositions.

Notes

[1] This chapter is not an attempt to efface the diversity of racial identity that exists in the contemporary U.S. Instead, it comments on, in order to deconstruct, the Black/White Binary Paradigm of Race—or "the conception that race in America consists , either exclusively or primarily, of only two constituent racial groups, the Black and the White," which are defined antithetically (Perea 133)

[2] "Mainstream feminism" refers to the consciousness-raising, scholarship, and feminist activism by middle class white women (beginning in the 1960s) against oppression and gendered discrimination. Although first lauded as empowering to all women, this movement was later faulted for their exclusion of the experiences and the multiple/different oppressions faced by women of color, blue-collar women, and lesbians.

[3] Morgan and Wyatt temporally locate the stereotype of the physically strong black woman as originating in slavery, as the strength of black female slaves "to endure any pain and keep on going," justified the abuse of slave-owners (Wyatt 107). Wallace writes that this now-mythic stereotype defines black women as having "inordinate strength, with an ability for tolerating an unusual amount of misery and heavy distasteful work. This woman does not have the same fears, weaknesses, and insecurities as other women but believes herself to be…stronger emotionally than most men" (107)

[4] In the remainder of the section titled *The Bluest Eye*, quotations from the primary text will be notated with only a page number.

[5] In this chapter, I use metafiction to refer to Douglas's use of a present day narrator to consciously expose the fictional illusion of the novel.

[6] "Present-day" in this context refers to the late 1980s, when Douglas first published *Can't Quit You Baby*

[7] In the remainder of the section titled *Can't Quit You Baby*, quotations from the primary text will be notated with only a page number.

Chapter 3

Best Frenemies: (E)Merging Friendships and Horizontal Violence in Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*

> "Little girls are cute and small only to adults. To one another they are not cute. They are life-sized" (Atwood 129)

In December of 2006, three middle-school girls in Long Island, New York, deliberately kicked and punched a thirteen-year-old female classmate while she lay helpless on the ground. As the victim never reported the crime, parents and school officials did not discover the bullying until a video of the incident circulated on YouTube (Conroy). Similarly, in March of 2008, six female teens from Lakeland, Florida, kidnapped and attacked classmate Victoria Lindsay, leaving the girl with two black eyes and a near-fatal concussion. Each of these teens, the youngest of whom was fourteen, was charged with kidnapping and assault (Celizic). Most recently, in January of 2010, fifteen-year-old Phoebe Prince hung herself in her own closet after being repeatedly taunted, stalked, and physically abused by several of her female classmates. Phoebe's status as an outsider, having recently moved from Ireland to Massachusetts, and her subsequent harassment were widely acknowledged but dismissed by teachers and classmates alike (Cullen). Although these examples represent verbal manipulation and relational aggression that have long been stereotypes of girls' relationships with other girls, these recent instances of what Lyn Michel Brown calls "physical girlfighting and girl-initiated violence" have dramatically increased since the mid-1980s (16).

Supporting Brown's assertion, Kevin Cullen, the *Boston Globe* columnist who covered Phoebe Prince's suicide, reports the culture of violent "mean girls" is definitely on the rise. This new mean girl ideal is one that exists even beyond the school setting, as

American culture is currently saturated with girl-initiated violence—particularly through popular television series and films that glorify the "girl as fighter" figure and accessible cyber social networks that promote adolescent bullying (Brown 15). However, even before the wide circulation of these violent girl personas, late twentieth-century American female novelists were exposing a secret world of physically abusive and adversarial relationships between girls, which was often hidden behind the guise of friendship. This chapter analyzes this literary pattern of horizontal violence—or inter-group violence between peers who occupy the same social position—within adolescent female friendships.[1] Specifically, it examines the temporary merger of bodies created through these violent exchanges as a symptom of adolescent rebellion against the restrictive denigration and stereotypical interchangeability of women's bodies under contemporary definitions of adult femininity.

Using Margaret Atwood's *Cat's Eye* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* as literary case studies, this chapter explores patterns of physical violence to better understand how the female body functions and what it signifies in these girlhood friendships. By first detailing a shifting feminine ideal that is increasingly centered on the body, the analysis of each novel examines adolescence as a time when girl protagonists find their bodies outside this ideal and initiate never-ending campaigns of self-improvement. As Brown reminds readers, all female bodies *need* improvement, as they are all abject in some way: "In relation to the narrow ideal of beauty and femininity, all girls to some degree experience their failure to match up; all girls feel excessive, outside the lines" (132). As self-splitting—separating one's sense of self from one's physical body—and embodied fragmentation—dividing the self into acceptable and unacceptable

body parts—often result from women's individual battles against their bodies, the chapter also examines the protagonists' engagement in these practices. Moreover, as the scrutiny of oneself frequently coincides with the hypercritical assessment of one's close friends, the chapter also investigates the impetus for girls to extend their policing to one another's embodied failures. This system of policing in the novels almost always leads to girlhood frenemies, or girls that simultaneously serve as both best friends and adversaries to one another.

To explore and discuss these frenemy interactions, this section borrows from the self-psychological language of adversarial transferences. Just as self-psychology charts idealization and twinship as part of the coming-of-age process, this developmental theory also marks stages of self separation, initiated by safe or unpunished adversarial interactions. In these exchanges, girls declare difference from one another, developing and defining the borders and qualities of an independent self: "In these alter ego relationships there is a recognition of difference and complementarity, rather than sameness" (Swartz 190). Following these trial periods of dissimilarity and separation, girlhood adversaries can help individuals to draw borders around their emotional and psychological selves.

Often the motivation for these kinds of relationships, particularly in adolescence, stems from what Lang calls a "not me impulse" (61-62). In other words, to achieve female subjectivity as laid out by patriarchy, women are required to possess stereotypically positive characteristics and to repudiate other undesirable qualities (Lang 62). As a result, in order to maintain "the structural cohesiveness, temporal stability, and positive affective coloring of the self," a woman must displace or reject what does not fit

within the subjectivity of "appropriate femininity" through making herself and others around her believe that any step out of this narrow ideal is "not me" or uncharacteristic of her persona (Lang 61). Frequently, this impulse requires the location of an adversary of the same rank and social status, who is more inappropriately feminine than herself. In order to divert negative attention away from one's own flaws, an individual often highlights this same physical or character flaw on another woman in order to create separation between herself and that flaw—that flaw is not mine, it is hers. In turn this other woman, or adversary, serves as a physical location of emotional and psychological comparison, on which one girl often displaces personal qualities deemed socially unacceptable.

However, for contemporary adolescent girls, these adversarial transferences have begun to move from the emotional and psychological to the physical, as modern standards of beauty have become increasingly centered on achieving the ideal feminine body. Girls declare their difference through physical regulation of one another—displacing corporeal inadequacies through verbal policing and physical violence toward their female peers. This shift toward horizontal violence allows girls to commit overtly violent acts against one another, eliminating their own "anxieties and fears about not matching up to or resisting ideals of feminine beauty and behavior" by assigning their faults to their peers, or social equals, who are restricted and oppressed by the same social mores of femininity (Brown 32). These acts of violence suggest that the novels' instances of physically aggressive bodily contact, in contrast to bodies engaged in twinship or idealization, enact a sense of personal self-distinction and difference between adolescent girls. By creating a temporary merger through physically violent acts, each protagonist in

this chapter engages in a vital stage of contemporary female self-development: physically displacing her own body's inadequacies onto the body of her "best friend," or, as I will later argue, onto what she perceives to be a truncated or inferior version of the self. This physically aggressive horizontal displacement stems from the collision of the adolescent desire for intimate friendship and the increasingly physical definitions of ideal femininity, which make girls interchangeable through their shared failure to achieve the feminine ideal.

A. Adolescent Frenemies and Femininity

In contrast to stories of male self-development, which are often initiated by a quest toward separation and individualism, Abel reminds readers that for women, "friendship becomes a vehicle of self-definition…clarifying identity through relation to an other who embodies and reflects an essential aspect of the self" (416). However, although girls and women are often socially and self-defined by their ability to "stay with, build on, and develop in the context of attachment and affiliation" with one another, female friendships are just as frequently socially stereotyped as conniving and mired in backhanded aggression (Miller 83). Brown argues this kind of relational aggression consists of "such behaviors as gossiping or spreading rumors about someone or threatening to exclude or reject them for the purpose of controlling their behavior…the goal is to hurt another person in such a way that it looks as though there has been no intention at all" (16). This characterization remains so socio-culturally familiar, that "manipulation and duplicity have be[come] part and parcel of the very definition of femininity," conforming to "all the old stereotypes we [Americans] have of girls and

women—as deceitful, complaining, and jealous" (Brown 1). Although the contradiction between relationships founded on nurture and malevolence is built into definitions of femininity and female friendship, it has historically given little reason for concern. Squabbles or bickering among women are most often viewed as female rites-of-passage, similar to the "boys will be boys" cultural mentality that condones roughhousing among male adolescents.

Interestingly, this same paradoxical relationship between women who serve as both best friends and worst enemies has become an essential element in many contemporary women's novels that detail the stunted and circular female adolescent's coming-of-age story. In these novels, amidst new feelings of personal feminine inadequacies and self-consciousness about changing bodies, pubescent girls often find comfort in a friend who looks and acts like themselves: "It is the first time a child fully sees herself through another's eyes, the first time she truly experiences mutual validation" (Brown 68). Elizabeth Abel confirms Brown's assertion that adolescent friendships are not initially about complimentarity; instead, mutual identification becomes "the psychological mechanism that draws women together" (415). Particularly for adolescents, who struggle with the social embarrassment of an out-of-control and impossible-to-hide awkward body, friends are used to promote a sense of sameness and to avoid feelings of isolation, abnormality, and loneliness: "[S]he looks in the mirror of her girlfriend's gaze. She hopes to find a confirming and comforting reflection" (Apter and Josselson 4). These friendship relations are founded on identification and reciprocal validation. In turn, they aid in conditioning girls to see and understand themselves through another's perception. Abel highlights this unique bond of physical and emotional

mutual recognition between girls as a mode of "relational self-definition," in which ego boundaries are often blurred (414, 421). As adolescent friendships progress, girls tend to use these blurry lines between self and other to shape their future self-definition:

> In childhood, girl's friendships seem easy, placid, and interchangeable. A friend is someone to play with. But as a girl's world enlarges, a friend becomes someone to 'be' with. Friendship evolves into a context in which to define oneself; each friend offers shifting norms and endless possibilities for reflecting on and discovering who we are. And as intimacy evolves in friendship, issues of loving and becoming intertwine and interact. (Apter and Josselson 20-21)

Although Apter and Josselson illustrate a reciprocally beneficial relationship between best friends, in which girls positively affirm and shape one another's identity, these blurred lines between self and other can just as easily make girls completely vulnerable to mutual condemnation and self-disparagement.

Indeed, such disparagement frequently occurs when the adolescent need for a self-defining friendship intersects with the current socio-cultural environment, which demands that all women compare themselves to other "ideal" female bodies. This comparison between self and ideal creates a social sense of female interchangeability and invisibility, based on women's shared failure to match up to an impossibly narrow model of feminine perfection. In turn, women unconsciously encourage further interchangeability, as they reduce and fragment their own bodies into a series of transposable parts and as they self-split into positions of seer and seen. The judgment and fragmentation of one's own body into acceptable and unacceptable parts is often symptomatic of this split between object and observer. Just as popular television and

radio ads often promise women slimmer hips, bigger breasts, flatter stomachs, and smoother faces, women have also learned to mirror this parceling out of parts of their bodies that need improvement: “I may find parts of myself fragmented and the fragments at war with one another” (Bartky 25). In order to better control the constant feelings of inadequacy produced by the consistent failure to achieve the physical ideal, women often self-split to create a protective division between a sense of self and the failed female body—between subject and object.

Bartky calls this partial subjectivity that girls and women occupy the “feminine body-subject,” in which women are only acknowledged as social subjects when they “aim to produce a body of a certain size and general configuration” and force this body to perform a “specific repertoire of gestures, postures, and movements” (71). In turn, the female body is separated from one’s sense of self and instead becomes an “albatross, the heavy drag on self-realization” (Bordo 5). Consequently, the contemporary body-as-impediment not only causes intense feelings of failure and personal inadequacy for all women, but also produces internalized oppression that fuels a fashion-beauty complex built on the impossible female desire to achieve embodied perfection.[2] The demand to personally improve not only groups girls’ bodies into a series of parts—breasts, hips, thighs, etc.—but also fosters anxiety that blurs the boundaries between one female body and the next: “Girls who are different or not ‘normal’ because they call feminine ideals into question by being too full of themselves or because they look different or dress ‘weird’ produce anxiety because they remind other girls of their own potential failure to match up” (Brown 70).Whether produced by seeing personal failures in the mirror or by seeing the failures of other girls and women as a reflection of personal inadequacy, the

anxiety of not measuring up to the narrow ideal of feminine beauty causes many girls to actively engage in self-splitting, separating out their "true" sense of self from their own bodies.

At no time does this pressure to be the feminine ideal conflict more with one's own sense of a *real* self than when a girl first begins to enter adolescence. Simone de Beauvoir describes the embodied shift that occurs during female puberty as a transformation that produces not a changing self-definition, but a realization of the necessity to create a split or "doubled" sense of self: "[She] becomes an object and she sees herself as object; discovers this new aspect of her being with surprise: it seems to her that she has been doubled; instead of coinciding exactly with herself, she now begins to exist outside" (316). Just as girls begin to enter womanhood, they are confronted with a "fresh wave of pressure to be 'good' and desirable women in the conventional sense...[and] media messages, refracting and commodifying dominant views of beauty, are aimed at them" (Brown 86). As pubescent girls watch their bodies make unsolicited and culturally devalued changes that consume more space—watching as their hips widen, their breasts grow, and their bodies sprout hair—they are simultaneously introduced to the cultural dictum that asserts all women must remain childlike to be considered beautiful. As a result of the helplessness to stop these physical changes, puberty, in particular, fuels self-splitting: "It is hard enough for me to determine what sort of person I am or ought to try to be without being shadowed by an alternate self, a truncated and inferior self that I have, in some sense, been doomed to be all the time" (Bartky 24). The fluid, physical changes of adolescence make the "failure" of the female body impossible

to ignore, resulting in young women who are simultaneously engaged in intense campaigns of self-improvement and personal rebellion against these new restrictions.

For adolescents, the temporary tug-of-war between rejecting and being resigned to this oppressive ideal creates a unique relationship with friends who are also struggling with the same contradiction of self-definition. Specifically, when the boundaries between self and other are already blurred through intense self-defining friendships and the physical fluidity of adolescence, these culturally encouraged bodily divisions seem to extend from the intrapersonal to the blurred interpersonal subjectivities of girlfriends. As a result of this perfect storm of fluid adolescent bodies, relational self-definitions, and current cultural demands of self-improvement, pubescent girls' campaigns of self-discipline frequently include the policing of their friends' inadequacies as part of their own campaigns of self-discipline. Adolescents do not simply split a sense of authentic selfhood from their own failed bodies; instead, they displace their personal physical failures onto the bodies of other girls. They begin to "see and name the gap between the ideal and their more complicated realities… [and] part of experiencing it, owning it, is generalizing it to other girls—that is, learning to police others, to judge others on the same terms" (Brown 87-88). In these relationships, when physical and emotional boundaries are unclear, the line between self-policing and same-sex policing becomes blurred. As girls use their friends' perceptions to derive a self-definition, embodied inadequacies are often multiplied and refracted back through their mutual policing of one another.

Although feminist literary theorists have frequently argued that these shared adolescent duties of mutual policing and bodily disparagement represent competition

between two psychologically and physically separate individuals, I instead contend that these moments of same-sex policing between adolescent girls are actually physically displaced rituals of self-improvement.[3] In these instances of mutual body regulation, which occur among bodies and self-perceptions that are already fragmented into multiple pieces and personas, girls are not competing with another; instead, they are punishing their own personal physical and psychological traits that fail to meet the social demands of femininity. This adversarial policing is a mode of self-improvement, an effort at self-definition that expands the internal and external fragmentation of adolescents' minds and bodies to temporarily include the psychological traits and physical bodies of best girlfriends. In turn, this expansion allows one girl to physically displace her personal inadequacies onto another adolescent's body through acts of horizontal violence. By engaging in violence with friends to physically displace the inferior parts of the self, violent female adolescents are afforded fleeting feelings of separation from these flaws. Consequently, they manage to achieve a temporary sense of self-worth and a safe outlet for their frustrations within the system that has created these feelings of inadequacy in the first place.

B. Horizontal Violence

This kind of physical aggression, once only reserved for boys, has been on the rise in girl culture in the latter half of the twentieth century, increasing "exponentially since the mid-1980s or so" (Brown 16). Instead of feeding off past stereotypes of girls as physically weak and vulnerable, new images of women—what Brown calls the "girl as fighter" and what Susan Cahn terms "the athletic girl"—showcase females who are

"assertive, usually smart, psychologically though, [and] physically strong" (Brown 15, Cahn 7). Rejecting "the cultural mythologies that impose drastic limits on women's strength and potentials" and define women in earlier literary depictions, women in contemporary popular culture and literature are allowed to take up physical space, to test physical limits, and to be at least partial agents in their personal physical protection (Heywood 60).

However, as Brown underscores, the trouble with this tough girl figure comes with how she is valorized in mainstream media. Instead of functioning as a feminist manifesto for female strength, one girl's physical prowess is "usually about the containment of other girls rather than [the] testing [of] physical limits," and any violence displayed is often "likely to be motivated by a desire for heterosexual romance, envy for male attention, or beauty competitions" (Brown 19). Indeed, two of the three incidents of real-life violence that open this chapter were motivated by heterosexual love triangles. In addition, despite the empowered fighting that literary, television, and film stars engage in on the page or on screen, each one almost always commits acts of violence while maintaining her traditional good looks, her sexy attire, and her feminine charm. Consequently, the tough girl persona is safely "mediated by qualities that make her pleasing—and sexually appealing—to men" (Brown 15), making the media's new "girl as fighter" ideal another example of the contemporary cultural obsession with the female body.

As a result, girls have begun to internalize feelings of personal failure, which accompany this cultural obsession with the body, upon entering adolescence. In turn, they use horizontal violence as a means to "take out their anxieties and fears about not

matching up to or resisting ideals of feminine beauty and behavior on each other…because they don't have the power to take them out on [more powerful] others" (32, 90). Specifically, in Margaret Atwood and Maxine Hong Kingston's illustrations of girls' vigilant physical regulation of one another—through the skin-to-skin contact of hitting, pinching, and punching—both authors depict the secret world of girlhood violence. Because their pubescent female protagonists have limited outlets to express their frustration at a social order that deems them to be second class, they frequently take out their anger on safe targets: one another (Freire 62).

However, in behaving violently towards one another, Atwood and Kingston's adolescent characters are not simply eliminating competition in their quest for the social rewards of appropriate femininity. Instead, particularly for pubescent girls, these acts of violence become moments of bodily fusion that can only take place during the corporeal fluidity of puberty, initiating a temporary physical displacement of failed traits onto another body. Through this physical transference, one girl is able to temporarily shed the inadequacies that have socially penalized her. By aligning herself with the oppressor's power, even if only briefly, she displaces and defines herself in opposition to these flaws (or, more directly, to the girl who is victim to her violence), and she subsequently creates brief moments of self-distinction and affirmation in a social environment that frequently deems her abject or interchangeably invisible. However, unique to these novels, girls do not simply fight one another, allowing one girl to get closer to social approval. Instead, the division of good and bad, feminine and unfeminine, does not occur only among individual girls. Girls violently displace these flawed character traits and body parts on multiple selves, which span beyond the boundaries of the individual, through externalized

campaigns of personal improvement. Through a temporary violent fusion, one girl's inadequacies are "conquered" through their physical displacement onto another "truncated" version of the self—her best friend (Bartky 24).

This kind of horizontal violence involves the same temporary merging of female bodies that occurs in relationships of twinship and idealization. Girls in these novels continue to bond through mergers of blood, sweat, snot, and tears. However, admiration between women does not motivate the blurred embodied boundaries that Atwood and Kingston convey. In contrast to previous narratives, these cases of female affinity or mutual identity are constructed as a reminder of the shared failures of all women. As a result, asserting an adversarial transference—a claim of "opposition, argument, and self-assertion without punitive retaliation"—through physical violence becomes a final point of merger, a violent declaration of difference and individuality that occurs through the temporary fusion of bodies (Swartz 190).

However, these violent attempts at difference ultimately keep girls and women socially interchangeable by maintaining the status quo: "The problem is that such horizontal violence not only doesn't change the power imbalances for girls and women in this culture, but it perpetuates and reproduces them" (Brown 184). Owing to the "cultural language of denigration, subordination, and victimization" readily available through patriarchal scripts of female disparagement and now through reproducing male patterns of violence, the point of merger for these adolescents fails to become a moment of self-assertion (Brown 132). Instead, it not only reproduces social constructions of female interchangeability, but also reaffirms stereotypes of femininity and female friendship as superficial and manipulative. Ultimately, these adversarial transferences, which often

result from a cultural refusal to acknowledge the comparison, competition, and envy present in women's relationships, bind women's bodies in failure while simultaneously denying women the emotional and psychological support female friendship has the potential to offer. It is this lasting scar of adversarial violence—of being both perpetually bound to and eternally isolated from other women—that Atwood's Elaine and Kingston's Maxine try to artistically re-imagine in adulthood.

As both Elaine Risley and Maxine Kingston reflect on their childhoods in artistic retellings of their comings-of-age, each artist establishes an initial outsidership from the strictures of femininity, which, in turn, makes her adolescent need for friendship more dire. However, in both narratives, as the girls quickly learn about the preconditions of feminine subjectivity through their new friendships, they also become hyperaware of their need for physical self-improvement. Eventually, for Elaine and Maxine, this desire for self-improvement leads them into positions of victim and victimizer, respectively, in abusive relationships with their female friends. However, in the acts of violence that are committed in both novels, it becomes clear that the girls are not eliminating female competition for social approval. Instead, these adolescents are each battling internal feelings of physical inadequacy they have temporarily displaced onto the bodies of their best friends. This slippage between self and other leaves both Elaine and Maxine with lasting wounds that keep alive the bond, built on the contradiction of friendship and violence with their frenemy, into their adult lives.

This bond is maintained despite a post-adolescent shift for both women that hardens their emotional and physical boundaries against future abusive relationships with other women. These scars, as both authors suggest, can only be healed when conceptions

of female friendship and female community acknowledge and integrate what Jean Wyatt describes as the concurrent "feelings of envy and ambivalence between women and… women's desire to nurture and support each other" (59). To this end, both Atwood and Kingston conclude their novels with protagonists Elaine and Maxine using their creative artwork to reconstruct selves built from the "relational scar tissue" left over from the violent embodied mergers they obsessed over as adolescents (Brown 187). Using the fragments of themselves and their onetime frenemies, these now adult women respectively paint and write "envy, with its attendant violence, into the text of female friendship" (Wyatt 59). Through this reconstructive artwork, Atwood and Kingston's rewriting of lasting female friendships demands the inclusion of long held secret feelings of competition and violent aggression that parallel the nurture and kinship between women; only when these feelings are acknowledged will embodied mergers cease to be violent and begin to foster healthy and holistic female selves-in-relation.

C. Elaine and Cordelia in Atwood's *Cat's Eye*

Charting Elaine's evolution into adulthood through three strands of narration—"the adult voice, the little girl's voice, and the narrational strand of dreams and paintings," Atwood's *Cat's Eye* underscores the loss of a girlhood friendship as the void at the center of her protagonist's existence (Sizemore 74). Although as an adult Elaine has lost track of Cordelia, her childhood best friend, she remains haunted by their once-intimate friendship and later estrangement as adolescents. By weaving together Cordelia's ghostly presence in Elaine's adult life with the physical betrayals the girls subjected one another to as children, Atwood highlights a corporeal connection between

the two women that does not dissolve with the onset of adulthood. To shake the haunting abuses she suffered at Cordelia' s hand, Elaine retrospectively recreates and revises her own life on canvas' beginning with her naïve entry into Toronto girlhood and moving through the series of bodily betrayals that have come to define her roles as friend, mistress, wife, mother, and semi-famous painter. However, despite painting different people and places, the young girl Cordelia always sits at the center of Elaine's backward-looking artistic creations, as the physical and emotional site of the artist's self-definition. Consequently, as the adult Elaine aims to give shape to her past in order to formulate a tenable self-definition in her present, she must redraw the borders of her identity without using Cordelia as a reference point for self-understanding. Ultimately, in order to distinguish Cordelia's corporeal and emotional boundaries from her own, Elaine must first reconcile the paradoxical images of Cordelia as both her girlhood adversary and her "mirror image" (Lane 1).

Atwood begins to highlight this relational contradiction of envy and affinity by demonstrating its gradual, yet detrimental effects on her naïve protagonist Elaine Risley, whose remote childhood has allowed the girl to exist largely outside of conventional 1940s femininity. Until her eighth birthday, Elaine spends her life traveling in the back of her parents' Studebaker station wagon, accompanying her father to the forests of Northern Canada, where he conducts his biological field research. Unlike other girls her age, Elaine's early childhood nights are spent sleeping in campsites, in shabby hotels, or in cabins. As her daily interactions are limited to those with her father, her brother, and her decidedly unfeminine mother, young Elaine is only exposed to the stereotypical world of girls and women through the books she studies in her school lessons. In reading

her Dick and Jane primers, the girl notes her own outsidership to this female culture, observing femininity as an exotic entity she knows little about:

> There are no tents, no highways, no peeing in the bushes, no lakes, no motels…The children are always clean, and the little girl, whose name is Jane, wears pretty dresses and patent-leather shoes with straps. These books have an exotic appeal for me…This is the elegant, delicate picture I have in my mind, about other little girls. I don't think about what I might say to them if I actually met some. I haven't got that far. (Atwood 31-32)[4]

As Patricia Goldblatt points out, Elaine, "having grown up in the Canadian North, outside of social propaganda" is a blank female canvas. As such, she can "observe the behaviors that have been indoctrinated into her urban peers" from a critical position of disconnected fascination (Goldblatt 275). Even Elaine's mother, a potential source of knowledge concerning mainstream femininity, actively tries not to impart restrictive feminine virtues onto the young girl. Instead, Mrs. Risley wears oversized shirts and pants, works alongside her husband in the field, and upholds the same standards of appropriate childhood behavior for her son and her daughter. As a result, Elaine is kept, in large part, as a complete outsider to twentieth-century female culture.

It is not until her father takes a permanent position with a university in Toronto that the little girl becomes exposed to the realities of 1940s girlhood. Upon moving to the Canadian city, Ingersoll points out that "Elaine as a child is suddenly forced to confront 'femininity'" in order to successfully acquire the girlfriends she has always wanted (20). This initial desire to have "some friends, friends who will be girls" is finally realized when Elaine meets Carol and Grace, two classmates at her elementary school (30).

Despite the initial promise of having girlfriends, these girls make Elaine feel her outsidership to feminine culture even more acutely: “But I’m not used to their customs. I feel awkward around them, I don’t know what to say… with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen calamitous blunder” (52). Elaine, who herself is now the exotic entity, does not understand what other girls seem to know intuitively—why girls and boys are separated on the playground, why Carol’s mother’s new twin set carries such importance, and why “good” religious girls like Grace always cover their heads when attending church.

Elaine worries over her inadequacy as a correctly feminine friend, saying, “Playing with girls is different and at first I feel strange as I do it, self-conscious, as if I’m only doing an imitation of a girl” (57). Despite the fact that Elaine proves a quick study concerning the rules of friendship with other girls, her initial outsidership makes her consistently wary that her carefully constructed masquerade will fail, and she will be excluded and lonely yet again. As Apter and Josselson point out, “in childhood and adolescence, having a girlfriend protects a girl from feeling isolated” (3). Now that Elaine has girlfriends and “is special to someone outside her family,” her fears of losing this feeling of inclusion make her even more determined to alter herself in order to be a “normal” girl (Apter and Josselson 3). Through her relationship with Carol and Grace, Elaine not only learns that there is a narrow ideology of femininity that she must follow, but also she is taught that she must be vigilant and self-conscious to meet this standard.

Specifically, from these two young girls, Elaine learns a culture of self-obsession, self-denigration, and self-separation, which one must embrace to win friends and to ward off the outsider status that shadows Elaine’s social interactions in Toronto. Because

Elaine has yet to internalize the rules of femininity completely, she must continually remind herself of certain restrictions: “Now that I’ve changed back from pants to skirts, I have to remember the moves. You can’t sit with your legs spread apart, or jump too high or hang upside-down, without ridicule” (59). In addition to restraining her physical movement, Elaine also learns to publically assert limitations to her creative and intellectual abilities. In watching her two new friends criticize themselves in front of one another, Elaine learns that self-disparagement is an essential part of femininity: “Grace and Carol look at each other’s scrapbook pages and say ‘Oh yours is so good. Mine’s no good. Mine’s awful’…Their voices are wheedling and false; I can tell they don’t mean it, each one thinks her own lady on her own page is good. But it’s the thing you have to say, so I begin to say it too” (59). Elaine eventually starts to embrace the self-criticism that comes with being a girl:

> Something is unfolding, being revealed to me. I see that there’s a whole world of girls and their doings that has been unknown to me, and that I can be part of it without making any effort at all. I don’t have to keep up with anyone, run as fast, aim as well, make loud explosive noises, decode messages, die on cue. I don’t have to think about whether I’ve done these things well, as well as a boy. All I have to do is sit on the floor and cut frying pans out of the Eaton’s Catalogue with embroidery scissors, and say I’ve done it badly. Partly this is a relief. (59)

Emulating Carol’s squeamish delicacy and Grace’s virtuous propriety, Elaine comes to understand femininity as a state of perpetual childhood. Void of aspirations, freedoms, or goals, the girl feels an initial safety in her newfound understanding that society not only encourages, but requires women to be “kept vulnerable and treated as children: girls must

ask permission, dress in silly frocks, are allowed no money, play no part in their own self-determination" (Goldblatt 279). As a result of this indoctrination by Carol and Grace, Elaine learns that a successful imitation of this femininity will maintain her friendship with these two girls. As Gilligan points out, this connection, although built on fraudulency and mimicking, is of the utmost importance not just for Elaine, but for most girls and women—as an important part of female gender identity rests on being "good" at relationships with other females (8).

However, Elaine's playful effort to imitate other girls shifts to a serious attempt to attain femininity when she first meets Cordelia. In contrast to Carol and Grace, with whom Elaine only pretends to have something in common, Cordelia manages to impress and intrigue the pre-adolescent with her decidedly unfeminine discussion about dog feces. Although Carol and Grace cringe in horror, Elaine, who has spent summers with her brother staring in fascinated wonder at scabs and earwax under her father's microscope, finds the topic both comforting and familiar. Of her first discussion with Cordelia, Elaine notes that the girl's "voice is confiding, as if she's talking about something intimate that only she and I know about and agree on. She creates a circle of two, takes me in" (77). In contrast to her relationship with Carol and Grace, Elaine's initial friendship with Cordelia, like that of Sula and Nel, and Enitan and Sheri, is built upon their mutual fascination with the body. Elaine, who has long been intrigued by the corporeal elements of her own body, believes she has found a kindred spirit in Cordelia. Elaine excitedly underscores her affinity with the new girl, saying to herself, "the grotesqueries of the body…are also of interest to her" (7). This initial spark of similarity between the two girls allows Elaine to see, for the first time, some version of what she

considers to be her authentic self in another girl her own age. Elaine's early feelings of outsidership and inadequacy, compounded with her desire to make and keep girlfriends, engender an especially strong bond between herself and Cordelia. This strong bond, according to Apter and Josselson, is a common one: "Girls are drawn powerfully to one another because they can see themselves in the other—an awareness that can arouse both comfort and anxiety" (21).

Indeed, despite the initial comforting intimacy the girls share, Cordelia quickly begins to exploit their friendship to create anxiety in Elaine—using their closeness as a vehicle to highlight the rules and restrictions that are applied to the female body. Instead of the vulgar conversations about bugs and snot that characterize Elaine's easy relationship with her brother, Cordelia instead teaches Elaine, Carol, and Grace about a new and different kind of grotesquery: that of the burgeoning female body. As Cordelia regales the girls with stories of her sisters' growing breasts and monthly menstruation, Elaine and her friends begin to learn that they, too, should keep a vigilant watch over their bodies for any unsolicited changes or swellings. Behind closed doors, Cordelia frightens Elaine by explaining "the curse is when blood comes between your legs…She produces evidence: a sanitary pad filched from Perdie's wastebasket" (99). For girls particularly, menstruation, "associated as it is with blood…with a mess that does not dry invisibly, that leaks, uncontrollable, not in sleep, in dreams, but whenever it occurs, indicat[es] the beginning of an out-of control status" (Grosz 205). Each young girl is endlessly fascinated and horrified by the "alien and bizarre, hairy, squashy, monstrous" female bodies that Cordelia's sisters warn them will one day be their fate (99). Elaine and her friends arm themselves for the battle against their own changing bodies, watching to

make sure they retain their current streamline childlike form: "We examine our legs and underarms for sprouting hairs, our chests for swellings. But nothing is happening: so far we are safe" (100). Unlike Elaine's control over the earwax and scabs that fascinate her and her brother in the microscope lens, these new grotesqueries of the body are outside of Elaine's command. They instead signify an unavoidable entrance into the female body's limitation and constraint

However, because keeping a child's physical shape into adolescence is an impossibility, Elaine and her friends inherit the foundational feelings of feminine inadequacy that fuel the 1940s culture of female self-improvement. The contradictions that arise as the girls begin to internalize these self-critical cultural standards are first evident in Cordelia's obsession with the changing female form: "Breasts fascinate Cordelia, and fill her with scorn" (99). Although Cordelia despises the physical restrictions that growing breasts demand, she also acutely feels her own feminine inadequacy for not possessing the parts that seem to make her sisters successful women in comparison to her own feminine failures. Even Elaine, who is still largely unfamiliar with female culture, notices that Cordelia "is not beautiful in the same way" as her sisters—she is "less agile" at pleasing her father and "more disappointing" to her mother (79). As Elaine continues to be exposed to the perfection and charm of Cordelia's sisters, which Atwood directly compares to Cordelia's gangly frame and inappropriate demeanor, she, too, begins to feel the awkwardness and failure of her adolescent body. Elaine stays up at night, allowing the agony of her worry to wash over her: "I worry about what I've said today, the expression on my face, how I walk, what I wear, because all of these things need improvement" (130). Elaine's silent confession underscores the

fact that this friendship, which began as a mutual fascination with the grotesqueries of the body, has now become a site of fear through the feelings of physical inadequacy, personal feelings of being socially abject, that pass between Elaine and Cordelia.

As Elaine witnesses the barrage of corrections that Cordelia endures from her mother and older sisters, both younger girls begin to see themselves as objects in need of improvement. As Perdie and Mirrie berate their younger sister for not pulling up her socks, for not washing her face, or for eating too much, both Cordelia and Elaine are taught by example "the terms in which women monitor each other and demand 'improvement'" (Hite 144). Hite notes that this system of consistent correction and unavoidable failure makes anxiety over one's appearance and demeanor an indelible part of female gender identity: "The anxiety attendant on achieving full feminine identity comes from the requirement that the adult woman internalize a permanent belief in her need for improvement" (142). Instead of blaming a culture that confines girls and women to the restrictions of self-improvement, these personal corrections make both Elaine and Cordelia believe that their failures are individual flaws; unlike other women, they are personally unable to successfully navigate femininity. Sitting alone in her bedroom, Elaine says: "I see that there will be no end to imperfection, or to doing things the wrong way. Even if you grow up, no matter how hard you scrub, whatever you do, there will always be some other stain or spot on your face or some stupid act, somebody frowning" (154). In order to soothe her own feelings of inadequacy, Elaine takes pleasure in finding less than perfect women in magazines and pasting them in her scrapbook: "But it pleases me somehow to cut all these imperfect women, with their forehead wrinkles that show how worried they are, and fix them into my scrapbook" (154). Just as the women in

Cordelia's family ridicule the young girl's imperfections to bolster their own feelings of feminine propriety, Elaine learns the temporary power and personal satisfaction that comes with policing other women's failures.

As Carol, Grace, Cordelia, and Elaine all enter the earliest stages of adolescence, each begins to learn the power differentials between appraiser and object appraised, between the one who sees and the one who is seen. Despite the fact that the women in each girl's family take on the position of appraiser—as Carol's mother spanks her daughter for wearing lipstick too young, as Grace's mother condemns Elaine for not covering her head to go to church, and as Cordelia's sisters look at their younger sibling's appearance with shame and disgust—each disparaging correction is made under the always present rule of the father. When Carol's mother promises her daughter that she will *tell* her father and as Perdie and Mirrie threaten Cordelia with promises of *telling* their father, the younger girls stand in terrified silence: "None of the girls jokes or drawls when mentioning him. He is large, craggy, charming, but we have heard him shouting, upstairs" (79). As Deery notes, even though the novel appears to be "an account of intra-female interaction…the male voice is ever present" (476). Through these warnings, each girl learns that the heterosexual male gaze is the one that really matters; he is the ultimate judge. In turn, the girls are led to believe that corrections and warnings of failure from other women serve their best interests, as these corrections will ultimately protect them from patriarchal scorn. At the same time, this same-sex policing works to teach each girl that "the 'self' in self-representation is always seer as well as seen, and that both seer and seen are implicated in the social construction of how one looks" (Hite 136).

Cordelia especially, who has been reminded daily of her flawed character, inappropriate demeanor, and deficient body, understands these aspects of herself to be feminine failures. As Brown notes, Cordelia, like most girls her age, has been subject to the "the process of assimilation and personal ownership of a culture that denigrates the feminine"—a process that simultaneously still demands that she strive to achieve stereotypical feminine perfection (32). This cultural message, which already invites comparison and rivalry between girls, makes Cordelia acutely aware of the parts of herself that do not meet socio-cultural standards. However, in her efforts toward personal self-improvement, Cordelia not only learns to distract attention away from her own flaws by highlighting those of her friends, but also discovers that she can temporarily displace her own embodied failures by locating them on the bodies of other girls who look to her for a sense of self-definition. Because Elaine, in particular, has become "dependent on the image of herself as viewed by Cordelia" (Lane 4), the naïve girl creates a blank canvas on which Cordelia can displace her own personal flaws. To create an acceptable version of her feminine self, Cordelia learns that she can externalize what Bartky has called the "truncated and inferior self" (24) that all women possess by violently relocating it on Elaine's body.

Atwood depicts Cordelia's temporary displacement through a reign of torture, which requires a system of vigilant surveillance and constant correction of Elaine's eager-to-please body. In order to correct Elaine's every misstep, Cordelia enlists the help of Carol and Grace:

> Cordelia stands close beside me and whispers into my ear: 'Stand up straight! People are looking!' Carol is in my classroom, and it's her job to report to

> Cordelia what I do and say all day. They're at recess and in the cellar at lunchtime. They comment on the kind of lunch I have, how I hold my sandwich, how I chew. On the way home from school I have to walk in front of them, or behind. In front is worse because they talk about how I'm walking, how I look from behind. 'Don't hunch over,' says Cordelia. 'Don't move your arms like that.' (131)

The constant barrage of corrections and criticisms directed toward Elaine—"Your clothes are stupid. Your art is crap. Sit up straight and don't answer back"—are the recycled and redirected critiques Cordelia receives from her own family, particularly from her father (97). Using this familiar language of female denigration, Cordelia temporarily aligns herself with patriarchal power, literalized in her own father's critiques of unacceptable appearance and unfeminine demeanor, to make Elaine believe that she herself is a feminine failure: her body is grotesque, abject trash. In turn, Elaine, who remains vulnerable due to her initial outsidership and her changing body, all too eagerly allows Cordelia to define her new sense of self. Atwood demonstrates the externalization and transference of Cordelia's own flaws as Elaine begins to physically manifest Cordelia's symptoms of feminine inadequacy. Thinking about her body, Elaine says to herself, "my shoulders sag, my spine crumples, I exude the wrong kind of goodness; I see myself shambling crookedly, I make an effort to stand straighter, my body rigid with anxiety" (136). Specifically, in one especially tortuous confrontation, in which Cordelia demands that Elaine look into a mirror during recess and point to each flaw she sees on her face, it becomes clear that Cordelia is not attacking Elaine as a separate entity. Instead, Cordelia blurs the physical boundaries between her body and Elaine's body by holding up the

mirror against her own face and employing the same rote script of her father's criticism, which was originally directed at her. Indeed, as Hite points out, Cordelia makes Elaine her own "surrogate victim, representative of the category 'girl' and thus a stand-in" for her own personal failures (136).

This physical slippage between Elaine and Cordelia's sense of self is not just acutely felt in the victimizer's brief relief from her physical flaws and her temporary association with the patriarchal power of the appraising male gaze. As a result of Cordelia's consistent surveillance and demands of bodily compliance, Elaine begins to self-impose this physical punishment in private, having been taught that her failed female body deserves this corporeal castigation. Nightly, Elaine peels the skin off her own feet until they bleed, she bites the corners of her mouth until sores become visible, and she chews the ends of her own fingers until they are bloody and raw. As Goldblatt points out, Elaine, like many women is "unable to turn outward in a society that perpetuates the idea of a submissive female…[T]hese women turn inward to their bodies as shields or ploys" (278). Similarly, Phyllis Chesler describes acts like Elaine's as middle-class and white "girlish training, which includes prohibitions against physical aggression and against appearing too openly competitive or hostile, driv[ing] the open expression of anger and hostility inward, where it festers and explodes in other, more acceptable indirect ways" (105-106). In these acts of personal bodily punishment, Elaine recreates herself as abject, using the dead skin peels and blood that continue to carry out the physical transference of Cordelia's feelings of feminine inadequacy on her own body. Through the girl's internalization of Cordelia's flaws, evidenced by the punishments she carries out in secrecy, Cordelia "is able to [temporarily] transfer her feelings of nothingness to Elaine"

(Lane 6). As Ingersoll points out, the slippage is complete during Elaine's private moments of self-punishment, as the young girl acts "as though she is studying to become a child martyr by flaying herself alive" (21). Elaine's body has indeed become a physical sacrifice, simply existing as a corporeal cache for all of Cordelia's socially abject, or unredeemable physical, intellectual, and emotional characteristics as a 1940s female adolescent.

In contrast to the twinning of Sula and Nel, Ephanie and Elena, and Sherri and Enitan, Cordelia does not engage in an act of physical slippage between herself and her friend to promote a mutual identity. Instead, she takes on an adversarial or antagonistic position to Elaine in order to assert her difference from those qualities of which she is ashamed, those qualities that society considers abject or undesirable. In turn, as is described of successful psychic adversarial transferences, Elaine's inaction affirms Cordelia's "appropriate" sense of self, as Cordelia is able to declare "opposition, argument, and self-assertion without punitive retaliation" (Swartz 190). In other words, Cordelia uses this violent slippage, the reign of bodily castigation that relocates her own flaws onto Elaine's body, to simultaneously assert her difference from these characteristics. By moving her flaws onto the physical body of her best friend, she is then able to declare separation and difference from those characteristics that have always socially penalized her.

These adversarial transferences are used, unlike twinship bonds, to declare autonomy and difference—to externalize and displace the self-splitting onto other girls, which has prevented one from becoming a full subject:

> Competing with or rejecting girls becomes a way for a girl to separate, to distance herself from the inferior "others" unworthy of her friendship, adult approval, or male desire. In a culture that values masculinity and the characteristics that go with it, separating from an inferior, weak femininity so incapable of attaining real power and control—is the way to gain the power of maleness for themselves. (Brown 31)

Cordelia learns that she can use these "well-worn pathways to feelings of superiority for girls and women" to displace personal flaws onto Elaine (Brown 97). However, because the weaker girl has, in turn, become a physical repository for Cordelia's own shortcomings, Cordelia must face her "truncated and inferior self" every time Elaine meets her gaze. This tension of needing Elaine to define herself against and wanting to rid herself altogether of the shortcomings she has displaced onto the weaker girl's body is evidenced by Cordelia's mode of torture—as attempts to murder Elaine are quickly followed by Cordelia's decisions to rescue her adversary or to apologize for her abandonment. In these tortuous scenes, readers are not privy to girlhood violence between two "best friends"; instead, Atwood illustrates an elaborate role play between antagonistic parts of one girl's sense of self.

Specifically, if female gender identity, what Lang calls a sense of feminine "self-cohesion," is contingent on the possession of certain desirable traits and the denial or expulsion of other socially abject or undesirable traits, most women would try to enact a "selective process of inclusion and exclusion…[of] 'self'…[and] 'non-self'" (58, 61). However, because Cordelia manages to externalize this division of self and non-self—the division and denial of unacceptable aspects of the self—by displacing all of her socially

undesirable physical and emotional traits onto Elaine, she also externalizes her own campaign of self-improvement. By locating her failures on Elaine's body, making impossible demands on that body and then punishing her friend's embodied failures, Cordelia enacts her personal campaign of corporeal reform on Elaine's body. Although Cordelia feels relief each time she displaces her own inadequacies and subsequently takes on the powerful role of the critical male gaze, this relief remains only temporary. As a result, Cordelia decides that the only way she can achieve full subjectivity is to expulse those cached negative characteristics (read: Elaine) altogether.

This decision accounts for both Cordelia's attempts to bury Elaine alive and to leave her to die in an icy ravine. First, while playing in her yard, Cordelia shows the girls a deep hole she has been digging, eventually convincing Elaine to let the girls bury her there. As Elaine waits underground for the girls to come and dig her out, she thinks to herself, "When I was put into the hole I knew it was a game; now I know it is not one. I feel sadness, a sense of betrayal. Then I feel darkness pressing down on me; then terror" (116). Although the girls do finally remove Elaine from the hole, Cordelia's reign of torture continues. Specifically, when walking on a bridge across a ravine one winter day, Cordelia throws Elaine's hat over the side railing. The girl then demands that Elaine go get the hat, while her three friends wait at the top of the hill for her. However, when Elaine falls through the ice as at the bottom of the ravine, Cordelia encourages the other girls to run, and they all leave Elaine to freeze to death. The attempt to rid the world of the body she sees as representative of her own corporeal inadequacies highlights the fact that for Cordelia, who has been defined by her bodily deficiencies, the adversarial transference with Elaine is physical by cultural default.[5] Because Cordelia has

externalized those failures onto Elaine, by extinguishing Elaine, Cordelia believes that she can expunge the undesirable characteristics of the self that threaten her sense of appropriate feminine identity and self-cohesion. As Atwood highlights, when girls learn to understand themselves through the physical body, and fluid adolescent self-boundaries make the embodied failures easy to displace, the policing and even extinguishing of negative traits translates into violent attacks on the bodies of other girls. For Cordelia, appropriate self-definition as an adolescent woman ultimately requires her to literally bury or kill off the truncated and inferior version of herself embodied by Elaine Risley. As Hite notes, the girl is impelled by a need to ward "off any sense that the self might be implied in the other" (144).

As Cordelia's sense of self extends beyond the physical boundaries of her own body, Elaine, in turn, seems to engage in "self-erasure" in her misguided efforts to be the person her friend desires (Hite 143). As Brown points out, under the feminine requirement that good girls be able to make and keep friends, "some girls struggle to improve, to adapt, to become shape-shifters, relational chameleons" (81). Indeed, as Elaine reflects on being buried alive and being left for dead in a ravine, she can recall nothing but a "vague horror" and a general "sense of shame and failure": "When I remember back to this time…I can't really remember what happened to me…I can't remember what I felt…there's nothing; just a receding darkness" (116). Because Elaine repeatedly describes her adolescence as a void in which she has only vague feelings of failure, shame, and inadequacy, Lane's assertion that "Cordelia is able to transfer her feelings of nothingness to Elaine" seems plausible. Indeed, as Elaine begins to own

Cordelia's feelings of nothingness, "the two characters begin to act as one" (Lane 3), as Elaine feels that she deserves to die as much as Cordelia wishes it on her:

> I think about eating the deadly nightshade berries from the bushes beside the path. I think about drinking the Javex out of the skull and crossbones bottle in the laundry room, about jumping off the bridge, smashing down there like a pumpkin, half of an eye, half of a grin. I would come apart like that, I would be dead, like the dead people. (173)

For Elaine and Cordelia, the entrance into adolescence creates the physical and emotional fluidity necessary for Cordelia to externalize and exchange the feelings of inadequacy and personal failure that are part of twentieth century feminine subjectivity. And, as Goldblatt notes, even though Cordelia forces Elaine into an adversarial position to assert her own difference and complete subjectivity, Cordelia's reign of torture is in fact circular: "first, as victim susceptible because she is a woman subject to her society's values; and second, as a woman only able to command other women, namely herself. Her sphere is so small she becomes both victim and victimizer" (278).

Never is this physical slippage more overt than when Elaine details her fears about a comic book the two girls read together. The comic details the life of twins, one pretty and one with a serious burn covering half of her face. Although the twin with the burned face hangs herself out of jealousy, her spirit remains in the mirror and eventually "gets out of the mirror and into the pretty one's body" (233). After reading this comic, Elaine can't sleep at night: "I'm afraid I'll find out that there's someone else trapped inside my body; I'll look into the bathroom mirror and see the face of another girl, someone who looks like me but has half of her face darkened the skin burned away"

(234). In this fearful admission, Elaine acknowledges the physical transference that has taken place between herself and Cordelia. The "half" of Cordelia that is "darkened" and undesirable has been displaced onto Elaine. As a result, Elaine faces this abject part of Cordelia, trapped inside her own self image, every time she sees her reflection in the mirror. As an adult, Elaine recreates this comic in a painting, inserting herself and Cordelia into the narrative in place of the twins, yet the artist is still haunted by the physical fluidity between these two adolescent bodies: "Cordelia is afraid of me, in this picture. I am afraid of Cordelia. I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia. I'm afraid of being Cordelia" (249). For both of these girls, the fear of feminine inadequacy is compounded by the knowledge that their flaws can be externalized and exchanged across the porous boundaries of adolescent identity. Each girl fears that she will be the one who is burned, scarred, and abjected.

Just as Atwood blames these fluid adolescent boundaries for the displacement of Cordelia's feminine flaws, she ends this reign of terror by describing Elaine—after being resurrected from the pneumonia that resulted from the icy ravine—as being no longer open or adaptable: "I am happy as a clam: hardshelled, firmly closed" (221). As Goldblatt points out, this near-death experience is the push Elaine needs to "seal herself from further outrage and invasion" by Cordelia (280). After her recovery, Elaine reports feeling rigid and closed off: "There's something hard in me, crystalline, a kernel of glass…There was never anything about me that needed to be improved. It was always a game, and I have been fooled. I have been stupid. My anger is as much at myself as at them…They are not my best friends or even my friends" (213-214). Although this anger, which fuels a definitive sense of closed-off self-cohesion, is a protective barrier from the

girlhood cruelties of Cordelia, Grace, and Carol, this same boundary prevents Elaine from having any future meaningful relationships with other women.

Atwood demonstrates Elaine's aversion to other women when the adult artist encounters other female artists. During these interactions, Elaine is visibly uncomfortable, acknowledging that "Sisterhood is a difficult concept for me…brotherhood is not" (375). Despite this discomfort, Elaine achieves much of her artistic success by mistakenly being viewed as a feminist painter—painting grotesque and abject female bodies in stances critics determine are both proud and unapologetic. Still, she feels uncomfortable with this label and only participates in feminist organizations out of a sense of obligation. Truthfully, Elaine loathes these all-women meetings, as they bring back the fears of her childhood torment:

> I don't say much, I am awkward and uncertain, because whatever I do say might be the wrong thing. I have not paid my dues. I have no right to speak. I feel as if I am standing outside a closed door while decisions are being made, disapproving judgments are being pronounced, inside, about me. At the same time I want to please. (375)

Elaine's discomfort with other women causes her to imagine that female reviewers who praise her work are also silently critiquing her—"What I hear is what she isn't saying. Your clothes are stupid. Your art is crap" (97). In addition, the artist often openly denigrates feminism, as she sees feminists as just another group of women who are trying to control her: "I am not Woman, and I'm damned if I'll be shoved into it. *Bitch*, I think silently. *Don't boss me around*" (414). Brown describes responses like Elaine's as "relational scar tissue" (187), which causes the adult artist to mistrust other women and to

replicate the same female depreciation and duplicity that have become the status quo definition of stereotypical female friendships

Instead of representing feminist declarations of female solidarity, the repetitive images of grotesque females that make up Elaine's artistic collection are actually carefully executed illustrations of revenge. According to Sizemore, "as a painter Elaine is no longer the object of a gaze but one who sees" (78), which ultimately facilitates the switching of roles for Elaine and Cordelia as victim and victimizer: "[I]n some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when" (249). In addition to her newfound power as a famous painter, this role reversal first began when Cordelia summoned Elaine to a rest home for adults who can no longer take care of themselves. During the visit, an overweight and heavily drugged Cordelia begs a now-successful adult Elaine to get her out of the home; however, Elaine refuses, leaving her there to die. Elaine's refusal to help Cordelia mirrors the former bully's own refusal to save Elaine from the icy ravine. Although this shift in the dynamics of their relationship alters the positions of power in which they find themselves, the exchange of roles also reopens the fluidity between the women's self-definition. After this encounter, Elaine paints and repaints replications of this same desperate fluidity—hatred mixed with affinity—that has been left unresolved between the two women. However, as long as the adult Elaine can only see Cordelia as a broken and truncated version of herself, an adversary whom she must declare her own self-definition against, the artist is doomed to occupy the same circular trappings of envy mixed with affinity that consumed Cordelia in girlhood.

Only after returning to Toronto for a retrospective show of her artwork is Elaine forced to organize and reflect on her paintings as a complete collection of her self-

evolution. Hung on a gallery wall in the city of her childhood torture, Elaine's "paintings allow her to consolidate her vision and see her self—which was fragmented and scattered by Cordelia's abuse" (Rogers 160). Lane describes Elaine's retrospective as "the final process of recollection and re-formation of identity" for the female artist, in which she develops "…a new language of sorts. This language is one that supports Elaine's unique identity, in which she views Cordelia as a separate entity (4-5). The grotesque bodies of the women that line the gallery wall are artifacts of a painful past; however, in viewing this complete series Elaine is able to move past her pain and see the power that can be derived from these abject bodies. In this instance, she gives up defining herself against her tormentors and uses this legacy of female bodies to derive a composite self that remains open, even with the knowledge of past wounds. With this new outlook, Elaine returns to the icy ravine of her youth, thinking about the paintings that have "giv[en] shape to the hate she fe[lt] as a child" (Sharpe 6), while also imagining the face of a nine-year-old Cordelia:

> I know she's looking at me, the lopsided mouth smiling a little, the face closed and defiant. There is the same shame, the same sick feeling in my body, the same knowledge of my own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia's; as they always were…I reach out my arms to her, bend down, hands open to show I have no weapon. *It's all right*, I say to her. (459)

In this simple act of acknowledging the transference of inadequacies between the two girls, understanding the motivation for this envy laced with violence, Elaine is able to

reconstitute herself outside of Cordelia's image and forgive her childhood tormentor. Ingersoll describes this artistic transformation well, explaining that "having completed this retrospective of her life and given birth to herself, Elaine can acknowledge the separateness of her 'daughters'—both the girl she was and Cordelia as her 'other'" (26). Not only do these paintings represent the birth of Elaine and Cordelia as separate from the truncated and inferior version of Cordelia's own fragmented sense of self, but they also become Atwood's artistic intervention into the definition of successful female selfhood. As Wyatt points out, Elaine's artistic creations become the author's "attempt to bring envy, with its attendant violence, into the text of female friendship (59). Atwood's efforts, through Elaine's evolution, highlight the fact that feminist friendships have, to their detriment, failed to acknowledge the jealousy, competition, appropriation, and physical violence that women bring into relationships with other women.

Indeed, after Elaine separates herself from Cordelia and forgives the girl's cruelty, the artist begins to see and understand her own paintings more completely. As Elaine reflects on the mostly female audience who has come to her retrospective, she begins to realize that "the paintings she [has] creat[ed] as a dissident woman artist" have actually become "sites for communication between women" (Sharpe 1). Although Elaine is unable to "dismantle the patriarchal codes of her day," which created the competition and eventual damaging merger between herself and Cordelia, her art can "walk the spaces between the silent, and silencing, words," becoming an act of both self and community "vision and revision" (Sizemore 79, Hite 143). Specifically, this revision, in both Elaine's paintings and Atwood's novel as a whole, requires that envy and affinity be considered within the refashioning of female friendship and feminist communities. As Wyatt

highlights, "[F]eminist community can provide support to women on a realistic basis only when it acknowledges feelings of envy and ambivalence between women and learns to integrate them with women's desires to nurture and support each other" (59). Similarly, Hite calls Atwood's ideology a "…vision of alternative interrelations, in which women gaze at other women not for physical critique or appropriation, but instead for self-restoration (150).

Atwood affirms this claim, as after Elaine has constituted herself as separate from Cordelia, she longs for a different kind of merger with her one-time friend. On the plane ride home from Toronto, Elaine sees two older women, reveling in their intimate connection:

> They're rambunctious, they are full of beans; they're tough as thirteen, they're innocent and dirty, they don't give a hoot. Responsibilities have fallen away from them, obligations, old hates and grievances; now for a short while they can play again like children, but this time without the pain. (462)

While watching these elderly women laughing together, Elaine thinks back to Cordelia, contemplating what she would offer the woman if she saw her again: "I could give her something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from the outside. A reflection. This is part of herself I could give back to her. We were like twins in old fables, each of whom has been given half a key" (450). In this final admission, Elaine is not trying to retrace the boundaries of her individuality as separate from Cordelia. Instead, the adult wants a physical and emotional merger with her former friend, but on terms that acknowledge and forgive old grievances. Just as the girls Sula and Nel, Ephanie and Elena, and Enitan and Shari had, Elaine wants twinship, mutual

affinity, a restorative reflection: “This is what I miss Cordelia: not something that’s gone, but something that will never happen. Two old women giggling over their tea” (462).

June Deery has called Atwood’s novel a kind of bricolage, which merges “the personal and the abstract, the local and the cosmic” (483). I, too, think Atwood does the work of bricolage here, breaking apart stereotypical conceptions of female friendship and community only to later glue together the jagged elements of empathy and envy, violence and merger, friendship and rivalry, self and other. Sometimes this kind of revisionist artwork is sloppy, as the broken pieces of female selves do not always align perfectly or fit together as planned. These fragments have been mistaken for trash, abject elements, heaped together on the outskirts of polite society. However, Atwood’s novel asserts that this trash is charged with value. Despite competition and violence between women, the desire for merger, the desire to piece the “ugly” parts of ourselves together for support and restoration, remain both necessary and ever-present.

D. Maxine and the Nameless Girl in *The Woman Warrior*

Similar to Atwood’s narrative style, Kingston charts her own coming-of-age story through a nonlinear series of childhood recollections and contemporary imaginative revisions. Through “her memories of a Chinese American girlhood in California…spliced with myths and anecdotes told by her imposing and thoroughly Chinese mother,” Kingston details her feelings of dual outsidership, her oppression from both Chinese and American femininity, her intense desire for a sense of belonging, and her consuming sense of self-loathing (Homsher 93). In contrast to Atwood’s depiction of Elaine’s slow progression into a victim of girl-initiated violence, Kingston uses Maxine’s feelings of bi-

cultural bodily inadequacy, compounded with the physical changes of adolescence, as a catalyst for the Chinese-American girl's singular act of desperate horizontal violence. Like in Elaine's situation, this violent act leads to an illness, which eventually results in Maxine's rebirth as an adult who distrusts relationships with other women. Consequently, the adult Kingston must use her own artistic storytelling revisions to transform her self-loathing—which she has learned to externalize and generalize to all women—into a hybrid literary genre that acknowledges the leaky borders between self and other, ambivalence and empathy, and autobiography and fiction. Through what Wong calls a process of "imaginative reconstruction," Maxine must learn to rewrite female ambivalence and violence into a constructive narrative of female friendship and community, moving beyond the embodied mergers created by the violent cruelties of her youth (8).

Just like Atwood, Kingston begins her narrative of a young Maxine by detailing the protagonist's exclusion from mainstream society. "Straddling two cultures" since her birth, Maxine becomes aware that she is neither fully American, like the other children who populate her 1960s California classrooms, nor fully Chinese, like the extended family who occupy her home (Wang 23). As Wang notes, "she is constantly aware of the remoteness of ancestral China and her essential marginal status of exclusion and alienation in the American society" (23). Kingston demonstrates this outsider status in the home, particularly through Maxine's interactions with her mother. Specifically, when the girl presents a report card with straight A's to her parents, the older woman's nonplussed response and quick change of subject reminds Maxine that no matter how hard she tries to please, her "American life…[is] such a disappointment" (45).[6] As

Maxine's mother and father quickly dismiss her American successes as illegitimate or unimportant, Homsher notes that the girl becomes "part ghost in the eyes of [her] immigrant parents: part un-Chinese, unfamiliar, untraditional" (94).

Kingston continues to explore this "hyphenated selfhood" through the explicitly American context of Maxine's elementary school education (Feng 108). In class, the girl's initial hesitation when speaking English aloud makes teachers, and Maxine herself, mark her inability as both different and inadequate: "I did not speak and I felt bad each time that I did not speak… 'Louder' said the teacher, who scared the voice away again. The other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl" (166). Maxine's inability to force herself to read English aloud in front of her American peers causes her to receive a zero on an IQ test and to be "considered retarded by her American school teachers" (Cheung 165). Unlike Elaine, whose unusual upbringing marks her as exotic to her Canadian peers, Madsen notes that Maxine's difference from her classmates is more overt, as it is always visible: "[Her] crime is a crime of [racial] difference…which is located most explicitly on the body" (237).

Later, Madsen succinctly summarizes Maxine's bi-cultural outsidership, noting that "her subjectivity is precariously situated on the margin of both mainstream American society and emigrant Chinese culture. She is simultaneously inside and outside the cultures of her parents and her peers" (241). In contrast to Elaine, Maxine's difference is double-sided—clearly present in the visible markers of her ethnicity, which classifies her as different and inferior to her American classmates, and in her newly acquired American feminine affect, which keeps her partially separated from the culture of her Chinese parents. These consistent feelings of dual outsidership engender Maxine's keen desire for

acceptance and cultural belonging, both of which seem to be only partially within her reach.

As Kingston highlights, even before the protagonist reaches adolescence, Maxine's physical differences from both her peers and her parents force her to see her own body as the enemy, as it signifies the negative and painfully "visible signs of ethnicity and femininity" (Madsen 241). The corporeal legacies of femininity, passed down to her from both Chinese and American cultures, only exacerbate this negativity associated with her female body. Although the two cultures are vastly different, Maxine quickly learns that the key to appropriate femininity, or to cultural belonging, in both traditions stems from embodied sacrifice. Specifically, in her mother's version of Chinese tradition, images of sacrificed female bodies—of women suffering the painful agony of foot binding, of words being physically carved into village women's backs, of a now dead aunt who drowned herself after being found guilty of adultery, of a crazy woman who was stoned to death, and of Maxine's own tongue cutting as a young child—teach the young girl that the female body in Chinese tradition exists as a physical repository for a violent cultural history. Madsen notes this female punishment occurs most clearly in the story as Maxine's mother, Brave Orchard, tells her daughter about the Woman Warrior, who "literally embodies the sufferings of her sex. She is at once a sacrifice, weapon, and scapegoat; her body a catalogue of accusations and a record of crimes punished" (248).

Despite Brave Orchard's desire to instill traditional Chinese values in her children, she also passes on the painful gendered bias of this tradition. As Wong notes, "Unfortunately, for her [Brave Orchard's] daughters, however, women are at the bottom of the pecking order in traditional Chinese culture; even in America they are daily

reminded of their worthlessness" (6). Indeed, the most vocal supporter of this "antifemale prejudice" toward girl children is Maxine's great-grandfather, who stares across the table at his six female grandchildren and shouts, "'Maggots! Where are my grandsons? I want grandsons!' He pointed at each one of us, 'Maggot! Maggot! Maggot! Maggot! Maggot! Maggot!...Look at the maggots chew'' (Chueng 163, 191). Clearly, Maxine's embodied guilt and intense self-loathing directly stem from her girlhood in a traditional Chinese household: "Then I get bitter: no one supports me; I am not loved enough to be supported. That I am not a burden has to compensate for the sad envy when I look at women loved enough to be supported. Even now China wraps double binds around my feet" (48). The young girl's feelings of inadequate femininity, represented through the embodied restriction and sacrifice of bound feet, is only compounded when Maxine faces feelings of ethnic inferiority among her female American peers.

Rebelling against the binding traditions of Chinese culture, Maxine opts to instead make her life at school "American-normal," which requires her to discipline her body in a different way: "Walking erect (knees straight, toes pointed forward, not pigeon-toed, which is Chinese-feminine) and speaking in an inaudible voice, I have tried to turn myself into American-feminine" (11). However, despite these dogged efforts to meet the standards of American femininity,[7] Maxine's body ultimately betrays her, as "the soft-demure, doll-like image of the Chinese girl" seems to function as an inescapable stereotype during her youth (Wang 29). As Cheng notes, "the Asian American girl narrator's hatred of her femininity…is conditioned by her fear of her 'Chineseness'—that is, of femininity's inevitable racial-ethnic signification ("Melancholy" 74). Not only do the visible racial signifiers of Maxine's body prevent her from achieving the narrow ideal

of white female beauty, her inability to make her body perform in the appropriate way also limits her inclusion within American femininity. For instance, like most other Chinese girls her age, to rebel against the embarrassing, loudly spoken foreign language of her immigrant parents and to hide a voice that lays bare her own association with these Asian roots, Maxine remains silent in the classroom. However, regardless of the motivation to stay speechless—read here as a desire to assimilate with her American peers—this voicelessness confirms the stereotype of her difference for her classmates, validating their belief that all Chinese-American girls are "submissive and silent" (Wang 28).

Indeed, as Maxine remembers the embarrassment of her primary schooling, it becomes clear that not merely the students, but the teachers as well, see this inability to speak audible American English on cue as a racially embodied inadequacy:

> Once a year the teachers referred my sister and me to speech therapy…Some of us gave up, shook our heads and said nothing, not one word. Some of us could not even shake our heads. At times shaking my head no is more self-assertion that I can manage. Most of us eventually found some voice, however faltering. We invented an American-feminine speaking personality…. (172)

Through her struggle to speak English at an audible register and through her inability to hit a baseball during gym class, Maxine cannot force her body to perform in ways that would make her appear authentically American. However, this failed American-feminine performance aside, she cannot meet the narrow ideal of white femininity, as the racial-ethnic markers she carries physically cement her embodied difference. Indeed, in learning the strictures of American femininity, Maxine must simultaneously "incorporate and

encrypt both an impossible ideal and a denigrated self" (Cheng, "Melancholy" 72). Regardless of her efforts to follow either American or Chinese femininity, Maxine learns that being a successful woman requires embodied discipline and sacrifice. In turn, she also learns that this "dilemma cannot be solved by replacing one ideal with another" (Cheng, "Wounded Beauty" 198).

Although Atwood's Elaine and Kingston's Maxine both rely on emulating their feminine peers to gain belonging, the complication of Maxine's racial difference makes winning coveted white female friends nearly impossible. Instead, as Maxine reaches early adolescence, she feels resigned to befriend other Chinese girls who have a similar social rank. Just as Elaine needs Cordelia to ward off isolation, Maxine relies on this small group of Chinese-American girls to protect her from the loneliness of her difference, bonding "together to survive in the larger social world" (Apter and Josselson 20). However, despite the fact that Maxine and these other "girls are drawn powerfully to one another because they can see themselves in the other," this awareness simultaneously offers "both comfort and anxiety" (Apter and Josselson 20). Maxine's anxiety in regards to these friends stems from their combined classification as socially inferior subjects, compounding her own racial failure. Atwood presents these mixed feelings in Maxine's description of her relationship to another Chinese-American girl at school:

> She was older than I was and in my class for twelve years…She had no friends of her own but followed her sister everywhere, although people, and she herself probably thought I was her friend. I also followed her sister about, who was fairly normal…I hated the younger sister, the quiet one. (170-171)

In this passage, Maxine's conflicting feelings toward the girl become evident, as she describes their relationship, noting tangled feelings of affinity and hatred. Although Maxine clearly spends the better part of her twelve years of schooling with this quiet girl, the girl's stereotypical hushed Chinese affect engenders Maxine's anxiety concerning her own white feminine inadequacy. Maxine's own inability to speak standard English in part motivates these feelings, which appear each time she watches her silent counterpart unable to read aloud or carry on conversations with classmates. However, just as Elaine's desire to make and keep girlfriends offers her no choice outside of abusive female friendships, Maxine's desire to have friends similarly traps her within a friendship that compounds her social outsidership to white femininity. Indeed, as Maxine enters adolescence, the hyperawareness of her own racially marked body only causes this friendship to produce a more corporeally felt sense of anxiety.

Although, in *Cat's Eye* Cordelia's stories of the burgeoning female body's grotesqueries incite a watchful hyper-vigilance in Elaine, Maxine's mother's stories impart this same sense of bodily fear in her own daughter. Indeed, one of the first stories in Maxine's collection of narrative remembrances is Brave Orchard's retelling the story of her now dead sister-in-law. This woman, Maxine's aunt, lived alongside Brave Orchard in the same Chinese village. While both women were waiting for their husbands to send for them from the U.S., Maxine's aunt became pregnant by another man. Although the woman was most likely raped, the village raided her home and destroyed her belongings. As the woman knew people in the village would neither accept her child nor forgive her, she drowned herself and her baby in the communal well shortly after giving birth.

Brave Orchard tells Maxine this story upon the young girl's menarche, issuing both a warning and a threat to her now pubescent daughter: "Now that you have started to menstruate, what happened to her could happen to you. Don't humiliate us. You wouldn't like to be forgotten as if you had never been born" (5). As Madsen points out, "The aunt's story is told to Maxine when she reaches puberty in order to make her mistrust her new femininity and in particular, her feminine sexuality" (249). In turn, this story not only incites personal fear about the potential consequences of her changing body, but also fuels Maxine's obsessive shame over her embodied limitations and inadequacies. Just as with Atwood's adolescent protagonists, menstruation spells the beginning of an out-of-control feeling that compels Maxine to be hyper-vigilant in monitoring the leaky boundaries of her own body. Her vigilance must be constant, as an out-of-control female body ultimately means isolation from both the Chinese and American cultures she is trying to straddle.

Kingston displays Maxine's desire to be free of these repressive strictures of the body in her adolescent fantasies about the female Chinese warrior Fa Mu Lan, who openly "menstruates [and] defecates," in addition to stringing the umbilical cord of her baby up in the air as a proud flag of giving birth (Homsher 97). Unlike the story her mother tells of her no-name aunt, which highlights the female body as dangerous and unspeakably shameful, Maxine's fantasies make the abject functioning of the female body both legitimate and speakable. Like Elaine, however, Maxine's contradictory feelings, which result from the fear of shame elicited from her changing body and the desire to be free of these newly-imposed restrictions, create "conflicting impulses toward resistance and conformity" (Madsen 239). Ultimately, however, Maxine learns that

regardless of the imaginative fantasies that allow her temporary freedom from female bodily restraints, in order to achieve female identity in her waking life, both her American and Chinese feminine performances need improvement. This realization, compounded by her mother's talk story upon the protagonist's entrance into puberty, begins a cyclical campaign of embodied self-improvement and inevitable failure.

Whether her protagonist works toward appropriately Chinese or American femininity, Kingston locates Maxine's failure on the body, which each culture defines as wrong or inadequate in different ways. Specifically, Maxine's embodied failure, as it pertains to Chinese culture, is an inability to make her gender performance attractive to the opposite sex, which her sister does so well:

> My sister…was neat while I was messy, my hair tangled and dusty. My dirty hands broke things…Also there were adventurous people inside my head to whom I talked. With them I was frivolous and violent, orphaned. I was white and had red hair, and I rode a white horse…I picked my nose while I was cooking and serving. My clothes were wrinkled even though we owned a laundry. Indeed I was getting stranger everyday. (189-190)

In addition to her sloppy appearance and her clumsiness, Maxine cannot discipline her body to fit within the strictures of appropriate Chinese femininity because of a failure to hold her tongue. She uncontrollably questions her mother's stories and blames her family for her racial difference. Although Maxine knows that in Chinese culture, femininity means she has no right to question, she cannot resist and rails against, her mother: "I can't stand living here anymore. It's your fault I talk weird. The only reason I flunked kindergarten is because you couldn't teach me English, and you gave me a zero IQ"

(201). In response to this blame, Brave Orchard responds, screaming, "Who'd want to marry you anyway? Noisy. Talking like a duck. Disobedient. Messy" (202). After her mother's confirmation that Maxine has failed as a Chinese woman—claiming that she cannot attract a man and locating her body's inadequacy on her inability to keep clean and control her mouth—the girl sets out to improve her dress and the tone of her voice. Echoing Elaine's own adolescent efforts toward self-improvement, Maxine asserts "plans were urgently afoot to fix me up, to improve my voice" (192).

In order to successfully carry out her plans for self-improvement, Maxine trades in one cultural ideal for another, setting out to make her voice match the American ideal of the white body she imagines having in her daydreams. However, even in taking on an American feminine speaking persona, Maxine remains unable to shake the stereotypes that students use to identify her as different. Maxine fears having a traditional "flower stem neck,…soft cheeks," or a "China-doll haircut," as all of these characteristics carry the connotation of submissive Asian female and mark her body as different, as wrong (172, 176). To improve her embodied image, Maxine grows her hair long, so classmates will not see her "weak neck"; she learns to point her toes forward; and she makes every effort to speak softly, all in the service of making herself more "American-feminine" (11, 176). Cheng highlights the motivation for Maxine's desperate attempts at self-improvement as a kind of socially constructed hypochondria, derived from racism and chauvinism turned against the self: "If in the classic hypochondriac, we see a person endlessly preoccupied with his or her body's signification, its legitimacy, and the origins of its failure, then the assimilating racial-ethnic body can also be said to be

hypochondrical in that it is, too, a body continuously plagued by questions of its own authenticity and etiology" ("Melancholy" 68).

Although U.S. racism motivates Maxine's self-hatred, this racism is tinged with the chauvinism of classic American patriarchy, made evident through the ever-watchful male gaze. This gaze becomes most clear when Maxine reveals her motivation behind her efforts of self-improvement: "And all the time I was having to turn myself American feminine, or no dates" (47). Just as her embodied failure as a Chinese woman will prevent her from finding a mate, from being loved and supported by a man, she will also only achieve full American female subjectivity if she can entice the attention of the white heterosexual male gaze. As Shu points out, Maxine learns early on that "being a cheerleader and getting dates in U.S. culture and society is equivalent to bringing honor and glory to one's family and village in Chinese culture and society [through marriage]" (217). Unfortunately, despite her efforts at self-improvement, trying desperately to make her voice, her body, her gestures, and her affect more "American feminine," Maxine's body fails her, and she remains abject—partial, different, unwanted—in comparison to both cultures' ideals of female perfection.

Similar to Elaine and Cordelia's adolescence, Maxine's failure to live up to this patriarchal ideal of feminine perfection is policed not by the father himself, but by other women. Madsen confirms this system of female policing: "Women, it seems, have internalized these abusive values and, when they do direct this antifeminine aggression outwards, it is against other females" (244). Maxine, in particular, learns this female correction and degradation from her mother's talk stories that detail the punishment of women who fail to rise above their uncontrollable and shameful corporeality. Brave

Orchard details "crazy women" who bring on their villages' wrath by indulging the abject through acts of dancing or illicit sex. In turn, women of the community are at the forefront of these crazy women's punishments, inciting the verbal criticism, which eventually escalates to violence against the guilty party's out-of-control body. As Brave Orchard tells her daughter of the bloated, drowned body of her adulterous aunt and of the crazy woman the villagers warn and then stone to death, "a gestalt emerges in the young protagonist's world: those women who take pleasure in the world of the senses…who want to experience the fullness of their being, are considered improper…they are doomed to be martyrs of a lost cause" (Wong 10-11). As Wong confirms here, the boundaries of acceptable female bodies—including discussion, gestures, movement, and affect—are policed by other women who are oppressed by the same patriarchal ideals of appropriate femininity. These values create a social system of corrections women enact on one another; these are efforts at mutual self-improvement that protect women from the social isolation, and often death, which result from female bodies that refuse to stay within the bounds of acceptable femininity.

Moreover, just as Cordelia recycles the language of patriarchy to practice female policing on Elaine's body, women in Maxine's life also denigrate the position of girls and women through verbal criticism. In addition to the policing in her mother's talk stories, Maxine also finds herself subject to verbal correction. As a wealthy village woman comes into the family's laundromat, she hears Maxine's voice. Immediately, the woman turns to Brave Orchard: "'Improve that voice,' she had instructed my mother, 'or else you'll never marry her off'" (192). These insults that populate both Brave Orchard's stories and Maxine's own life force the girl to realize "words, more than anything else, are able to

embody realities. Women-hatred, self-loathing, misogyny, these are things that can be embodied in comprehensible images" (Madsen 249).

Maxine does not merely endure verbal critiquing of her female body from the surrounding Chinese community. Her American school teachers' similar chastisement of Maxine's inadequate voice highlight her embodied failure to meet the feminine standards of either culture. As Lim notes, this verbal violence is an indelible part of "the logic of assimilation and mainstreaming" (60). These blurry lines between Maxine's physical inadequacies—in regards to both U.S. and Chinese feminine perfection and as part of a legacy of the failed bodies of women in her mother's talk stories—make the girl's feminine failure an oppressive merger, which bind her to other women. This violent merger teaches Maxine to see herself as interchangeable with generations of failed women, both Chinese and Chinese-American, who have been subject to female verbal denigration and eventual bodily punishment: "I thought every house had to have its crazy woman or crazy girl, every village its idiot. Who would be It at our house? Probably me" (189).

However, like Cordelia, Maxine also learns to practice this kind of female policing to preserve and protect her own gender identity, displacing her own insecurities through the verbal denigration of a girl strikingly similar to herself. One day after school, Maxine encounters the quiet Chinese girl, who everyone has assumed is her best friend, in the womens' bathroom. Echoing the language of her mother's talk stories, the elderly Chinese women who came into her parent's laundromat, and her American teachers and classmates, Maxine speaks to the girl:

> And you, you are a plant. Do you know that? That's all you are if you don't talk. If you don't talk, you can't have a personality …You've got to let people know you have a personality and a brain. You think somebody is going to take care of you all your stupid life?...You think somebody's going to marry you, is that it? Well, you're not the type that gets dates, let alone gets married. Nobody's going to notice you…You're so dumb. Why do I waste my time on you? (180-181)

While this verbal assault continues, Maxine insists that she only issues these cruel critiques in the girl's best interest: "I'm trying to help you out…I'm doing this for your own good" (180-181). Just as her mother has taught her and just as Cordelia teaches Elaine, Maxine rationalizes her policing through the belief that an important aspect of adult female subjectivity is the required belief that all women need constant improvement. Consequently, Maxine rationalizes the mutual policing of other women's bodies as a kindness done in the service of one another's best interest, bringing the policed closer to the ultimate goal of feminine perfection. Ironically, in this instance when Maxine finally speaks at school, "she reproduces the cruelty, absolutism, and authoritarianism of oral culture in her behavior toward the most silent of Chinese girls" (Rabine 490).

However, as Maxine's verbal critique of this girl continues, Kingston blurs the clear delineation between speaking subject and victim. Directly following her realization that most of her sixth grade classmates see her as similar to the silent Chinese girl, as both are passive in sports and inaudible in the classroom, Maxine violently externalizes her own self-hatred in a degrading, stereotypical description of her Chinese American counterpart: "I hated her when she was the last chosen for the team and I, the last chosen

for my team. I hated her for her China doll hair cut. I hated her at music time for the wheezes that came out of her plastic flute" (173). Both Wang and Homsher note the self-splitting that occurs in this utterance, similarly claiming that Maxine, in her frustrated hatred, allows the silent Chinese girl to become a "surrogate self" (Wang 29) or a "partial image of herself…she wants to separate from and punish" (Homsher 95). Just as Cordelia displaces the inadequate characteristics of her own feminine gender performance onto Elaine's passive body, Maxine begins to displace the "broken" parts of her own feminine identity onto the silent Chinese girl through a "selective [verbal] process of inclusion and exclusion…[of] 'self'…[and] 'non-self'" (Lang 61). The parts of herself she sees as flawed—her inability to speak clear English, her lack of self-assertion, her decidedly Asian appearance—all become externalized and transferred onto the similar girl Maxine has been compared to for twelve years.

Not surprisingly, this process of separation and externalized personal criticism eventually results in physical violence, as Maxine displaces punishment of her own inadequate body onto her surrogate self: "I reached up and took the fatty part of her cheek, not dough, but meat, between my thumb and finger…[I] took a strand of hair. I pulled it…I could see her little white ears, like cutworms curled underneath" (176-177). As Maxine continues to twist the girl's cheek, pull the girl's hair, and shake the girl's shoulders, she repeats her disgust for her passive victim's embodied racial signifiers, comparing the nameless girl's body to worms and rancid meat. However, in this moment of violence, despite Maxine's lashing out against the submissive girl, it becomes clear that she is not fighting against a separate subject; instead she engages in an elaborate role play with the inadequate and abject elements of her own body. As a result of her own

embodied self-hatred, Maxine despises the silent girl's pristine and pore-less white cheeks because they are similar to her own; she despises the girl's China doll hair because it reminds her of her own. Most importantly, Maxine's hatred toward the girl's passive refusal to speak, even when being persecuted and tortured, exists only because she, too, often cannot muster the courage or self-possession to force her body to speak, to act.

In this scene, Maxine forces the girl to serve as a stand-in for her own socially abject and inescapable corporeality, as this adolescent sees an anxiety-producing authentic version of herself when she meets her silent friend's gaze. Confirming this anxiety, Cheng asserts, "What the narrator dreads in both the other girl and in herself is the ineluctable compliance of the visible: the roundness of the face, the black bangs, the shape of the nose, the fragility of the neck—what the narrator sees as the girl's vulnerability to Asian female stereotypes" ("Melancholy" 74). Consequently, Maxine's frustration with her own body's conformity to a stereotyped Asian female image explodes during this bathroom scene, creating a violent embodied slippage between herself and the silent girl. Cheng calls this slippage a "hypochondriacal circle of identification and disidentification" ("Melancholy" 74). It is no surprise that this transference of inappropriate or abject parts of oneself occurs in the women's bathroom of her school, as it is the location of "elimination of matter from the body," which is directly "associated with [the] female pollution and shame" that Maxine is trying to displace and expel (Smith 168).

Just as Cordelia chooses a naïve and trusting Elaine to function as an external representation of her "truncated and inferior self" (Bartky 24), Maxine selects the *more*

stereotypical Chinese girl to fill this role of self, friend, and adversary. As she violently pinches and shakes the girl, asserting her personal power and temporary authority, the victim says nothing, reacting only in silent sobs. Based on the girl's lack of response, she fulfills the self-psychological role of a developmental adversary for Maxine, as she, like Elaine, affirms "the self through acceptance of opposition, argument, and self-assertion without punitive retaliation" (Swartz 190). However, building on the traditional understanding of adversarial interactions, which are generally used to describe an individual's emotional declaration of a separate self, Maxine's obsession with the difference of the Asian female body expands the notion of a self-psychological adversary to include a self-definition that is inextricable from one's corporeality. In other words, because Maxine remains concerned with declaring the opposition or difference of her physical feminine performance from this anonymous girl—who has become the representative scapegoat of all that is "wrong" with Asian women from a traditional Western vantage point—this adversarial relationship must become a corporeally violent "not me" impulse. This violence, which ironically does create a direct physical merger between the two girls, which is sealed through abject bodily fluids, is actually Maxine's effort at a declaration of difference and of complete feminine subjectivity—"to claim herself without fear as a human being" (Wang 29). This status of female subjectivity can only be hers after she displaces the racialized physical indicators that have resigned Maxine and this anonymous girl to the same abject status, as non-subjects in both Chinese and American culture. By defining herself as an adversary to this girl, Maxine temporarily aligns herself with whiteness, and she achieves a fleeting subjecthood in opposition to her newly defined Asian other.

However, Maxine's desperate and violent attempts at difference ultimately only create a stronger physical merger between the two adolescent girls. Smith confirms this unwelcome fusion, explaining that the "fierceness with which she [Maxine] articulates her desire for difference only accentuates her actual identity with the nameless girl…An exaggerated representation of the perfect Chinese girl, this girl becomes the mirror image of Kingston herself, reflecting her own fears of insubstantiality and dumbness" (169). Like the oral legacies of their Chinese foremothers, the girls' bodies together, connected by racialized violence, have become the newest locations for the embodied sacrifices of both Chinese and American women. The divisive cultural line drawn down the middle of both girls' bodies—which they feel more acutely as their physical forms are in flux between childhood and adulthood, Chinese femininity and American femininity—is ironically also the motivation for the violent merger that makes both girls' bodies interchangeable in this bathroom scene. As Maxine holds her victim in her grasp, she watches the girl's mucous leak onto her hand while noting the joining of their tears: "Her sobs and my sobs were bouncing wildly off the tile, sometimes together, sometimes alternately" (181). This merger of abject fluid literally blurs the boundaries between one girl and the next, making Maxine and her adversary together function as one composite embodied sacrifice: a "combination of the polyphonic traces of the women that she [Kingston] has recorded" (Feng 113).

Kingston chronicles further slippage between the two girls when Maxine, and not her victim, becomes ill directly after the violent attack. Maxine's "mysterious illness" makes it seem as if her own body was the one that was violently kicked, punched, and pinched in the girls' bathroom (182). However, just as Elaine's illness allows the

Canadian adolescent the time and space to develop an identity no longer permeable to damaging connections with other women, Maxine, too, uses her illness to form an identity outside of the cultural expectations and racial stereotypes that incited her to violence. Specifically, this time away from her waking life provides a renewal or rebirth for Maxine that is similar to Elaine's. As Wang notes, "the pause from external activities reveals an inner unity; the loss of contact with the outer world is like a baptism, an immersion into the harmony of the spiritual realm, the space between old and new selves" (29). Maxine's reconstitution as a unified subject who has, to some extent, made peace with her conflicting sense of dual outsidership becomes evident after the girl seems to emerge as a tabula rasa post-sickness.

Not only does Kingston describe the adolescent's efforts to relearn how to speak and behave, but she also illustrates the difference with which the protagonist approaches the girl she once tortured: "But at school I had to figure out again how to talk. I met again the poor girl I had tormented. She had not changed. She wore the same clothes, hair cut, and manner as when we were in elementary school, no make-up on the pink and white face" (182). Upon seeing the girl after her return, Maxine does not feel the old sense of anger. Instead, the shift in Maxine's reaction allows her to acknowledge her mutual sense of ambivalence and empathy for the girl, who has experienced the same bi-cultural self-loathing as she has. Using the first person plural to detail their unity, Maxine empathizes with the girl, saying, "We have so many secrets to hold in" (182).

In this assertion of twinship, not adversarial difference, Maxine engages in her first act of revising the talk stories that have come to formulate the girls' composite identity. Just as Elaine describes herself and Cordelia's bond as two parts of one whole,

using the metaphor of twins in a fairy tale who have each been given half of the same key, Maxine joins her sense of self with the silent girl's identity through their mutual keeping of the same secret. Years after the initial violence, in an act of apology and renewal for both girls, Maxine rewrites her own ending to the girl's story. Instead of the harsh bathroom threats Maxine issued to the anonymous girl, saying she would never be loved, supported, or taken care of, the now adult Maxine reimagines the silent girl's future as one of love and support: "I was wrong about nobody taking care of her…She was supported. She was protected by her family" (182).

This written promise of support and protection not only functions as an apology to the girl she once tormented, but also becomes Maxine's personal assertion that she herself is worthy of the love and support of her family. Despite being trapped in partial subjecthood by both her cultural and gendered identity, Maxine's creative act, her written revision, which states that "She was supported…protected by her family," directly rewrites her own childhood fears: "[N]o one supports me; I am not loved enough to be supported" (182, 48). As an author who bridges both autobiography and fiction, Kingston has the ability to pick and choose the elements of her new narrative history. She embraces women like her no-name aunt who commits adultery, the crazy village woman who dances, the warrior woman with words carved in her back, the silent sobbing girl who is physically protected by her family, and herself as a violent adolescent, ultimately making room for a Chinese-American talk story that celebrates the abject female body as a way to acknowledge and move beyond woman hatred. As Madsen notes, Kingston names "the concept of 'woman-hatred', of generalizing a culturally determined self-

loathing to include hostility to all women…as one of the motives for her writing, through which she has been able to overcome her own woman-hatred" (249).

Consequently, scholars who have criticized Kingston for being historically inaccurate ultimately miss the point. Maxine's creative license as a writer allows her to invent a tenable subject position for the living, breathing, Chinese, American, and female body that is an indelible part of her sense of self. Indeed, Kingston herself asserts this creative artistry: "I continue to sort out what's just my childhood, just my imagination, just my family, just the village, just movies, just living" (205). Critically, this matrix is of her own creation—part imagination, part myth, part real life. However, Kingston locates this matrix of subjectivity, which reconnects multiple female bodies not through violence and sacrifice, but through the power to exist and to speak, in Maxine's own voice as a legitimate speaking subject. Just as Elaine's series of paintings reflect back a restorative gaze to females in the viewing audience, Maxine's series of talk stories provide flesh and blood subject status, a restorative subjectivity, and a mutual sense of acknowledgment to the Chinese American female "ghosts" that populate her history.

Indeed the pain at the back of Maxine's throat, the thing she describes as both "alive" and consuming her "bite by bite," is only released when she gives voice to a distinctive Chinese American female speaking subject (200). This voice is not simply the product of Maxine finally forcing her body to speak on cue, to act at her command. Instead, it represents a new kind of "composite self: she is the combination of the polyphonic traces of women that she has recorded. She herself becomes an intertextual accumulation of all women's stories" (Feng 113). This merger of female bodies does not derive from the horizontal violence on the margins of racialized and gendered self-hatred.

The imaginative revision of embodied sacrifice creates a community of women who are able to go "beyond the violent behavior and abusive language of the tyrant to truly become themselves; their murderous impulses give way to artistic acts" (Cheung 168). As the creator of this new history, Kingston, like Atwood, does the work of bricolage. Combining the stories of her Asian past with the waking life of her American present, Kingston pieces together a composite sense of embodied selfhood. This self not only embraces the traditional physical features of Chinese women, but it also embraces Kingston's "American successes" that she wears across her body as a protective "shawl" (52). It not only embraces the talk stories of her mother's generation, but also the revised "tales that sustain and affirm her [contemporary] Chinese American identity" (Cheung 169).

Importantly, the point of merger, the glue that holds these oppositional pieces together for Kingston, is what Homsher calls "felt comparison" (98). The fragmented parts of her own body, which were formerly hidden as shameful and unspeakable, become transparent points of connection in Kingston's new collection of talk stories. Kingston successfully merges the contradiction of her embodied Asian racial signifiers and her distinctly American living experience through the written evidence of her narrative. *Woman Warrior* creatively declares and holds together, in a single binding, an identity that Chinese and American society have continually tried to fragment and keep separate in order to preserve their respective cultural purity. However, Kingston's narrative erases her former invisibility, piecing together the fragments of American and Chinese, self and other, envy and affinity, rivalry and friendship, outsidership and

inclusion to construct a positive and authentic written reflection of her historical and contemporary composite selfhood.

E. Conclusion: Toward a Renewed Twinship

In Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, Elaine claims to have been saved from dying in the icy ravine by a vision of the Virgin Mary. Lying in the freezing water, Elaine describes her mythical savior's body in concrete physical terms: "Now she's quite close. I can see the white glimmer of her face…She holds out her arms to me... Inside her half-open cloak there's a glimpse of red. It's her heart, I think. It must have been her heart, on the outside of her body, glowing like neon, like coal" (Atwood 209). Similar to Elaine, an adolescent Maxine also envisions the body of a mythical savior, the warrior woman Fa Mu Lan, who she hopes will help translate her own hybrid, mixed identity into terms that will grant her acceptance in both American and Chinese cultures: "The swordswoman and I are not so dissimilar…What we have in common are the words on our backs…The reporting is the vengeance—not the beheading, not the gutting, but the words. And I have so many words—'chink' words and 'gook 'words too—that they do not fit on my skin" (Kingston 53).

Unable to find a restorative self-reflection in the women who populate their waking lives, both Elaine and Maxine spend much of their adulthoods looking to these childhood visions for both inspiration and healing. In particular, years after Atwood's Elaine has spent many summers to no avail searching different churches for a statue that resembles the Virgin Mary who saved her, she finally comes across a sculpture of the woman she remembers from her vision. In a small church in Mexico, the Virgin Mary

statue Elaine finds is also known as "the Virgin of lost things, [the] one who restored what was lost" (219). Like Fa Mu Lan, who triumphantly carries the words of the crimes committed against her village carved in her back, both of these mythical women point to the conscious awareness of physical grievances committed as the space in which healing can begin.

Now adults, in response to this call, the painter Elaine and the writer Maxine use these mythical women's bodies as muses to reflect upon their own fragmented pasts. Detailing the outsidership, the policing, and the self-hatred that prompted the horizontal violence, each artist makes transparent the relational scar tissue they have carried with them into adulthood. However, once complete, these artistic creations also supply each woman with a new styling of the flesh of her own creation—an embodied identity constructed with what has been lost. Both Atwood and Kingston's self-creations merge, in a single frame, the acknowledgement of both the animosity and kinship that has prevented the physical connections between girls and women to function as the restorative reflection of a mirror image to the self. Being ultimately forced to look to mythic women to provide this embodied restoration for their protagonists, both authors highlight this restorative physical merger as what has been lost between women in adolescence. However, both authors also find hope at the end of their novels through Elaine and Maxine's revisionist artwork—replacing the neat canvas that idealizes women's friendships with the work of bricolage, a new piecing together of the contradictory notions of nurture and violence, friend and adversary, to construct a multiple, polyphonic, composite female self. This composite self learns to rework a legacy of physical wounds as the point of future hope and lasting merger. Ultimately,

both authors charge all women readers to regain what we have lost: the ability to "play together as children, but this time without the pain" (Atwood 462).

Notes

[1] This chapter uses Paulo Freire's definition of horizontal violence. He uses the term to describe the internalized oppression that leads socially devalued individuals to violently enact their own self-hatred on those who have similar social status. Because both members are unimportant to society, this violence often goes unnoticed and is free from punishment. For a more complete definition of horizontal violence, see Freire.

[2] This chapter borrows Sandra Bartky's term "fashion-beauty matrix" to discuss the barrage of products and information presented to women that teach the gestures, aesthetic, and persona of ideal female beauty. See Bartky for a more comprehensive definition.

[3] For two good examples of contemporary feminist theorists who have argued that policing between girls and women is motivated by the limited number of rewards promised to those who achieve (or get the closest to achieving) ideal femininity, see Bartky and Brown.

[4] In section I, all quotations from Atwood's *Cat's Eye* will be identified only by page number.

[5] As Western culture identifies ideal femininity more and more with the perfect female body, girls' relationships with other girls become physical by cultural default.

[6] In section II, all quotations from Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* will be identified by page number.

[7] In this chapter and in Kingston's novel, the definition of "American femininity" relies on stereotypical descriptions of the slender white female body. For a more comprehensive explanation of this definition, see Bordo.

Conclusion

Defiling the Body: Toward an Ethics of Embodied Empathy

Primarily, this dissertation considers the implications of the body's ability to be dirty, to create pollution, and to revel in abject trash. In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas defines dirt "as matter out of place…Where there is dirt there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of [the]… ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements" (44). Dirt—be it toenail clippings, blood, bits of glass or paper, leftover food, or strands of hair—functions to separate order from disorder. Because the appearance of dirt disrupts the organized system of separations and boundaries necessary to uphold the "cherished classifications" that array our world, detritus must be vigilantly cleaned up, removed, so that order can be restored (Douglas 45). Within the carefully constructed organization of order and disorder, matter out of place is literally and figuratively hazardous: "This is the stage they [dirt and debris] are dangerous; their half-identity still clings to them and the clarity of the scene in which they obtrude is impaired by their presence" (Douglas 197). As a result, Douglas asserts that we wait impatiently for the long process of "pulverizing, dissolving and rotting," which evacuates dirt of all recognizable characteristics, as "it is unpleasant to poke about in the refuse to try to recover anything, for this revives identity" (197).

Just as dirt, in a more general context, functions to draw lines between order and disorder, the body's dirt (known throughout this dissertation as the abject elements and processes of corporeality) points to the separation of the body from its waste, the subject from the object, the inside from the outside. These seemingly clear divisions construct the illusory ideal of the body as static, whole, and impenetrable (Yeager 244). However, this ideal is structurally at its weakest when one is forced to consider the orifices of the

human body: "Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, feces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings, sweat" (Douglas 150). These marginal spaces, or the thresholds between the body and its by-products, highlight our own leaky physical boundaries, the porousness of the human body. Consequently, these orifices and their emissions are understood to be dirty, abject, and defiling: things an individual should ignore, disguise, and transcend in order to be understood as a bounded, singular subject.

The body and the measure of its success in fending off dirt and pollution come to represent, as Douglas points out, a "symbolic system…whose primary concern is ordering of a social hierarchy" (154). Within this social hierarchy, those who fail to deny, to be ashamed, or to rid themselves of their body's baseness are relegated to the status of social contaminant. They become classified as communal pollution so that the ordered boundaries of community and individual can be restored. To re-establish these borders, those who have allowed their body's dirt to cross socially tabooed lines are cast out to the community's margins. This practice of excommunication to restore social cleanliness and order is common to many contemporary women's novels. For example, Gunn Allen's Sister Mary Grace and Sister Claire, caught in the midst of an illicit lesbian affair in Ephanie's Catholic school, are removed from their posts. Similarly, in Morrison's *Sula*, Hannah Peace, is ostracized from the polite society of ladies in Medallion, Ohio, for casually exuding her body's sexuality. Moreover, in *The Bluest Eye* dark skinned and imaginatively blue-eyed Pecola Breedlove is forced to live "on the edge of town," surviving by picking through the trash heap on the community's outskirts (Morrison

205). These literary examples clearly highlight that refusing to conform to the borders of the clean, closed, and proper body come with high costs. However, as the previous chapters emphasize, despite the serious risks, many contemporary American female novelists create characters who insist on engaging with the abject. Crafting protagonists who not only acknowledge embodied dirt, but also use this dirt as a foundation for friendship and identity, Morrison, Gunn Allen, Atta, Douglas, Atwood, and Kingston use the blurring of dirty female bodies to suggest new patterns of self that rely on an ethics of embodied empathy.

Despite having arrived at this claim, I did not begin this project in search of systems of female empathy. I simply set out to examine how women's bodies inflected and informed friendships with other women. In rereading these novels with the body in mind, I began to perceive an unspoken system of physical imitation, exchange, and merger between female protagonists' bodies. Although the protagonists have different motivations for embodied exchange in individual novels, the constant physical transferences among women and their friends create a common pattern across the narratives: the blurring of individual bodies' borders. In each of these works, this confusion of embodied boundaries creates an often fleeting, but powerful, mutual self-in-relation, which functions outside of disembodied Western scripts of autonomy and individuality. These new constructions of physical female selfhood ignore rote conceptions of the singular self and signify both the potential for danger and creative power. Together in these novels, women in a state of physical merger find that they have the freedom to dirty, disrupt, and confuse old and oppressive boundaries of female selfhood, creating new patterns of self that are built on a mutual sharing of the common

materials that make up the physical body. However, they also frequently face the danger of reifying past scripts of ideal female identity through new associations with pollution and defilement—exploring increasingly violent avenues to exploit other women in order to fix a broken self-conception.

However, despite this looming danger, chapter one's bonds of twinship give adolescent girls a fleeting sense of creative power and freedom to erase or expand individual physical boundaries. During early adolescence, bonds of twinship promote physical exchanges and imitation, which are enacted to create a doubleness or likeness between adolescents. Specifically, Morrison's Sula and Nel "use each other to grow on," together becoming a two-throated, one eyed creature who dreams about thriving outside of the confines of their small town (52). This same twinship allows Gunn Allen's Ephanie and Elena to share a mutual sexual awakening, cemented in the shared sticky secretions between each other's legs. This blending of bodily fluid gives both girls newfound pleasure and efficacy in the world, as they began to know "themselves and their surroundings in terms of each other's eyes" (Gunn Allen 22). In contrast to the overlay of bodies or skin-to-skin touches Morrison and Gunn Allen convey, Atta creates a bond of mutual identity between Enitan and Sheri by detailing a series of agonizing physical parallels, as both girls simultaneously see blood on their inner thighs—one through her menarche and the other through rape—and are then forced to concurrently cleanse their bodies of this experience. However, despite a painful initiation into the bond of twinship, Enitan and Sheri reinvent themselves as embodied twins again in adulthood; their bodies revise their doubleness, outside of a shared female culpability for rape, to mutually provide for the care of a single girl child. For all of these friends in twinship, the

transposing of bodies and the refuse of sweat, blood, vomit, and breast milk provide the mortar for embodied selves that are neither one nor two. These doubled selves allow each adolescent to dream beyond the limited social scripts assigned to her body based on race, class, religion, and sexual orientation.

However, physical transferences between women do not always promote embodied freedom or equal physical exchanges between bodies. In the chapters addressing bonds of idealization and adversarial violence, the guise of friendship is used to hide physical exploitation, racial opposition, and violence between women. In efforts to compensate for or to completely transcend a perceived physical lack, women in these chapters co-opt the body parts of an idealized racial opposite or locate their violent self-hated on the bodies of their closest friends. Because both Douglas's Cornelia and Morrison's Pecola engage in asymmetrical exchanges for physical bulk and blue eyes—built on absolute oppositional racial binaries that assert white women are weak, yet beautiful, and black women are physically strong, yet unattractive—these bonds do not facilitate freedom or creative power. Instead, the transposing of bodies in these instances simply allows common twentieth-century racial stereotypes to persist.

Similarly, violent adversarial bonds also call for asymmetrical physical transferences between women, allowing one girl to displace and punish her own embodied failures by enacting violence on her "best" friend. For Atwood's adolescent protagonists, this adversarial transference is crafted through a series of physical tortures that Cordelia inflicts on Elaine, thus transferring her own embodied insecurities and failures onto her friend's eager to please body. In Kingston's novel, the violence between Maxine and the no-named girl who she confronts in the bathroom is even more direct. In

a fury of pinching, hair pulling, and mixed tears, Maxine externalizes and punishes characteristics of her own Chinese-American body by terrorizing a girl who looks and acts like her. Like exchanges motivated by idealization, adversarial violence does not re-imagine bonds between women; it instead uses new and increasingly physical ways to reify old scripts of female friendships as two-faced, catty, and mired in backhanded aggression.

In these problematic bonds, girls and women temporarily transpose bodies not in an effort to imagine, expand, or recreate new borders and scripts of self-construction. Instead, they simply find novel ways of adhering to the social process of restoring order by covering over or displacing their bodies' dirt. However, despite these initial asymmetrical exchanges in the novels, Morrison, Douglas, Atwood, and Kingston still suggest that the abject elements of the female body ultimately have the power to equalize experience and bridge differences among women. To this end, Cornelia and Tweet merge again at the end of Douglas's narrative over a strand of hair and a mutual acknowledgement of menstrual blood. Pecola is restored from the margins by Claudia McTeer's re-imagination of the girl's life-giving womb. Elaine safely merges with Cordelia once more by recreating their conjoining in the series of grotesque female figures the artist paints as an adult. And, Maxine restores her embodied connection with the no-named girl by making room for their merged tears and mutual self-hatred in her talk-stories.

In the authors' revisions to their protagonists embodied bonds, re-imagined mergers are no longer about fixing the individual body, broken by social narratives and regulations that lodge it within scripts of embodied failure and shame. Instead these

women learn to intermittently walk between divisions of class, race, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity—presented to each as reasons to separate, to individuate, and to create autonomous singularity—in order to make physical connections based on shared components, by-products, and excesses of the female body. In these cases, the body's dirt becomes the ultimate equalizer, as physical exchanges of the abject temporarily disrupt the dividing lines that separate black from white, Hausa from Yoruba, Native from Anglo, Christian from Muslim, poor from rich, deviant from proper, clean from dirty, and self from other. The equally shared blurring of individual distinctions of physical selves gives each protagonist a renewed sense of pleasure and agency, as girls become women and begin to see themselves through "each other's eyes" (Gunn Allen 22).

Although not all embodied bonds in the novels are worth emulating, each author considered here proposes that a key component of female coming-of-age narratives requires girls and women to defile the boundaries between their bodies to ultimately evolve into empathetic selves-in-relation. These new patterns of selfhood are created through the sharing of bodies, which are dirty, "riddled with holes, beset with…incompleteness and excess" (Yeager 248). Specifically, each of these authors suggests that before this bodily dirt becomes indistinguishable debris, women can use the creative power of what Douglas calls its "half-identity" (197) to forge new conceptions of self, friendship, and empathy. Using this half-identity, when the abject elements of the body are still recognizable as being part of the other, women willingly pollute individual embodiment and traditional self-conceptions by trading blood, sweat, tears, and vomit. By exchanging these abject elements with one another, the boundaries that distinguish one body from the next are blurred, mixed, blended, and mutual. This personal evolution

through literal and metaphorical self-expansion exists in a space outside of a singular selfhood defined in opposition to others—oppositions that have become rife with discriminations derived from difference.

Instead, these mutual selves use the porous thresholds of the body as inlets into an ethics of embodied empathy. Acknowledging the common dirt of their bodies, which is always already being expelled and exchanged, these protagonists are able to revive the half-identity of the other's refuse on and inside of themselves. In this exchange, dirt literally invades order, and the other is indistinguishably physically enmeshed with the self. By beginning with this common embodied connection, based on the shared "undignified, nonpoetic, daily attributes of existence," each of these contemporary authors crafts the space for empathy that begins and ends with the body (Grosz, *Volatile* 194). In contrast to reflecting and sustaining the current social hierarchy, creative embodied exchanges can dirty distinctions by crafting a shared vulnerability through the porous, open body. This mutual physical vulnerability underlies an ethics of embodied empathy, creating new definitions of self that require an intimate understanding of the other. Indeed, only when bound to one another, do Morrison, Gunn Allen, Atta, Douglas, Atwood, and Kingston's female protagonists run, dance, write, dream, paint, and laugh themselves into achieving pleasure, agency, and efficacy in the surrounding world.

If empathy is the process by which we try to understand one another's inner lives, an ethics of embodied empathy requires us to acknowledge that our bodies are "never alone or unique but always double, mutual, mixed with their environments" and with each other (Yeager 224). After the abject elements of our bodies serve to equalize and expose our shared vulnerability, we each become open to friendships and communities

that use what Craig Womack calls "empathetic imagination" (396). Refusing to simply erase difference, this embodied connection allows us to empathize with embodied differences—using the by-products of the body to imagine new selves-in-relation that, when merged, work to heal damaging social narratives of self, friendship, beauty, strength, race, and the body, which have until now created chasms between women.

Despite this utopic final vision, risks are still present. Through the sacrificial bodies that populate these novels (Pecola, Cordelia, Sula, Sister Claire, and Maxine's no-named Aunt) one can easily see the high cost for declaring a mutual self in opposition to patriarchal scripts of autonomy and individuality. However, these contemporary American female novelists charge the sacrificial bodies in their narratives, which themselves have become dirt, refuse, abject trash, with creative power. In their state of "half-identity," these bodies signify female corporeality as a fundamental site of critical engagement in contemporary women's novels—dictating situations of varying political projects, freedoms, assumptions, and beliefs of differently embodied protagonists—while also acknowledging the central humanizing aspect of the female body across lines of race, class, sexuality, and region. These bodies signify a new pattern, a new language, a new system of understanding women's experience: "For the measure of her life, of all their lives, was discovering what she, what they, were made of. What she, they, could do. And what consequences their doing created, and what they would create of these" (Gunn Allen 212).

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