

ABSTRACT

SANDERS, LARONDA. Power Benighted or Souls Uplifted: Mother-Daughter Relationships in *The Bluest Eye*, *Corregidora*, and *The View from Here*. (Under the direction of Sheila Smith-McKoy).

This work examines the extent of African American maternal power and the effect of that power on mother-daughter relationships. The term Black matriarch, developed and perpetuated by white society, defines Black women as neglectful mothers and emasculating wives thereby ignoring the absence of actual power in the political, economic, and social realms that Black women have. Acceptance of this matriarchal fallacy leads mothers to embrace facades of power that negatively impact their own and their daughters' psychological development. Using Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Gayle Jones' *Corregidora*, and Brian Keith Jackson's *The View From Here*, this study examines how the presence or absence of maternal power can either foster or hinder feminine growth.

Because of the dangers posed by patriarchal structure and white hegemony, Black mothers need to fortify their daughters through their matriline, which is a nurturing and supportive network of maternal figures. This thesis further explores the power that the matriline accords Black mothers. Morrison illustrates the repercussions of helplessness and false power, as a ruptured matriline leaves both mothers and daughters vulnerable to the white gaze. From a different perspective, Jones exposes the dangers of a matriline that allows traumatic history to deprive future generations of their individuality. Jackson reveals how the inadvertent internalization of patriarchy can overshadow actual economic, social, and matrilineal power. Each of these novels highlight the extent of matrilineal power, which suggest a degree of influence that justifies the term matriarch. If positive and flexible, the matriline is the most salient protection of Black womanhood and Black girlhood. This study determines that the matriline shaped by mothers, other-mothers, and the women who are imprinted by it—is the most significant legacy of matriarchal power.

**POWER BENIGHTED OR SOULS UPLIFTED: MOTHER-DAUGHTER
RELATIONSHIPS IN *THE BLUEST EYE*, *CORREGIDORA*, AND *THE VIEW FROM
HERE***

by
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DEDICATION

To My Mothers and Other-mothers:

Mama, I have always remembered “Can’t never could and Couldn’t got the hell beat out of em!” This along with everything else you have taught me, both consciously and unconsciously, through your childhood stories, lectures, conversations and example—I remember and they continue to shape me.

KeeKee, though I am no longer the little girl following you and your friends around, I remember you taking care of me and spending time with me. As a child I wanted to be just like you. As an adult I am happy to be your sister.

Booketta, five hours never felt so close. You are my friend and my confidant. You keep me in touch with our oh so familiar world. Without you there to listen, fuss, or share, I would be lost.

Abria and LaBrea, you two make me remember—remember what I was like at your age and examine who I was and who I have become. I need for your two to also remember. Remember your matriline—GRANDMA, Nanny, Grandma Katherine, Grandma Lottie, Fat Ma, Aunt Betty Jean, Aunt Georgia Lee, Aunt Mattie, Kim, Deb, Ida Mae, Jackie, Sabrina, Mamie, KeeKee, and me. This group of women is the foundation from which you arise. Each of these women host both flaws and brilliance. RESPECT them and embrace their wisdom, making it your own.

BIOGRAPHY

LaRonda Meeshay Sanders was born on May 28, 1982 in Greenwood, South Carolina. The youngest child of Ronald Donaldson and Dianna Sanders-Donaldson, she took a special interest in history and language. She entered Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina in the fall of 2000. Pursuing a bachelor's degree in English, Winthrop afforded her the opportunity to pursue an Honors degree, through which she completed a 78 page thesis, entitled "The Cost of Conformity," that focuses on Booker T. Washington's and W. E. B. Dubois' distinct methods of assimilation as reflected in African American Literature.

LaRonda graduated Magna Cum Laude in May of 2004, from Winthrop, with an Honors Bachelors Degree in English. In the fall of that same year, she entered North Carolina State University, pursuing a Masters Degree in English and American Literature. In the fall of 2006, LaRonda plans to enter a Ph.D program concentrating on African American Literature and Nineteenth Century American Literature. Her ultimate goal is to teach literature on the college level.

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Introduction

Everything's a metaphor, some wise
guy said, and his woman nodded, wisely.
Why was this such a discovery
to him? Why did history
happen only on the outside?
She'd watched an embryo track an arc
across her swollen belly from the inside
and knew she'd best
think *knee, not tumor or burrowing mole*, lest
it emerge a monster. Each craving marks
the soul: splashed white upon a temple the dish
of ice cream, coveted, broken in a wink,
or the pickle duplicated just behind the ear. *Every wish
will find its symbol*, the woman thinks.
"History"
Rita Dove

The term *mother* is very powerful—it is a term ripe with ambiguities, complexities, and with both biological and emotional significance. As Rita Dove notes in "History" mothers are often loving and nurturing; however, mothers can also feel frustrated and disempowered. Furthermore, the maternal subject's longing for symbolic meaning and greater understanding often underscores her acquiescence to a less than satisfying life and the necessity that she endure all hardships. All too often mothers have to accept life's limitations in order to provide a nurturing home for their families. The motherhood role takes on different dimensions in the Black community. The conventional image of Black motherhood, perpetuated by white patriarchal social structures, requires each Black woman to find ways to define herself within the limits of being a devoted wife and mother.

As early as 1892, Dr. Anna Julia Cooper, early African American scholar and activist, argued in her essay "Womanhood a Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of a Race," that "the fundamental agency under God in the regeneration, the retraining of the race, as well as the ground work and starting point of its progress upward, must be the Black

woman” (643).¹ Cooper’s work was not limited to mothers; however, her address to mothers centered on the responsibility to maintain and perpetuate moral rectitude within the home. Although her assertions are steeped in the confines of white domesticity, she insists “Only BLACK WOMEN can say ‘when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole *Negro race enters with me*’” (Cooper 644). Here, Cooper focuses on the often-untapped power of Black women. Despite Cooper’s contribution, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mark an era when Black female empowerment was overshadowed by the struggle for racial equality. In the struggle for civil rights, Black male leaders marginalized black women, asserting their right to establish a Black patriarchy. During this period, literature continued to explore the role of mothers in Black homes and communities. Works such as August Wilson’s *Fences*, Lorraine Hansberry’s *A Raisin in the Sun*, Ann Petry’s *The Street*, Alice Walker’s *Meridian* and Dorothy West’s *The Living is Easy* reveal the extent of maternal power—illuminating both its negative and positive implications.²

These challenges of motherhood are only complicated in the African American community, as women face racial limitations that can be just as confining as gender. Andrea O’Reilly elaborates noting, “In African-American culture motherhood is the pinnacle of womanhood. The emphasis on motherhood over wifedom and Black women’s role as

¹ Although Cooper is less known than her male counterparts, she was very active as an advocate for both women and African American rights.

² One of the major themes in this sub-genre is the absent mother. Works that engage this subject include Alice Walker’s *Meridian*, where the daughter of an emotionally distant mother fails to connect with her child and chooses to relinquish her maternal right in exchange for a longing to protect the Black community and Ann Petry’s *The Street*, which involves a young mother whose desire to provide a home for her son is impacted by the racist and sexist influence of her urban environment. In *The Living is Easy*, West, depicts a mother whose power over her family is both destructive to herself and to her children. There is a marked similarity between Walker’s *Meridian* and Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. While *Meridian* becomes the absent mother as she gives up her child, her inability to care for her son is the result of a ruptured matriline that her mother passes down. Like Pauline Breedlove, *Meridian*’s mother is present yet she fails to share the maternal gift—a positive matriline—which would have prepared her for motherhood.

economic provider means that the wife role . . . (as defined by white America's emphasis on domesticity) is less operative in the African-American community" (150). Thus, the virtuous Black mother has been a prevalent trope both within and without of the realm of African American literature. Trudier Harris affirms that African American females:

. . . were towers of strength against the degradation of slavery. They were towers of strength against the abuse of husbands and the demands of children. They were towers of strength in taking care of their families . . . And they formed the pillars that supported the Black churches that in turn demanded a tremendous strength from them . . . Black women were the spiritual as well as the physical healers, putting hearth, home and family back together after the tragedy of lynching, nursing daughters brutalized by rape, soothing children who were attacked when they tried to integrate Southern schools. Black women provided the bandages for the wounds, the solace for the stricken. We have applauded this strength—and certainly not without justification. (109)

As Harris notes, Black women have assumed those various roles, mothering both their own children and the community. As mothers, they have provided a sacred space of love that protects the vulnerable from the destructiveness of white hegemony and often they have contributed significantly to the fiscal well-being of the family. In the African American community, this immense responsibility places great significance on mother-daughter relationships. As burgeoning "towers of strength"—mothers of the community—the daughters who see this maternity "as the rite of passage into womanhood" look toward their mothers and other-mothers for support and guidance (Harris 109; O'Reilly 150). Thus, the

daughters—as apprentices to motherhood—are greatly affected by their mothers’ ability or inability to handle the challenges of life.

While the challenges of African American motherhood are undeniable, there is great debate over the extent of female power and its manifestations in the community. This celebration of Black motherhood, however, has reached “mythic” proportions, in that it yields both positive and problematic notions in both Black and white communities.

Accepting this “myth,” many Black mothers pretend they have power that is simply unavailable. There are both the outward manifestations of power, which as evidenced by patriarchal traditions consist of social, economic, and political control, as well as the often ignored power of the matriline. The matriline, as I define it, is the linkage of daughters to the lives, stories, and memories of mothers, foremothers, and other-mothers. These links nurture, guide, protect, and socially fortify daughters from the destructive influences of racism and patriarchy. Like biological mothers, other-mothers should serve as failsafes where the weak and vulnerable members of a community can find support and love. These other-mothers are part of an African American value system, which needs other-mothers who enable women to “combine child rearing, family employment, and social activism” (Hill 135). Yet, a lingering question remains: does a matriarchal system exist within the African American community? Although patriarchal power proscribes for many women matriarchal power, as measured by social, economic, and political influence, the matriline empowers in ways that the Black matriarchy cannot.

One of the most important works that addresses the issue of a Black matriarchy is Alice Walker’s “In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens.” In this work, Walker laments that “our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the

creative spark, the seed of the flower they themselves never hoped to see: or like a sealed letter they could not plainly read” (2435). Because of poverty and oppression, many African American women prior to the late twentieth century did not have opportunities to nourish artistic talent—left to make “[their] mark in the only materials [they] could afford, and in the only medium her position in society allowed” (Walker 2334). These mothers displayed their gifts in domestic arts and encouraged their daughter, both implicitly and explicitly to, as Mary Helen Washington puts it in “I Sign My Mother’s Name” to utilize “the authority of authorship” (147). These mothers were forced to work, often as domestics or agricultural workers, in order to help provide for their families, which limited their creative opportunities. While social barriers have historically repressed the gifts of African American women, their daughters are often free to create. These women become witnesses of their mother’s lives, absorbing maternal lessons that influence their lives. Washington illustrates this most adeptly as she examines the maternal relationships of authors Alice Walker, Dorothy West, and Paule Marshall. While these mother-daughter relationships are fertilized by both good and bad experiences, witnessing their mothers’ lives helped each woman develop her voice. bell hooks also describes her role as witness to her mother’s objectification and how her mother’s hardships effected her, in Marlon Riggs’ documentary *Black Is—Black Ain’t: A Personal Journey Through Black Identity*. All of these women pass on their foremothers’ matriline through the written word. Thus, the mother bequeaths the power of creativity and awareness of the world through the matriline and the daughters witness, through art, on their mother’s behalf.

This power is not simply limited to artistic mediums. In a more practical sense, these strong women gave their daughters the ability to see and understand their community. The

medium of this strength is the nurturing, both mental and physical, of the family through stories, folklore, and images of perseverance. Madhu Dubey, in her article entitled “Gayle Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition,” contends that “The figure of the mother or the maternal ancestor is insistently aligned with the Black oral and folk tradition, which is celebrated as a cultural origin, a medium of temporal synthesis and continuity, and the basis of an alternative construction of Black feminine history and tradition” (248). Throughout these tales and images, women establish and direct the structure of the narratives, utilizing and emphasizing the power of their voice (Washington 150). These tales also provide a space where “The community is seen, as women see it, from within, where its inner workings, its logic, its rituals, make up a world . . . that is complete in itself” (Washington 150). These stories become part of the matriline, through which maternal figures share tales of endurance with their daughters. Like Alice Walker,” O’Reilly agrees that “Motherline stories, made available to daughters through the female oral tradition, reunite mothers and daughters and reconnect them to their motherline thus making possible the mother-daughter bond needed to effect change in the home and in the larger patriarchal culture” (146). Daughters must know the personal stories of their mothers in order to achieve self-actualization and to take their place in the community.

Moreover, in “I Come From a Long Line of Uppity Irate Black Women,” Andrea O’Reilly argues that motherhood empowers African American women, allowing daughters to become self-actualized through “maternal identification” (147). By nurturing their families and becoming “Other mothers,” supporting and caring for weaker members of the extended family or the greater community, Black mothers emerge as social activists (148-149). The elevated value of motherhood can be described as the matrifocality of African American

culture. Mothers have the responsibility to create a safe place where—shielded from the racist negativity of the outside world—a mother’s loves fortifies her children against the ravaging effects white hegemony, ensuring that they have sufficient self-esteem that protects against objectification. Subsequently, the mother’s nurturing and maintenance of a safe haven acts as political resistance (O’Reilly 150-151). As nurturers, Black mothers create a space where even as one of the most marginalized groups, they can dismantle the obstacles that racism and sexism establish.

Contrary to these positive assertions concerning the matriline and African American matriarchal structure, other scholars insist that the extent of female power within the Black community is curtailed by sexism, racism, and socio-economic status. Furthermore, these scholars recognize the development of the pervasive Black matriarchy theory as an erroneous and damaging social construction formed and perpetuated by the white patriarchy and internalized by white feminists and many members of the Black community. Much of the outcry against the matriarchy theory initially materialized in response to Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s 1965 report entitled “The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.” In this “study” Moynihan attempted to access and effectively address the challenges that African Americans faced in their efforts to achieve economic and social stability. Patricia Hill Collins articulates Moynihan’s thesis best in her book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, noting:

the Black matriarchy thesis argued that African-American women who failed to fulfill their traditional ‘womanly’ duties at home contributed to social problems in Black civil society. Spending too much time away from home, these working mothers ostensibly could not properly supervise their children

and thus were a major contributing factor to their children's failure at school.

As very aggressive, unfeminine women, Black matriarchs allegedly emasculate their lovers and husbands. These men, understandably, either deserted their partners or refused to marry the mothers of their children. (75)

Moynihan's insulting and misinformed argument continues to permeate society. Ignoring the economic imperative that Black females work outside of the homes and the American social and economic ills that contribute to Black men's inability to economically support families, this report essentially casts women as neglectful parents that induce impotence in males (hooks 75-77). In addition to reversing the male and female relationships, Hortense Spillers contends that "Under the Moynihan rule, 'ethnicity' itself identifies a total objectification of human and cultural motives— . . . the 'Negro Family,' by outright assertion, in a constant opposition of binary meaning . . . Moynihan's 'Families' are pure present and always tense . 'Ethnicity' in this case freezes in meaning, takes on constancy, assumes the look and affects of the Eternal" (66). Moynihan's report represents matriarchal tendencies as innate in Black women and validates racist notions of racial biological distinctions (Collins 77). Moynihan's matriarchs are static, stereotypical, objects. Thus, the title of matriarch potentially becomes another instrument of the white gaze, where the African American community internalizes the erroneous conceptions of black femininity, created and perpetuated by white society.

Although scholars such as bell hooks, Patricia Collins, and Shirley A. Hill are adverse to the classification of Black women as matriarchs, their reasoning is vastly different from that of Moynihan. They note that, the prerequisites for an African American matriarchy have never existed (72). hooks further argues that, "The term matriarch implies the existence of a social order in which women exercise social and political power, a state which in no way

resembles the condition of Black women or all women American society. The decisions that determine the way in which Black women must live their lives are made by others, usually white men” (hooks 72). As perhaps the most economically disadvantage group, simultaneously facing sexism and racism, Black women lack economic security, significant political influence, or absolute control of their bodies, due to the dependence of reproductive choice, in the case of unwanted pregnancies, on financial ability (hooks 72-74).

Furthermore, Hill, author of *Black Intimacies: A Gender Perspective On Families and Relationships*, rightly maintains that “while a sense of power, creativity, and authority may be engendered by the biological processes of bearing and breastfeeding children, the social role of mothering is demeaned by gender inequality and the general devaluation of women and unpaid labor” (131). Additionally hooks maintains that in homes where adult male authority figures are not present, mothers often designate an older male child, male family member, male member of the community, or a significant other to appropriate that role, exercising patriarchal authority (73). Thus, I submit that the influence of patriarchy is so great that maternal power is extremely limited and inherently internalized making the Black matriarchy ideal inoperative.

Moreover, Hill argues that the community of “Other Mothers,” touted as source of strength and position of authority for Black women, also “releases African American men from the responsibility of caring for children based on the belief that Black women can simply rely on each other” (137). Embracing the title of matriarchy creates ambiguities that place new pressure on mothers. “In essence,” argues Collins, “African-American women who must work encounter pressures to be submissive mammies in one setting, then are stigmatized again as matriarch for being strong figures in their own homes,” which ultimately

“erodes their self-confidence and ability to confront oppression” (78). Summarily, in regard to the matriarchal myth, hooks argues that “without a doubt, the false sense of power Black women are encouraged to feel allows us to think that we are not in need of social movements that would liberate us from sexist oppression. The sad irony is of course that Black women are often most victimized by the very sexism we refuse to collectively identify as an oppressive force” (81). Hence, many scholars question the actual power that women possess in the home. If the matriarchal theory is a façade, initiated by white society, which establishes and perpetuates the social and economic conditions that make it so, then mothers pass veiled helplessness on to their daughters.

Just how powerful are mothers? Both sides of the debate recognize the social and economic limitations of African American women. But, the questions remain: Is there a Black matriarchy? Furthermore, does a strong positive matriline constitute a matriarchy? Recognition of power or authority, whether constructive or destructive, greatly impacts mother-daughter relationships and influences the positive impact of the matriline. African American literature provides an illuminating look into how this debate is manifested in the lives of individuals. Maternity and the challenges of motherhood are common tropes in African American literature.

My focus in this project is to explore Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Gayle Jones’ *Corregidora*, and Brian Keith Jackson’s *The View for Here* as distinctive, yet undeniably connected examples of mother-daughter relationships. The presence of a maternal figure who is emotionally distant and unable to cultivate and pass on a positive matriline represents the deficiency of an essential element necessary for the psychological development of daughters. The ability of mothers to protect daughters from the destructive influences of the

white gaze and the male gaze is dependant upon their recognition of their access to power. If mothers accept the Black matriarch title, without actual political, economic, or social authority, façades of power may emerge that are both self destructive and damaging to the mental and physical health of daughters. However, the matriline exists as a legitimately positive source of power for mothers, if it is dynamic, flexible to generational contribution, and if it welcomes individuality.

More specifically, these three works each contain elements that directly relate to matriarchal fallacy debate. In chapter one, the discussion of *The Bluest Eye* will examine Morrison's portrait of the Breedlove mother-daughter bond and how Pauline's inheritance of a ruptured matriline impacts her connection with young Pecola. Pauline's ruptured matriline, as Morrison presents it, leaves her susceptible to the white gaze, which leads to her total devaluation of her daughter and internalization of racist ideology. The Breedlove mother-daughter relationship reveals the consequences of a cyclical ruptured matriline with great reverberations.

In contrast to the Breedlove ruptured matriline, an exploration of *Corregidora*, in chapter two, will reveal how the maternal imperative of "making generations," to which the women confine themselves affects Ursa and her mother's romantic relationships and sense of themselves. Jones' novel reveals how a matriline can be misappropriated and configured into an oppressive force that greatly limits the lives of mothers and daughters. This matriline objectifies Ursa and her mother Irene; they become mere tools to correct the systematic erasure of their foremothers. This novel also emphasizes the need for individuality within the matrilineal system. I submit that, as the women use orality and matrilineal memory to combat erasure, assert truth, and combat the patriarchal ideology, Jones demonstrates how

the Corregidora mother-daughter relationships inadvertently continue to be subject to patriarchy even as they struggle to overcome it.

Chapter three explores *The View From Here*, which examines the tension between Anna's strong matriline and her subjection to patriarchal social system. Jackson's portrait of Cynthia Anderson is rife with ambiguities. Mrs. Anderson assumes the role of positive nurturing matriarch, while she simultaneously embraces her deceased husband's patriarchal role. By having an unborn daughter narrate this novel, Jackson emphasizes the importance of passing down the matriline—protecting daughters against the dangers of patriarchy.

Thus, through this analysis of *The Bluest Eye*, *Corregidora*, and *The View From Here*, we can better understand how the presence or absence of power in the hands of mothers and the ability or inability of mothers to nurture and communicate the importance of the matriline influences daughters' ability to withstand the challenges of the world around them. Maternal adherence to the word as authority, in either its oral, biblical, or socially constructed forms also impacts their daughters' capacity to achieve self-actualization. Maternal power can have far reaching negative and positive effects. Hence, whether mothers are cognizant of this power, embracing it as a positive element of female development, or ignorant of it, her matriline, affects their and their daughters' sense of self.

Chapter I

And The Cycle Continues: Maternal Failure in *The Bluest Eye*

“Well, I had that baby—a boy—and after that got pregnant again with another one. But it wernt like I thought it was gone be. I loved them and all, I guess, but maybe it was having no money, or maybe it was Cholly, but they sure worried the life out of me.”

From *The Bluest Eye*
Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* presents a powerful and disconcerting image of the impact that African American mothers can have on the lives of their daughters. While the novel provides glimpses into the MacTeer mother-daughter relationships, its focus on Pauline Breedlove and her daughter, Pecola, validates critical assertions about the dangers of the myth of the Black matriarch and confirms, by its absence, the power of the matriline. The myth of the Black matriarch is the attributing of great authority, power, and influence to Black mothers who are socially, economically, and politically unable to exercise such power in their own lives or in the lives of their family and community.¹ This definition arose partially in response to the notion that Black matriarchs are “masculine,” neglectful mothers who emasculate Black men. It also addresses the tendency of Black women to embrace this theory of power, with all its positive connotations, even in the face of a repressive society that asserts their powerlessness. The damaging impact of the term matriarch, argues recent African American scholars, renders Black women powerless, without any constructive means to deal with gender and racial inequalities once they accept the fallacious claim of a strong Black matriarchy.² However, the matrifocality of the African American community

¹ While the term matriarch in itself implies power and authority, the powerlessness of African American women belies the veracity of a claim of a Black matriarchy. As hooks asserts, because the term matriarch is often equated with a usurpation of masculine roles, the illusion of power masks the matriarchs actual vulnerability.

² See bell hooks' discussion in *Aint I A Woman*, Patricia Collins' discussion in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, and Shirley A. Hill's *Black Intimacies: A Gender*

traditionally speaks to the power that Black mothers have within the domestic sphere of the community as nurturers and caretakers. These mothers may use the matriline to strengthen the community, to prepare children to survive, and to impact the challenges that Blacks face in America. I use the term matriline to refer to maternal personal narratives, memory and oral tales that mothers use to socially fortify Black children against racial, economic, and social inequalities. My focus in this chapter is the ways in which a ruptured matriline leads to displacement and self-deprecation. The importance of a positive matriline is particularly relevant in mother-daughter relationships because daughters will emerge as keepers of memory and “towers of strength” whom society traditionally charges with cultivating a positive sense of selfhood in the community through the matriline (Harris 109). Thus, the myth of the Black matriarch, the passing on of a ruptured matriline, and the absence of positive other-mothers culminate in an acceptance of a negative self-image and a desperate sense of loneliness for Morrison’s Pecola Breedlove.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison focuses on the dangers of powerlessness in her depiction of Black female characters who struggle against racial and sexual objectification. Because Pauline is never privy to a familial or communal valuing of the matriline, she is unable to pass the benefits down to her daughter. This disconnection from her perceived role in the community and her inability to love and value herself as an individual or as an African American isolates Pauline. Consequently, she accepts the false matriarchy premise, which leads to destructive shows of power to validate selfhood. Pecola also seeks alternative maternal connections and falls prey to the same racial and social dangers, dangers from which her mother’s sharing of a positive matriline could have protected her. Thus, this novel

Perspective On Families and Relationships in which they all argue that the embrace of the term matriarch accompanies an illusion of power and authority.

shows the negative impact of the Black matriarchal myth, while simultaneously representing the catastrophe that can result from a mother's incapacity or reluctance to socially fortify her daughters by gifting her a nurturing matriline.

The act of not privileging the matriline, as *The Bluest Eye* demonstrates, disarms African American daughters and exposes them to the dangers of a hostile society. By treating her daughter's loneliness with benign neglect, Pauline's mother fails to socially fortify her daughter; her failure results from passing along a ruptured matriline. The failure of Pauline's mother begins a cycle that will ultimately culminate in the demise of Pecola as a functional human being. Although Morrison does not deliver a clear picture of Pauline Breedlove's childhood nor of her relationship with her mother, it can be inferred that Mrs. Williams does not inculcate in her daughter a sense that she has an important place within the African American community. Marginalized by an injury to her foot at the age of two, Pauline grows up in the periphery, lame and disconnected. As a result of this injury, she is an outsider to her family for:

Slight as it was, this deformity explained for her many things that would have been otherwise incomprehensible: why she alone of all the children had no nickname; . . . why no one ever remarked on her food preferences. . . why she never felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged anyplace. Her general feelings of separateness and unworthiness she blamed on her foot. (Morrison 86)

In a behavior that strangely foreshadows her daughter Pecola's "owning" of the dandelions, who are uprooted as a consequence of their ugliness, because her possession of them "made her part of the world, and the world part of her" (Morrison 36), Pauline takes interest in

common everyday objects—arranging “jars on the shelves at canning, peach pits on the step, sticks, stones, leaves”—and withdraws into herself. Pauline never learns, by example, what her role should be as mother. As Barbara Turnage asserts, in her article “The Global Self-Esteem of an African-American Adolescent Female and Her Relationship with Her Mother,” a loving nurturing mother

signals to her daughter that she wishes to take an active role in her daughter’s life. She teaches her daughter . . . that she is worthy of love and respect, that she has the right to dream and accomplish her dreams, and that others’ opinion of her should be secondary (if at all) to her opinion of herself. For her daughter to achieve a positive global self-image, an African-American mother must not only verbally encourage her daughter, she must model the image of womanhood she wishes her daughter to obtain. (178)

By sharing a positive matriline, these good mothers empower their daughters, giving them a sense of self. Pauline’s mother fails to connect her to the matriline, which renders her unable to see how her own life narrative connects with her community or to recognize the importance of nurturing her daughter. The detachment that Pauline learns as a child, therefore, carries over to adulthood and informs her motherhood. She never expresses a fondness for any African American, except for Cholly to whom she totally relinquishes all power, which she attempts to reclaim later through violence. Mrs. Williams’s maternal failure makes Pauline emotionally ill-equipped to deal with the world. Pauline never gains a sense of self. Through Pauline, Morrison demonstrates how an abusive maternal cycle, which ignores the matriline, breeds vulnerability and isolation.

Just as Morrison leaves Pauline's mother absent from the narrative, there is also an erasure of positive other-mothers with whom Pauline could identify, which further highlights the rupture of the matriline. Instead of finding an accepting community of strong women, who bond together to help one another, thereby strengthening the community, the other-mothers—the community of women ostracize her. The potential other-mothers flout a traditional African American communal network of feminine support and cooperation (Hill 135). Their refusal of maternal sisterhood suggests a weakness in the community. After her marriage to Cholly, Pauline seeks to be accepted by potential other-mothers who are so absorbed in white society's dictates of what a woman should look like and sound like that they reject her. The absence of other-mothers in Pauline's life leaves her more vulnerable to sexist and racist threats against her sense of selfhood.

Consequently, Pauline becomes enamored with the movies and absorbs their messages of white hegemony. These films fill a void that a mother's instruction should occupy. As Pauline notes, “ ‘I'd move right on in them pictures. White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet’ ” and as Morrison supplements, “ ‘she was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen’ ” (Morrison 95). Pauline's absorption in the films directly affects the development of her hard exterior exacerbates her inability to connect with her daughter. Pauline becomes cold and distant, communicating with her daughter and the other members of her family with anger and violence, which reflects what bell hooks calls “delusions” of power that result from the embrace of the matriarchal myth (81). Simultaneously, she is loving and protective of her

white employers. The realization that she can never be the white women in the films and that she is powerless to change this—unmitigated by a strong matriline—allows her to totally divorce herself from nurturing her daughter, diminishing her own self esteem and damaging Pecola psychologically and socially, which I will discuss later in detail. Thus, the absence of both supportive mothers and other-mothers allows Pauline to fall prey to self-deprecation and destructive behavior, that begins with a voyeuristic odyssey into the white world.

Laura Mulvey's essay entitled "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," provides further insight into the effect of Pauline's voyeurism. In this article, which explores the objectification of women in films, Mulvey describes a process called narcissistic scopophilia, where men view movies and the heroic male characters as ideal images and erroneously begin to "misrecognize" the ideal as themselves (2184-2185). For men, Mulvey asserts, women are objects that perform, interrupting the plot that must then be neutralized by the ideal males (2186-2187). Narcissistic scopophilia is a phenomena that can just as easily occur in women as in men, especially women who embrace and inculcate white patriarchal values. Similarly, within *The Bluest Eye*, Pauline experiences what I define as illusory scopophilia in which she develops a connection with the disparate images of the white women in films. Pauline ingests these images until the precise moment when she loses a tooth and accepts her "ugliness" (Morrison 96). When the illusion is broken, she must process the message of total white superiority. Due to her illusory scopophilia, she no longer sees a positive connections between herself and the white world; the loss of her tooth, however, signals her rapid descent from contentment in a happy illusion to degraded Other. Just as the women in Mulvey's work are subject to the male gaze, Pauline must come to terms with the white gaze, which is now integral to the way that she sees herself. This racist objectification

designates African American as the Other who is outside of the life narrative. Furthermore, this burdensome white gaze intensifies the importance of nurturing mothers, as they are the first line of defense that Black selfhood has against “the gaze.” After Pauline’s initial illusion is shattered, she forges a new connection to the white world through her job. Thus, the absence of a strong material figure leaves her vulnerable to a destructive white gaze.

Morrison further seizes on the importance of a viable matriline as Pauline embraces white superiority. Ironically, Pauline’s acceptance of white hegemony coincides with her subjection to the abuses of the white gaze. Despite Pauline’s efforts to mimic the ideal of whiteness that she receives from the movies and from the assimilated African American other-mothers her efforts are doomed. After she loses her tooth, she reflects, “There I was, five months pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. Everything went then. Look like I just didn’t care no more after that. I let my hair go back, plaited it up, and settled down to just being ugly. I still went to the pictures, though, but the meanness got worse” (Morrison 96). Pauline sees African American life and culture through the eyes of white society, just as she sees herself through the eyes of white males and Black males, both of whom accept exclusionary notions of beauty.

In addition to internalizing the white gaze, the white gaze also subjects Pauline to underlying attitudes of apathy, disgust, delusions of innate superiority, and malice that also exists toward Blacks. Mrs. Breedlove’s employer exhibits this attitude as she demands: “you leave him, and then come back to work, and we’ll let bygones be bygones” and insists that “[Mrs. Breedlove] should have more respect, and it was [her] husband’s duty to pay the bills, and if he couldn’t [she] should leave and get alimony” (Morrison 94). She fires and refuses to pay her because she carelessly equates her economic, social, and marital options to

Pauline. Her employer presumes that she is teaching her a lesson of acceptable behavior. She faces this damaging gaze again as the doctor compares Black child delivery to horses foaling. While Pauline seems to recognize the constraint and impact of the white gaze, she ignores the damage of the male gaze. It is clear that Morrison works to establish that, as Missy Dehn Kubitschek suggests, the “movies’ message denigrates African American women’s importance, their beauty, and their worthiness to be loved” (Kubitschek 41). Pauline’s mother had failed to equip her with the mechanisms for dealing with such disparate images. Without having had the benefit of a mother’s support and wisdom, Pauline is vulnerable to the white gaze, which impacts Pauline’s role in Pecola’s life and contributes to her perceptions of political, social, and economic powerlessness.

Morrison’s depiction of Pauline’s economic and social limitations and her cognizance of them, which the films intensify, supports critical claims that the term matriarchy masks powerlessness. At first glance, Pauline can claim matriarch status, as the independent sole provider of her family, but her economic status and social relationships are debilitating. Her attitude and behavior, then suggests that she accepts the matriarchal fallacy. However, poverty and abuse do not necessarily preclude exercising power through mothering. For example, her family lives in an abandoned store where:

There was a living room, which the family called the front room, and the bedroom, where all the living was done. In the front room were two sofas, an upright piano, and a tiny artificial Christmas tree . . . The bedroom had three beds: a narrow iron bed for Sammy, fourteen years old, another for Pecola, eleven years old, and a double bed for Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove. In the

center of the bedroom, for the even distribution of heat, stood a coal stove.
(Morrison 25)

The family's economic status is clear, but Morrison also emphasizes the hopelessness that thrives within the Breedlove household. Pauline has the opportunity to infuse love into her home, despite her meager material possessions. A positive matriline could have created a haven where children are nurtured and made aware of their personal value. Passing on the matriline—empowering daughters—gives maternal figures a very significant amount of power. However, Pauline fails to exercise it.

Morrison's Pauline is shaped by social objectification and manipulative power. She also must deal with an abusive husband who “. . . was free. Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt—fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep” (Morrison 125). Cholly's selfish freedom, and his awareness of it, is in stark contrast with Pauline's total subjectivity. Pauline's inability to control her own sexuality also disqualifies her as a matriarch. It is Cholly who must initiate sex; it is done on his terms. He physically positions her body and she even suppresses her orgasms so that he may climax first. Patricia Collins Hill notes, “Black women's sexualities can become an important place of resistance. Just as harnessing the power of the erotic is important for domination, reclaiming and harnessing the power of the erotic is important for domination, reclaiming and self-defining that same eroticism may constitute one path towards Black women's empowerment” (128). Yet, Pauline surrenders to Cholly. She equates fleeting moments of sexual intimacy with the affection that they once shared with each other.³ She is powerless even to control her own body.

³ At one point, Pauline speaks admirably of the white marital relationships that she sees in films. These romantic notions of love are unavailable to Pauline. It is economically infeasible that Pauline will ever be in a

Still available to her, despite her fiscal and physical vulnerability, is the ability to nurture Pecola and Sammy, preserving the matriline and giving them a sense of their worth. Instead, she creates a home where “the only living thing . . . was the coal stove, which lived independently of everything and everyone” (Morrison 27). Coupled with her actual physical powerlessness, Pauline’s failure to socially fortify her children or to offer any semblance of nurturing represents a total renunciation of any legitimate maternal power. However unthinkable, the rupture in the matriline that begins with Pauline’s mother renders Pauline incapable of loving her children and powerless to enact any positive change in their lives.

Pauline’s mother bequeaths maternal emptiness that results in both her incapacity to cope constructively with the white gaze and to equip Pecola to properly handle the same challenges. Total powerlessness characterized by a ruptured matriline and social, economic, and martial weakness, exacerbate the harmful effects of white hegemony on her life. Naturally, her acceptance of powerlessness results in Pecola’s belief that she deserves nothing better in life because she does not have the social formula for happiness. Lisa Williams author of *The Artist as Outsider in the Novels of Toni Morrison and Virginia Woolf* asserts, “it is their [the Breedlove family] belief in their ugliness, more than the reality of their poverty, that paralyzes them” (63). They endure with the belief that

their ugliness was unique. No one could have convinced them that they were not relentlessly and aggressively ugly. Except for the father, Cholly, whose ugliness . . . was behavior, the rest of the family. . .wore their ugliness . . .

You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly . . . and could not find the source . . . it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though

position of the pampered wife and Cholly’s selfishness, which was also shaped by the white gaze, makes idealistic romantic relationships impossible.

some mysterious all knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each accepted it without question. The master had said, 'You are ugly people.' They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance. 'Yes,' they had said. 'You are right.'" And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (Morrison 28)

Pauline accepts the limitations of the white patriarchy as *word*—the law that is decreed and must be followed. The patriarchal *word*, which is perpetuated by white men that affirm her "ugliness," becomes most important to her. The same patriarchal word that Pauline holds dear makes a strong matriline necessary and essential to Black mothers and daughters. A powerful matriline helps mothers prepare their children to deal with the decree that Blackness is nothingness. In a very important way, Pauline allows white society to narrate the story of her life. It defines her; it ruptures her matriline. Thus, patriarchy proscribes her life and limits Pecola's possibilities. Through her immersion in white values, Morrison shows that Pauline could save Pecola from her fate if she had only provided a secure environment where she was valued. However, Pauline has no other model to contradict the *word*; she only has the movies. Morrison aptly demonstrates that she and Pecola are helpless against white patriarchy because the matriline is ruptured.

This learned helplessness, unmitigated by a nurturing matriline, leads Pauline to alternate more destructive methods of displaying and exerting power. In the face of this helplessness, Pauline hardens, ignoring the needs of her daughter, accepting her place as the mythical "Amazon" who has the "ability to endure hardships no 'lady' was supposedly

capable of enduring” (hooks 81-82). In attempts to label and classify African American women, as hooks argues, white society perpetuates images of Black women as Amazons, matriarchs, sapphires, mammies, and hoochies.⁴ Although these false images are always shaped by white hegemony, many Black women accept them, as they provide pretenses for power or feelings of importance. Likewise, Pauline’s embrace of this role is a façade that attempts to mask her loneliness and helplessness. Her vulnerability becomes even more salient with the narrator’s claim that traditionally Black women are “edging into life from the back door. Becoming. Everybody in the world was in a position to give them orders . . . The only people they need not take orders from were Black children and each other” (Morrison 108). Morrison suggests that these women persist until old age, when they are seen as harmless and unimportant by both white and Black society. Thus, Pauline Breedlove is under the command of all but Black children. Due to Cholly’s destructive behavior, Pauline becomes the breadwinner for her family. She becomes the long-suffering wife and mother, asserting her self as a paragon of morality. Her attention to the economic viability of her family and her overly religious tendencies are commensurate with all of the positive that traditionally characterize matriarchs, yet along with these qualities is an abiding resentment of her family. In the myth of the Black matriarchal, women accept economic responsibility for the household, assuming the role of an absent, incompetent, or emasculated male. Because the mythical matriarch is praised for endurance, religion is both a source of strength and a validation of their goodness. Ironically, Pauline uses religion, which has historically

⁴ While this study focuses on the presence and level of authority of the matriarch, it is important to note other images to which many Black women may fall prey. bell hooks in *Aint I A Woman* describes several pervasive images of Black women which include, “Aunt Jemimas” or mammies, “sapphire,” “matriarchs,” and “amazon” As is often the case with human classification, many women do not fit into one specific image. The woman who is a matriarch in one instance can easily be deemed the typical sapphire or mammy in another setting or set of circumstances. Thus, characterization as a matriarch is often in flux, which further leads to the dichotomy between arguments of subjectivity or powerlessness.

been a control mechanism for the white patriarchy, to assert her superiority and judge others. Morrison's portrait of Pauline essentially corroborates critical assertions, that accepting the matriarch role adds even more of a burden to a individual who is already repressed by society and compounds that by attempting to exercise a veneer of power over her self and her family. Pauline deals with this double burden through violence and a cold reserve toward all other African Americans. She also frequently and intentionally engages in violence with Cholly, as the fights:

relieved the tiresomeness of poverty, gave grandeur to the dead rooms. In these violent breaks in routine that were themselves routine, she could display the style and imagination of what she believed to be her own true self. To deprive her of these fights was to deprive her of all the zest and reasonableness and orneriness, provided them. (Morrison 31)

Morrison shows that she has no true concept of love. She cannot reconcile love with power. As her relationship with Cholly demonstrates, her attempts at reconciliation fail. In her marriage, she has no love or power. Her only "power" is in her relationship with her children—especially with Pecola—and she unapologetically chooses power over love. However, this power is misleading as she has no influence over Cholly. Her moral indictments are responses to white society's rejection of her, her need to assert her existence in some way, and her overwhelming powerlessness.

This perception of power has a greater affect on her children. In her article "This Disease Called Strength: Some Observations on the Compensating Construction of Black Female Character," Trudier Harris cites examples "where the strong characters and actions of Black women become malignant growths upon the lives of their relatives. Unaltered and

uncontained, the virus of strength becomes its own reason for being for these women, and no matter how compelling the reason, the illness still dominates their lives” (110). Sammy, not without Cholly’s influence, becomes a degenerate, and Pecola does not feel safe or comfortable in her own home. Moreover, Pauline, “the strong, aloof, frequently uncommunicative Black female character” compounds Pecola’s sense of worthlessness with physical abuse and explicit devaluation of her in favor of white society (Harris 115).

Pauline categorically rejects her role as mother and mentor to young Pecola. Note that Pecola, like everyone else, calls her mother “Mrs. Breedlove.” Having her children call her Mrs. Breedlove instead of mother is symptomatic of the cold distant relationship that she and Pecola share. This simple act signals Pauline’s repudiation of her role as mother. Just as young Pauline feels distance from her family and never “felt at home anywhere, or that she belonged anyplace”, as an adult Pauline’s bid for power reduces her daughter to an insignificant whisper (Morrison 86).

Pauline receives her greatest sense of power from her work for the Fisher family, as she wholeheartedly embraces the mammy role.⁵ She happily assumes the mammy role for the family. This mammy role is incredibly destructive to Pecola. Patricia Hill Collins concurs:

As the member of African-American families who are most familiar with the skills needed for Black accommodation, Black mothers are encouraged to transmit to their own children the deference behavior that many are forced to exhibit in their mammified jobs. By teaching Black children their assigned

⁵ Although the difference between the mammy and matriarch may be unclear, as Collins clarifies in her work *Black Feminist Thought*, both the mammy and matriarch are maternal images. However, the mammy is the submissive happy domestic, welcomed in white homes, while matriarchs are the aggressive and dangerous maternal figures who reject obedience.

place in White power structures, Black women who internalize the mammy image potentially become effective conduits for perpetuating racial oppression. (73)

Her complacent accommodative attitude, a Negro content in her place, makes her happy to become “the ideal servant.” (Morrison 99). It is in this position that she is able to have the home and family that she wants. She takes pride in the care of the white family, enjoys the material possession in their home, and basks in the power that her position provides. She takes pleasure in “the porcelain tub with silvery taps,” brushing the little white girl’s hair, and intimidating the “creditors and service people” on the Fishers’ behalf” (Morrison 99). Through association, she could have power and maintain all of the things that she wanted personally through her “alternate, fantasy-family” (Kubitschek 35). However, her real family members “were like the afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the early-morning and late-evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fishers lighter, more delicate, more lovely” (Morrison 99). Perpetuating the patriarchal view, she helps consolidate the insignificance of her family and herself.

Pauline’s embrace of this patriarchal view is all the more significant because under its influence she abdicates her role as mother and perfects her self as the consummate Black mammy. While, as I have already noted, Pauline experiences illusory scopophilia, her acceptance of her and her family’s “ugliness” makes it necessary that she shift her focus from seeking to imitate the white heroines of the films to mimicking the portrayals of Black servants of early Hollywood. As Donald Bogale aptly recognizes in his work *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, mammies, and their fellow servants “were always around when the boss needed them. They

were always ready to lend a helping hand when times were tough. It was many a down-and-out movie hero or heroine who realized his Negro servant was his only real friend” (36). Pauline becomes a fierce advocate of all her employers’ interests, taking care of their possessions, ensuring that they receive the best meals, and nurturing their child. She accepts a role that is more accessible to her and perfects an image that is acceptable and most beneficial to her white superiors. The film image of the overly attentive and faithful Black servant was even more prevalent during the depression era. Morrison uses these images of early films to comment on Pauline’s own self image. Significantly, Pauline ingests the images during her pregnancies; thus, they have a great impact on her perception of herself and her treatment of her daughter. Although these servant characters were buffoons, ignorant, or ridiculously comic, for white Americans “Not only their joy and zest but their loyalty, too, demonstrated that nothing in life was ever completely hopeless. . . They seemed to say that even during the worst of times everything could be straightened out as long as people kept their chins up” (Bogale 36). The attitude prevailed that if “darkies” can manage happiness, in their degraded position, so could whites. In her employers’ world Pauline “keeps her chin up” and devotedly serves. As their agent—their dutiful and comforting mammy—Pauline feels powerful. She nurtures this white family. However, Morrison contrasts that with her violence toward Pecola when she intrudes on her white illusion. Pecola’s presence threatens to shatter her illusion. She is willing to be a mammy in the white world, but refuses to be a mother to her daughter. Thus, her embrace of the mammy image both reflects her own ruptured matriline and further allows her to exacerbate the ruptured matriline that she passes on to Pecola.

Pauline's ruptured matriline and her desire to have some significance cause her to shift any positive maternal feeling or behavior from her own daughter to the daughter of her employers, in which she continues an illusory connection with pure whiteness. When Pecola accidentally spills the pie, burning her leg at the Fisher's, Mrs. Breedlove's instinctive violence toward her and her soothing of the white child illustrates a severe deficiency in Pauline's notions of motherhood. Mrs. Breedlove's response to Pecola is that "In one gallop she was on Pecola, and with the back of her hand knocked her to the floor. Pecola slid in the pie juice, one leg folding under her. Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola" (Morrison 84). On this occasion, she also produces words "hotter and darker than the smoking berries"(Morrison 85). Conversely, to the little girl in the "pink sunback dress and pink fluffy bedroom slippers with two bunny ears pointed up from the tips" with hair that was "corn yellow and bound in a thick ribbon" (Morrison 84), she soothes her tears as "the honey in her words complemented the sundown spilling on the lake" (Morrison 85). She effectively sends the message that Pecola does not deserve concern or love. In this scene, her violence and desire to preserve her realm of power, even if it is only as a maid, effectively shatters the matriline. She clearly understands what it means to be nurturing, yet Morrison makes her utterly vicious toward Pecola. Pauline chooses not to mother Pecola because her mother initiates a generational cycle where daughters never learn to love themselves. She passes on a ruptured matriline. Thus, just as she is more concerned with a soiled dress than her daughter's burns, she is similarly not inclined to answer the little girl's inquiry of who Pecola and the MacTeer girls are, for they are just insignificant interruptions. While Pauline provides financial support for her family, she fails to form an emotional connection with her very vulnerable daughter. Pauline's false

sense of power, especially in her embrace of white patriarchy, creates a wider chasm between the mother and the daughter. Accepting the myth of the matriarch, she only maintains her fleeting sense of power by embracing white hegemony and physical violence, at the expense of the psychological health of her daughter. Therefore, the term matriarch also applies to the “power” that mothers, and what I shall discuss as other-mothers, have to impact the psychological development of Black girls. Ultimately, the power attributed to the term matriarch depends on socio-cultural perceptions of maternal power and authority.

Pauline’s failure to inform Pecola about Black femininity stifles her ability to mature and to deal with the negative stimuli both within and without of the African American community. One of the most important conversations that a mother and daughter can have is the conversation about physical and mental maturity. Yet, Pecola must ask Frieda “Am I going to die?,” when she begins to menstruate (Morrison 19). The menses marks the birth of womanhood, yet her mother’s failure to explain even the fundamentals of being a woman—even the biological aspects of the matriline—make Pecola unable to mature mentally.

Barbara Turnage maintains that “. . . African-American mothers have been charged with the task of providing an environment in which their daughters can become emotionally and spiritually sound, happy, healthy, and productive African-American women” (176). Pecola is none of these things. Pauline neglects the basic tenets of motherhood and stunts Pecola’s psychological growth, as she remains a stranger to the story of Black womanhood.

While Pauline’s willingness to share matriline could have been preventative, her unwillingness ensures that Pecola will be seduced by the illusion of white perfection and destructively internalize the white gaze. Pauline misunderstands the importance that the mother’s past has for the daughter. Thus, Morrison makes the similarities between Pecola

and Pauline clear. Pecola embraces the images of adored white girls like the Fishers' daughter as the ideal that she hopes to one day become. Pecola admires "cute" Shirley Temple and longingly ingests Mary Janes as the narrator confirms "little 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. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty" (Morrison 13; Morrison 38). Like her mother's idealization of Jean Harlow, Pecola internalizes the white gaze, finding it impossible to measure up to society's culturally exclusive standards. Even when Pecola is brave enough to tell Pauline her story—that she has been raped by her father—her mother does not believe her and beats her when she subsequently becomes pregnant. Pecola attempts to form a connection with her mother by sharing her pain—by making her own contribution to the matriline. However, Pauline's silence and deafness to her story prevents any repairs to the ruptured matriline

As I have already noted, access to other-mothers may potentially offset ruptured matriline. Unlike her mother, Pecola does have access to other maternal figures. While they are neither considered to be nor do they aspire to be paragons of virtue, Morrison's whores, China, Marie, and Poland, give Pecola some measure of support and love. Pecola genuinely loves and respects them. Moreover, she is on a more personal level with them than with her mother. From these whores, Pecola receives the nicknames—"dumplin'," "puddin'," and "Chicken"—something Pauline never receives as a child (Morrison 38; 40; 42). These women are willing to share their stories with Pecola. While the truth of their tales is questionable, there is some veracity and above all there is some sense of the personal that connects with Pecola. These women are not the positive other-mothers who can help Pecola reach her potential as a fulfilled African American women; moreover, their tales are not

intend to uplift, warn, or teach like those passed through the matriline. Nonetheless, they do dispense affection and attention to a child who is utterly alone in the world. Unlike Pauline, to whom Pecola can barely speak, she is free to ask questions and receive attention from these women. As Morrison clarifies, “With Pecola they were as free as they were with each other. Marie concocted stories for her because she was a child, but the stories were breezy and rough. If Pecola had announced her intention to live the life they did, they would not have tried to dissuade her or voiced any alarm” (Morrison 43). Marie spins tales that entertainingly reveal the harsh realities of life, tales without morals, with which Pecola can do as she pleases. Although they are not positive role models, they offer the semblance of matriarchal power and give Pecola a matriline of sorts. Pecola is protective of them and they give support to her as she tells Claudia and Frieda “They give me stuff all the time” “. . . pretty dresses, and shoes. I got more shoes than I ever wear. And jewelry and candy and money. They take me to the movies, and once we went to the carnival. China gone take me to Cleveland to see the square, and Poland gone take me to Chicago to see the Loop. We going everywhere together” (Morrison 83). While these women seem little inclined toward motherhood, they care enough to share the vestiges of a matriline with Pecola, which sadly does not repair the damage of Pauline’s inability to share a positive matriline.

In contrast, the “morally upstanding” other-mothers of the community all seem to reject Pecola, just as the community had rejected Pauline. Mrs. MacTeer rants about Pecola’s milk drinking and abuses of her charity, Geraldine calls her a “nasty little Black bitch” (Morrison 72), and the entire community views her incestuous rape as fodder for jokes, gossip, and condemnation. Without a nurturing mother or positive other-mothers, Pecola has no “secure base from which [she] can explore and experience the world” (Turnage 178). She

is left alone to deal with the white gaze, as rearticulated by these women who also fail in their responsibility to pass on the matriline.

Morrison suggests that the white gaze so oppresses Pecola that she crumbles under its penetrating influence. Pecola experiences and is affected by the white gaze in an intense interaction with a white shopkeeper. Yacobowski, the shopkeeper,

urges his eyes out of his thoughts to encounter her [Pecola]...he looks toward her. Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view. His eyes draw back, hesitate, and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see [and he] hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand . . . His nail grazes her damp palm. (Morrison 36-37)

Lisa Williams argues that “in order to mitigate his own oppression as an immigrant, . . . [Yacobowski] defines his white privilege against Pecola’s Blackness;” additionally, in order to mitigate his own otherness as an American immigrant African Americans become fixed targets of angst and disdain, while Pecola sees herself through his white gaze (64). Had Pauline been able to pass a matriline on to Pecola, she would have “ensure[d] her daughter’s global self-esteem survives the onslaught of negative stimuli directed at African- American females, [by]. . . mediat[ing the harm attached to these stimuli” (Turnage 179). However, Pecola is devoured by the white gaze. She has no positive Black images to deflect the gaze or mitigate its influence. Morrison’s work reflects a society that does not see beauty or individuality in blackness; Pecola’s mere presence is met with signals from her family, peers and all of white society, that she as a little Black girl is totally insignificant. Thus, she begins to comfort herself with the illusion that blue eyes would validate her existence.

Unfortunately, only her matriline, which is irrecoverably lost to her, could affirm the beauty of her brown ones.

The nurturing element of the matriline should provide a place where a child can feel comfort and love. Pauline provides no safe haven for Pecola. Because of this maternal failure, Pecola's misguided notions of beauty and worth become detrimental. As articulated by Kubitschek, "*The Bluest Eye* shows racism's damaging effects on the Black community at large and on Black families. As the Black community and individual Black people absorb the wider culture's racist pictures of themselves, they focus their self-hatred on the most vulnerable character, twelve-year-old Pecola" (28). This child, who was "always alone," as "nobody ever played with her," and who held "a profound wish that she herself could die," like the rest of her family, accepts her "ugliness" (Morrison 68-69; 32). Pecola's incessant peering into the mirror at the close of the novel allows her to transform herself, if only in her mind, into the blue eyed Mary Janes and Shirley Temples that she idolizes.⁶ Her mother's neglect of the matriline pushes Pecola to also experience illusory scopophilia. From her insanity emerges a new, "better" Pecola, of whom even the white gaze would not disapprove. Pauline's ultimate maternal gift to Pecola, born of a ruptured matriline, is the blue eyes that eventually destroy her.

In the absence of her mother's matriline, Pecola is left to wonder, why she is so despised and becomes convinced that "if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is so to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (Morrison 34). Therefore, "each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Feverently for a year she had prayed" (Morrison 35). Other people's perceptions of her make

⁶ Pecola's gazing into her mirror at the close of the novel is also reminiscent of China's talkative primping as she shares her stories earlier in the novel. Interestingly here, Pecola mimics the behavior of one of the whores who acts as other-mothers.

her feel shame. This shame is only abated by anger which “stirs and wakes in her; it opens its mouth, and like a hot-mouthed puppy, laps up the dredges of her shame. Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth. It is a lovely surging” (Morrison 37-38). The only time that she feels alive or significant is when she is angry; however, her helplessness makes anger less frequent than shame and sadness. The matriline is not available to replenish Pecola’s self esteem. Hence, most of the time Pecola settles in despair, as Claudia notes on one occasion:

Pecola stood a little apart from us, her eyes hinged in the direction in which Maureen had fled. She seemed to fold into herself, like a pleating wing. Her pain antagonized me. I wanted to open her up, crisp her edges, ram a stick down that hunched and curving spine, force her to stand erect and spit the misery out on the streets. But she held it in where it could lap up into her eyes. (Morrison 57)

Her mother refuses to recognize Pecola’s despair which is blatantly obvious to a child. Pecola is left alone to deal with this negative self-image, which she replaces with the illusion of having blue eyes.

Just as maternal abandonment and a ruptured matriline leaves Pecola open to the destructive white gaze, the loveless void that results from this maternal failure also makes her vulnerable to other physical dangers and mental desolation. As a result of Pauline’s self-imposed disconnectedness with her family, Soaphead church is able to exploit Pecola for his own vain contest with God and Cholly is able to violate her to satisfy his own incestuous need for control. Pauline’s neglect contributes to both the physical rape and to her loss of sanity. Note that Frieda tells Pecola that in order for her to have a baby “somebody has to

love you” (Morrison 23). At the point during the rape when Cholly is unsure if Pecola’s “grip was from a hopeless but stubborn struggle to be free, or from some other emotion,” Pecola may be wondering if this is the love of which Frieda speaks (Morrison 128). Unfortunately, the only love that Pecola ever receives is perverted. As I have already discussed, the legacy of love that Pauline bequeaths to Pecola is a ruptured matriline, further perverted by white gaze. Similarly, Cholly can only provide the destruction of his ruptured patriline, forged from his own abandonment and racial victimization. Hence, without a positive matriline, Pecola’s unfulfilled quest for love leads to madness.

Pecola’s and Pauline’s relationship reveals how the matriarchy myth, unmitigated by a positive matriline, masks powerlessness and loneliness. In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison shows how poverty, racism, and sexism can potentially leave mothers voiceless if they do not have constructive ways to assert themselves. Acceptance of the traditional patriarchal premise as the means of exerting influence, without proper regard for the matriline as an essential element, is potentially harmful to both mothers and daughters. Through Pauline Breedlove, Morrison demonstrates how perceptions of maternal powerlessness in economic, social, and marital situations manifest themselves in façades of power that are not constructive. Pauline’s powerlessness hardens her and pushes her to accept an authority that is destructive to her relationship with her daughter. Pauline embraces the patriarch fallacy, and is bereft of a matriline. Her mother never introduces her to the joys, challenges, and responsibilities of Black womanhood. Therefore, Pecola is bequeathed emptiness, in contrast a positive matriline would have left her able to deal with white hegemony and her negative self-image.

It is clear that in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison focuses on the matriline and the myth of Black patriarchal power to reveal the helplessness and the self-deprecation that arises when

these misuses of perceived maternal authority are coupled with internalized white hegemony. In “The Mother’s Part: Incest and Maternal Deprivation in Woolf and Morrison,” Paula Bennet insists mothers should have “strong sense of self-nurture,” (126). If mothers do not have within themselves, this “strong sense of self-nurture” the mother may “transfe[r] her own sense of deprivation and helplessness” on to her child (Bennett 126). In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison presents a maternal cycle where a mother’s silence and withholding of the matriline perpetuates her daughter’s inability to assert or accept her existence. The death of Pecola’s baby in effect ends the cycle of destructive matriarchs. It also causes Pecola to find refuge from powerlessness in the autonomy of insanity. Thus, what Morrison ultimately demonstrates, through Pauline and Pecola, is that acceptance of the Black matriarchal myth, in the face of great powerlessness, and a ruptured matriline can have a devastating impact on mother daughter relationships.

Chapter II

Erasure, Memory, and the Assertion of Self: Matrilineal Legacy in *Corregidora*

I'm leaving evidence. And you got to leave evidence too. And your children got to leave evidence. And when it comes time to hold up the evidence, we to have to have evidence to hold up. That's why they burned all the papers, so there wouldn't be no evidence to hold up against them.

From Corregidora
Gayle Jones

In Gayle Jones' novel *Corregidora*, the women, of the same name, are both undeniably troubled and can aptly be called matriarchs. Whereas the mother-daughter relationship of Pauline and Pecola Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* ultimately becomes destructive because of a failure to cultivate the matriline, in an interesting and equally tragic reversal, the lives of the *Corregidora* women are adversely impacted by a willingness to wholly embrace the maternal narrative, allowing it to affect and control their psychological and sexual well-being. Old Man *Corregidora* becomes intrinsic to their "matriline," because the context through which they define their femininity and purpose is based on his mothering of them.¹ They are each, either directly or indirectly, suckled by his venom and violation. While the larger patriarchal, racist society does impinge on their feminine independence, this novel focuses on the legacy of four generations of women who rely predominantly on each other, due to their strained and difficult relationships with men. Victims of abusive men, who sexually and psychologically exploit them, these women use their offspring to preserve old wounds necessary as evidence to "hold up against" white patriarchal society (Jones 14).

¹ Taken out of fields when she was just a child and forced to have sex with both her slave master and mistress by the age of thirteen, Great Gram is ripped away from any positive matriline. Likewise, Gram is raised for a time by Old Man *Corregidora* when her mother is forced to flee. Her mother finally saves her when she is eighteen and pregnant with her father's child. *Corregidora*'s use of them as commodities circumvents any positive matriline. They are left a masculinized matriline, which is solely influenced by *Corregidora*.

As I have already noted, the absence of cultural and personal memory or maternal nurturing—a positive matriline—can result in a personal and collective disconnection from the community as well as self-deprecation, powerlessness, and internalization of white patriarchy. Jones demonstrates that memory, as a controlling agent that permeates every aspect of life, an essential part of the matriline, may also limit the parameters of the lives of mothers and daughters. Just as in chapter one, Morrison's Breedloves suggest that the unwillingness or inability of mothers to instill cultural history and pride in daughters has powerfully negative implications, Gayle Jones reveals that the privileging of traumatic history above all else is also very destructive to the self-hood of Black girls. Thus, through Dorita and Gram, Jones illuminates the tragic consequences of an oppressive matriline, which proscribes the lives of both mothers and daughters. The masculinized matriline that Corregidora passes to his women is tinged with sexism, which alters their perceptions of sexuality and causes them to collectively impinge on individualism. Jones counters this oppressive matriline through Ursa, who's embrace of the blues as a matriline gives her the ability to personalize and understand her foremother's narrative, giving her an awareness of her own personal power.

Jones uses the trauma of the slave past to create a sense of urgency in the Corregidora women, as they need to assert their existence through memory. The Portuguese slave master, Corregidora, leaves an indelible mark on the slave mothers, whose flesh he peddles for money, and their descendants, which is both the source of incredible power and pain. Through vivid memories of the tales told by Ursa Corregidora's mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, Jones captures the intensity of the mandate that Ursa make generations, because their experience as doubly oppressed black women leads them to fear that their story

will be erased as “they [whites] think it ain’t going to be ask, but its going to be ask. They have the evidence and give the verdict too. They think they hid everything” (Jones 41). Despite the fact that—or perhaps because of the fact that—these women wield little economic or political power, they pass on powerful memories that are meant to rival traditional male and white authority. However, their matriline comes directly from Corregidora. Great Gram speaks of no foremothers; she is mothered, just as her daughter is mothered and fathered, by her white slave master. Their maternal narrative is inextricably mingled with the white patriarchy that Corregidora imposes on them. While these memories record white racism and masculinity, the Corregidora women are shaped by keeping these memories alive. Just as Corregidora physically rapes them, using their bodies for pleasure and profit, he more egregiously violates them as he deprives them of their matriline. Emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually raped, Gram and Great Gram do not know how to heal their ravaged matriline. Therefore, each woman is charged with the task of making generations, who will always remember and, in a very real sense unfortunately, relive the atrocities enacted by Corregidora. Ursa is told throughout her childhood that “They burned all the documents . . . but they didn’t burn what they put in their minds. We got to burn out what they put in our minds, like you burn out a wound. Except we got to keep what we need to bear witness. That scar that’s left to bear witness. We got to keep it as visible as our blood” (Jones 72). This memory, while in response to whites oppression, sustains these women as they raise their daughters relying solely on feminine strength; they rely on each other for support and nurture a sense of moral rectitude that seems incongruent with their incestuous heritage of compulsory prostitution. While the passing on of memories usually fortifies daughters and certainly marks the courageousness of the Corregidora women, the

mandate to remember and relive the horrendous past becomes oppressive. Affected by a troubled past, the elder Corregidora women use their power to pass on a traumatic matriline.

Gram and Great Gram serve as powerful other mothers that create a living history in Ursa and her mother, Irene. Gil Zehava Hochberg contends that “telling is not only a means for imprinting the knowledge on Ursa’s mind, assuring the continuation of testimony, but also a way for her mothers to come to terms with the trauma that otherwise escapes them. The act of passing down the memories is therefore a unidirectional process of creating knowledge, for it makes the past ‘known’ to both the teller and the receiver” (4). While the dualities of telling and knowing may provide clarity of the experience, it falls short of catharsis; the pain of the past continues to linger. This process adds to the oppressive weight of the memories. Thus, Kevin Quashie asserts that the value that African Americans place on memory:

arguably accrues from the potential that recovery holds to counter the legacy of erasure, the loss and losing that is colonial history. In most Black contexts memory is a political practice linked with consciousness and decolonization, its urgency effectively summarized in South African Freedom Charter’s proclamation that ‘ours is also a struggle of memory against forgetting.’ (100)

Surviving in a world fluctuating primarily according to the desires and needs of white men, the Corregidora women dare to supplement the incomplete history perpetuated by the established authority with the spoken word, which has traditionally been deemed unreliable and incomparable to the written word that documents law and validates white authority. They make the power of storytelling—sharing their matriline—just as authoritative as written documents. Into the dawn of the 1970’s, two generations out of their horrendous slave past,

Corregidora's matriline continue to affect every aspect of the lives of the Corregidora women, as they keep the name of their violator and see his misdeeds as intrinsic to who they are. Passing down their terrible memories not only helps them to combat the "verdict" and "evidence" of white society, but the recurrent pain of those memories helps them to corroborate their existence, despite their objectification as whore and daughters of whores.

While memory is laudable as a necessity to fill in the gaps for the subaltern and the disenfranchised, memory—as evidenced by Ursa and her foremothers—may also be disruptive, robbing the bearers of authority and making them subordinate to its reverberations. The "scar" seared on Ursa's psyche is devastating. All four generations of women are unable to carry on positive relationships with men, to make personal addendums to the proscribed matriline, or even to enjoy or be aware of their own sexuality. Touching every aspect of their lives, this oppressive matriline enslaves these women, making them psychological prisoners to Corregidora's misdeeds just as the elder two were physical prisoners. The memory is so strong that Ursa and her mother become nothing more than tools to carry the past into the future. In one of Ursa's remembered conversations, her mother reminds her that "That's how we all begin. A mud ditch or a slop jar or hit the floor or the ground. It's all the same" (Jones 41). From the Corregidora women's entry into the world, they are in a degraded position from which they are unsure how to elevate themselves.² In their case, the matriline does not socially fortify them against an abusive society, it only enslaves them to the history of—the memory of—that abusive society.

Quashie further describes oppressive memory as he clarifies:

² The elder women's history as whores and society's devaluation of Black women, is supported by the written word that deems them worthless or ignores them all together. This word is perpetuated by white patriarchy.

Memory as individually imagined or collectively engaged is not exclusively liberating and in fact can colonize . . . Although colonization interferes with memory, it does not as much prevent memory as it uses memory to reinvent narratives (memories) that colonized subjects accept, revise, remember, and pass on. That memory sometimes works against itself is one of the ways that it can colonize a subject, can interfere with a subject's process of selfhood.

(108)

In the Corregidora women's efforts to correct the erasure to which Corregidora and the white authorities attempt to subject them, Ursa's family becomes totally immersed in memory. Madhu Dubey, author of "Gayle Jones and the Matrilineal Metaphor of Tradition," asserts that "The figure of the mother or the maternal ancestor is insistently aligned with the black oral and folk tradition, which is celebrated as a cultural origin, a medium of temporal synthesis and continuity, and the basis of an alternative construction of black feminine history and tradition" (248). Upholding and sharing the matriline, of which the Corregidora memories are part, is an important task for mothers; however, as Quahsie maintains, allowing memory to overshadow individuality is destructive. Memories and the matriline should inform women's perceptions of their position in the world; it should not totally dictate who they are. These memories are empty as well as dangerous. All they have are memories that they hope will be enough "evidence," but these memories are not enough alone. The Corregidora women struggle against the memories of white hegemony and black worthlessness and cultivate painful narratives of violation. These memories are so potent that they invade Ursa's dreams. After one dream, Ursa re-describes it for Mutt: "He [Old man Corregidora] got into bed with me, stroking my hair" and adds "All the Corregidora

women [were] dancing. And he wanted me. He grabbed my waist (Jones 61). Similarly, on another occasion she dreams:

my belly was swollen and restless, and I lay without moving, gave birth without struggle, without feeling. But my eyes never turned to my feet. I never saw what squatted between my knees. But I felt the humming and beating of wings and claws in my thighs. And I felt a stiff penis inside me . . . Who are you? Who have I born? His hair was like white wings, and we were united at birth. (Jones 76-77)

In these dreams, Ursa's identity is enmeshed with Corregidora's; the dreams allow him to violate her physically as well as mentally. The memories spawn dreams that are an agglomeration of motherhood, sex, and violence that tightens the bonds between Corregidora and Ursa, making "any distinction between past and present [or her and her foremothers] . . . inoperative" (Dubey 251). Ursa's experiences validate Quashie's assertion that "Black memory. . . [is] an attribute of a body that can also inhibit and act upon a body and which is also potentially a fleshy entity of its own" (101). I submit that Jones uses the corporeal memory of Corregidora—in all of his animalistic or barbarian associations—to show how the slave master both sexually violates her and seems intertwined with the potential fruit of Ursa's ancestral womb. Ursa's grandmothers feel that they must speak the truth over and over again; eventually, the memory takes precedence over everything else, even Ursa's dreams.

Through their oppressive matriline, Ursa's grandmother and great-grandmother attempt to create an incontestable path for her and her mother. Their insistence on daughterly submission is no more evident than when Ursa's grandmother slaps her for questioning her

truthfulness. As the inheritor of the memories and executor of the decree to orally pass down the word that is ignored by white authorities, mothers in the Corregidora family cannot afford to have their offspring express doubt or in anyway constructively deal with the past—for them the pain must always be raw and real. Despite their efforts “the Corregidora women become imprisoned in a history that is not of their own making, for what their possession of history gives them is nothing other than the history of their own dispossession” (Dubey 252-253). Their imprisonment is comparable to their former bonds of slavery, yet they seek the truth despite its pitfalls. Even though the memories are harmful, it is necessary that they be transmitted, in some form, from generation to generation. Ursa realizes this as she looks at Corregidora’s picture and acknowledges, “I realized for the first time I had what all those women had. I’d always thought I was different. Their *daughter*, but somehow different. Maybe less Corregidora. I don’t know. But when I saw that picture, I knew I had it” (Jones 60). Initially Ursa does not fully understand the confines of the Corregidora legacy or her undisputable place in it. Through Ursa, who attempts to mentally and physically distance herself from the legacy, Jones shows how a traumatic matriline, is inescapable and may still endure.

Likewise, Jones’ depiction of Ursa’s mother shows how a reluctance to accept the oppressive matriline, without a true sense of individuality, is destined to fail. While she continues the tradition of sharing the slave past with her daughter, she withholds her personal pain from her entire family—initially refusing to bequeath her personal matriline to her daughter. Although Ursa can recite her foremother’s slave history from memory, she knows almost nothing about her father or about her parent’s relationship. Only when Ursa is well into adulthood does Irene reluctantly tell of her turbulent marriage and her husband’s anger

and subsequent violence toward her. Although Ursa even wonders “How could she bear witness to what she’d never lived, and refuse me what she had lived?,” Irene’s choice was necessary for own self-preservation (Jones 103). Her silence helps to her survive psychologically. The early Corregidora women’s “survival depends on suppressed hysteria” (Jones 59). Ursa and her mother also face hysteria. For them, the burden of familial memories creates loneliness and the inability to have intimacy. Irene suppresses this hysteria by attempting a relationship with her husband, yet keeping all of the details of their relationship to herself. Her relationship with Ursa’s father results in her own personal trauma, which helps her see the distinction between her and her foremothers. Neither she nor Ursa will ever be able to fully comprehend the traumatic experiences that fuel Gram’s and Great Gram’s memories, no matter how much they listen and remember. She can never really touch or feel their violation. Therefore, her traumatic marriage is something of her own, perhaps destroyed by Corregidora’s legacy, but still a pain of her own which reminds her of her individuality. Everything else she shares with her mother, grandmother, and Ursa. Ursa’s mother’s silence, for good or for ill, demonstrates her power. She refuses to add her own traumatic element to an already traumatized matriline. She is master over information to which no one else is privy. She may choose to relinquish it as she pleases. Ursa’s mother continues to hold up evidence, but she does place limits on her participation in the oppressive matriline. Thus, Irene is not simply an extension of her foremothers. Through Irene’s experiences Jones shows that the memories and experiences of mothers cannot and should not misdefine their daughters.

Despite Ursa’s mother’s decision to create a personal space by withholding information, in her silence, she also fails Ursa as a mother, by refusing to properly introduce

Ursa to or shield her in anyway from the dangers of the Corregidora legacy. Comparable to Pauline Breedlove's inability to recognize her complete immersion in and rejection by white society, which deems her worthless, Ursa's mother's failure to alert her daughter to the dangers of family memory to male-female relationships shows weakness. The sharing of her personal matriline may have protected Ursa from her foremother's oppressive one. The familial memories and the need to have the memories live on culminate into the destruction of heterosexual intimacy. The masculinized Corregidora matriline is so powerful, that it is only after Ursa realizes that she cannot comply that she can see and feel, both emotionally and sexually. During one of Ursa's reflections she notes that upon her birth "I came into the world. . . . Into the world, her [Irene's] incomplete world, full of teeth and memories, repeating never her own to me. Never her own. And I remember now, I didn't feel it then, I never saw her with a man, never saw her with a man. I didn't feel it then, because they were all my world" (Jones 102). The novel chronicles Ursa's movement beyond the boundaries imposed by the Corregidora memories, yet her mother remains incomplete and is never able to do so. Because preservation of the family legacy is the sole reason for her existence, Irene is both awkward with and ambivalent toward Ursa's father throughout their relationship. She attempts to reconcile her desire for male companionship with the all-consuming autonomy of the Corregidora women by persuading him to live surrounded by her matriarchs. In doing this, she drags him into a world of which she is not able to help him fully understand and in which she cannot function as wife. She remains, albeit vicariously, the violated daughter of Corregidora—a living vessel through which the matriline endures. Her mother and grandmother insulate Irene and make her totally dependant on them for the definition of who she is as an individual, in their efforts to be strong independent women, while never

forgetting the tragedy of their life with Corregidora,. At one point, Ursa even remarks that “He [Corregidora] made them make love to anyone, so they couldn’t love anyone” (Jones 104); however, they do express love to their offspring. Their love is a possessive and sometimes destructive one that attempts to dismantles individuality. While the first two generations instruct their daughter to make generations, there is a level of resentment that she attempts to have a relationship beyond the Corregidora legacy. Like their vicious slave master, who precludes any sexual involvement with black men, Ursa’s grandmothers resent her father. At one point, one of them even angrily declares “Messing with my girl. He ain’t had no bit of right” (Jones 131). Their possessiveness is the result of the masculinized matriline. They objectify their daughters just as they were objectified. Just as they are tools for Corregidora’s pleasure and profit, their offspring are tools to refute the lies.³ Irene’s matriline drives her husband away, Create a situations that social scientists like Moynoihan use to validate claims of overbearing male hating matriarchs. Therefore, Ursa’s mother is painfully aware of how the memories disarm the bearers of their individuality and leave them unaware of any other role outside of the mother-daughter-message bearer system. Thus by her initial silence, she both neglects Ursa and, in a small way, steals a little privacy—a little individuality, as she has her own private matriline.

Memory, as Jones shows through the Corregidora women’s opinions of sex and sexuality, can so reduce individuality that self is totally reduced to one primary function. Etched in Irene’s memory is a past that is defined by the sexual impotence and exploitation caused by Corregidora’s objectification and violation of her foremothers that is preserved in her matriline. This creates a limited existence for her and Ursa. As I have previously discussed, the “elder” Corregidora women display a level of possessiveness that parallels

³ See discussion of Moynoihan’s report on the black family in the introduction.

their former master's. Using sex as a commodity that ensures his financial livelihood, he reduces their sense of being—their identity—to a vagina. To the slaveholder, Great Gram was “the pretty little one with the almond eyes and coffee-bean skin, his favorite. ‘A good little piece [His] best. Dorita. Little gold piece’” (Jones 10). The slave women were “his pussy” and like others he “bought slaves [and] paid only attention to the genitals”(Jones 54). Indeed, the memory that he engenders continues to “slap [them] across the cunt till it [is] bluer than black” (Jones 54). The trauma of Corregidora's devaluation of their humanity leads to the fierce clinging to memory to combat erasure. Nonetheless, they in turn prescribe similar limitations on their offspring. As Dubey maintains “The Corregidora women attempt to fill in the gaps of the master text of American history necessarily activates the dynamics of power inscribed in the text. Their historical narrative, with its absolute truth-telling claims, replicates the masterful and repressive gestures of the dominant tradition it tries to supplant” (253). They unwittingly form their daughters into living breathing wombs and vaginas, who should have no other ambitions than to produce evidence of their injury. Although trapped in the horrendous memory of Corregidora's abuse, Ursa and her mother begin to use men to satisfy their maternal mandate. Men should only be desirable so far as they aid in the production of heirs, afterward they may be discarded. Of such totalizing of individuals, Quashie insists “Memory's corporeality is full-blooded for sure, but it is also piecemeal, multiple, like a scar—or literal body part, or part of a body; immaterial even, acting as a sensation or psychic sensibility” (Jones 104). While Quashie discusses this corporal memory as an entity often outside of the individual, I contend that, in *Corregidoara*, the memory “transforms” the individual into body parts that serve certain agendas. Similar to the way that Mrs. Breedlove needs Cholly Breedlove's sin to validate her saintliness and cope with

her otherwise purposeless unnoticed existence, the Corregidora women, as wombs, only need men to produce bearers of the truth to correct their historical and social exclusion. This function is an impossibility for Ursa.

In a sense, Irene further defies her family through her unwillingness or her incapability to have sexual relations with her husband or any man as Ursa comes to realize “I never saw her with a man because she wouldn’t give them anything else. Nothing.” (Jones 101). In her own way, she limits the damage of her familial history by only producing one heir to the pain of the past. Even in her defiance the majority of her being seems to be consumed with the need to make generations. She confides in Ursa that after first meeting Ursa’s father it was “like my body or something knew what it wanted even if I didn’t want a man. Cause I knew I wasn’t looking for none. But it was like it knew it wanted you. It was like my whole body knew it wanted you, and knew it would have you, and knew you’d be a girl. But something got into me after that night” (Jones 114). Her desire for intimacy arises from a combination of the need to fulfill her predetermined destiny and a longing to go beyond limits of love imposed on and by her strong matriarchs. She notes these conflicting feelings as she tells Ursa that her attraction to her father “was something [her] body wanted, just something my body wanted. Naw. It just seem like I just keep telling myself that, and it’s got to be something else. It’s always something else, but it’s easier if it’s just that” (Jones 116). Nonetheless, the overbearing memories cause her to sexually and psychologically desert her husband, long before he abandons their family. She refuses to have sexual intercourse with him and only fleetingly desires his company to produce Ursa. Ursa realizes that “It was almost as if she’d left him [Ursa’s father] too, as if she wanted only the memory to keep for her own but not this fussy body, not the man himself. Almost as if

she'd gone out to get that man to have me and then didn't need him; because they'd been telling her so often what she should do. But he left before she would leave" (Jones 101). Her connection to her family's memories, which when repeated become just as vivid as if she lived the horror herself, makes reproduction the sole purpose of her existence. Ursa's mother exploits her husband "[taking him] 'bout as far as a woman can take a man without givin him nothing" (Jones 121). The power that her family appropriates to combat their helplessness under Corregidora's rule and society willing ignorance of their plight ultimately objectifies their daughters, leaving them lonely and sexually and emotionally impotent. A masculinized matriline, Jones reveals, renders the Corregidora women unable to be complete and sexually whole.

Following her mother's painful example, Ursa's willingness to vocally bear witness through song and to be the holder and disseminator of the matriline results in hardships, similar to the ones that beset her mother. She initially accepts her role as producer of generations, but Mutt's violence takes away her purpose. Ursa, like many other African American women, falls victim to the mythical status of Black motherhood. In *Black Intimacies*, Shirley Hill maintains that "When the ideology of strong black motherhood is seen as essential to authentic womanhood, those who are childless, infertile, or who simply do not fit the model of confident, kin-supported motherhood may be silenced or distanced from the concerns that face all mothers" (138). Ursa's family uses children to ward off erasure. Her bareness, like her mothers' troubled marriage, is a traumatic experience that has positive effects; it allows her to separate sex and assert her individuality. Corregidora's use of his women for sex and profit forces Ursa's foremothers to make a clear distinction between sexual pleasures and reproduction. Since their existence is tied to the pleasure and

profit of others, they privilege reproduction over sexual enjoyment. Ironically, Ursa's hysterectomy causes her to shift. Sex is no longer a method to produce evidence of the monstrous deeds of the guilty. Sex becomes an act of physical pleasure and personal intimacy. Hochberg agrees that Ursa's barrenness sparks a need for psychological reprogramming adding that "It is not only the fact that she cannot do the 'one true thing' with which she identifies that leads Ursa to experience trauma, but also the fact that this loss forces her to acknowledge the fact that she does not totally identify with her mother's demand that she must find her voice outside of their prescribed narrative" (8). Ursa has to find a new way to pass on the matriline. She must redefine herself by recognizing her existence as a sexual being. While the only sexual experience in the novel from which Ursa gains any measure of sexual pleasure does not involve intercourse, Ursa's imagined conversations with Mutt and her conversation with her mother show a growing understanding of her own sexuality and the influence that the memories have on her sexuality.⁴ Ursa's personal trauma, as Jones presents it, perpetuates her recognition of her individuality and redefinition of sex and sexuality.

Just as the oppressive matrilineal memories are ever present to remind her of her role as reproducer, Ursa involves herself with men who seek to remind her of her limited capacity to provide sexual pleasure. Both Mutt and Tadpole are disturbed by her reluctance to have sex and her inability to reach a sexual climax. Ursa's aloofness frustrates Tadpole so much that he finds sexual pleasure elsewhere. Oddly, Mutt responds with jealousy and a possessiveness that rivals the Corregidora women and Old man Corregidora. Like Corregidora, Mutt makes demands and attempts to control her sexuality and sensuality,

⁴ In this novel Jones uses a narrative technique where Ursa carries on imaginary conversations with Mutt. These conversations which usually consist of questions and answers are interspersed with flashbacks, childhood memories, and memories of her early life with Mutt, after which she joltingly returns to her present life.

especially in regards to the blues. Like her foremothers, he fashions for her the role of dutiful wife. Reminiscent of the Portuguese slave masters who investigate women's genitals to see if they are fit for sex or childbearing, Mutt desires to have full reign of Ursa's body, as he angrily reproaches her for contesting his groping her body in public. Moreover, Mutt's behavior strikingly mimics Ursa's villainous grandfather as he tauntingly threatens to offer her up to her audience asking "one a y'all wont to bid for her? Piece a ass for sale. I got me a piece a ass for sale" (Jones 159). According to Mutt, Ursa is his "ass" and Ursa accepts her place as object believing that a husband is "Somebody to give your piece of ass to" (Jones 164, 55). Yet, sex remains a painful and unfulfilling experience for her. Thus, Jones demonstrates Ursa must overcome the sexism of these Black men, which parallels Corregidora's in order to become whole.

Although Ursa grows to lament her mother's choice to withhold her past declaring "I would have rather sung her memory [the memory her mother withholds] if I had to sing any," she also subordinates herself by remaining silent. In many situations her silences is less an act of defiance and more acts of weakness (Jones 103). Ursa subordinates herself to an oppressive matriline that affects her sexual and emotional relationships with men. Like her mother who makes herself available to her future husband while simultaneously hiding her desire, Ursa silently waits for Mutt's sexual advances, refusing to be the aggressor and fearing his rejection of her through silence. Like Morrison's Pauline, Jones allows Ursa's mates to dominate and control her sexual experiences. After her injury, she completely surrenders to Tadpole. He makes all of the decisions for her, including keeping up with doctor's appointments. She even refuses to handle her divorce from Mutt. She asks Tadpole to contact the lawyer and he even informs her of Mutt's decision to agree to the divorce. The

novel chronicles her journey to discovering her inner strength; however, she often silently acquiesces to the will of others. Even in her acceptance of Tadpole's marriage proposal, she is less than enthusiastic. Furthermore, in her relationships with these two men, she also uses them. She moves seamlessly from one relationship to another as if she needs a man to feel anchored. While she genuinely loves Mutt, he possessively dominates her like the memories and her family. It is clear that she feels little love for Tadpole; he seems but a placeholder for Mutt, who is unacceptable because he deprives her of her destiny. Cat, the only woman who befriends Ursa and has the potential to be an other-mother, warns her of this in the beginning of her relationship with Tadpole when she asks her "You be taking what you need, but do you think you be giving him what he need?" (Jones 26).⁵ Ultimately, Ursa's mother's unwillingness to divulge her memory allows Ursa to repeat the cycle of matrilineal oppression constructed by her grandmothers. However, Ursa is able to end this cycle and to discover herself by embracing the blues as a new positive matriline, one informed by her maternal narratives. This is the first matriline to cast off Corregidora's influence and to add a female component. The blues, as Jones presents it, gives women agency and power to share their narratives in a more public way.

Through Ursa's declaration that "They [her foremothers] squeezed Corregidora into me, and I sung it back in return," Jones recognizes the blues as a powerful force that also rivals the written word and stands as an equal with the orality of her familial memory (103); the blues is a matriline that asserts feminine authority in a patriarchal society. Ursa reformulates these oppressive memories in a new form mixed with her own personal sorrows.

⁵ The Corregidora women create such a closed familial community that other-mothers are not available. However, Cat does have potential, and even attempts to, mother Ursa. Yet, she forfeits that position, as her affection for Ursa is informed by homoerotic attraction and her relationship with Jeffy reeks of child molestation.

Clearly aware of the social and maternal imperative to pass on the memory, Ursa attempts to get Mutt to understand that she sings “because it was something [she] had to do” (Jones 3).

Ursa is willing to accommodate Mutt in every way except by ending her singing career.

Blues is an outlet to share her family’s past, and narrate her life. As Daphne Duval Harrison notes, “The black woman blues performer reflects the lives of black women by using

tensions creatively and by producing a proliferation of imagery, expressiveness, and music which continues to have impact upon all of us directly or indirectly” (72). The blues as a

matriline melodiously shares the life narratives of women, whether in raunchy songs heavily laden with sexual innuendo or laments of love lost, poverty, or physical abuse. Note

Kimberly Drake focuses on this point in “Women On the Go: Blues, Conjure, and Other Alternatives to Domesticity in Ann Petry’s *The Street* and *The Narrows*,” stating that “The

blues woman makes use of her voice and her body, aspects of her person traditionally

controlled by men, to give herself agency in the public realm” (73). On the stage, Ursa is

totally in charge. She sings songs about the “bird woman, whose eyes were deep wells,”

who “would take a man on a long journey, but never return him,” which has a deep

emotional impact (Jones 147). She also croons other songs including “Open the Door,

Richard,” which parallels her unwillingness or inability to be intimate with Mutt before

marriage, and “The Broken Soul Blues” which coincides with her struggle with Mutt’s

jealously (Jones 152; 159). Her songs, which are original, come from her difficult life.

Nghana Tamu Lewis reflects on this issue in “In a Different Chord Interpreting the Relations

Among Black Female Sexuality, Agency, and Blues” claiming that “the blues provide self-sufficient and arguably more importantly, self-signaled coping mechanism for dealing with

the reality of the frustration and anxieties that naturally (and inevitably) attend any sexual

relationships between women and men” (603). Ursa’s songs help her to release the tension that her personal hardships create, by sharing them with her audience. While her mother adamantly objects to her singing the blues, Ursa asserts “I’ll sing as you talked it, your voice humming, sing about the Portuguese who fingered your genitals” and maintains “I got them [the words to her songs] from you” (Jones 53-54). It is unclear if this conversation is real or imagined; however, just as the intensity of the highly sexualized stories makes the memories more powerful, those same memories combined with Ursa’s personal pain elevate the intensity of her blues songs. Cat notes the import of this experience in Ursa’s voice, after her accident. Ursa reflects on Cat’s comment musing, “What she said about the voice being better because it tells what you’ve been through. Consequences. It seems as if you’re not singing the past, you’re humming” (Jones 45). All of Ursa’s angst and emotional volatility are reflected by her voice. Although she sings the blues prior to her injury, they take on a different significance after she is unable to make generations. The blues, Ursa’s rescued matriline, is the medium through which she stops regurgitating the matriline of her foremothers and adds to it. The blues, as Lewis’ analysis shows, “merg[es] shifting images of weakness and power, despair and hope, and dependence and independence as the women describe, analyze, and/or react to their situations in song” (601). This musical motherline allows her to experience new sensations. Her experiences as a blues singer sheds new light on her Gram’s and Great Gram’s matriline. The blues displaces their matriline and reveals the patriarchal structure. Ursa’s embrace of the blues as a matriline achieves what her foremother’s matriline sought, but could not achieve—public recognition of their pain. After Ursa’s injury, she is both within and without of their matrilineal parameters. She cannot produce biological bearers of the matriline; however, she is still so inundated with the

memories and the need to undo her foremother's erasure that the blues is the only viable outlet for her. She is able to assert her individuality from the memories, while still respecting them. By accepting her own individual power and control, she reinvents the matriline. Her music is her way of coping with the past and the difficulties of her life. Through her embrace of the blues matriline, Jones allows Ursa to become a mother figure, whose songs finally heal the Corregidora women and the larger community.

Moreover, Ursa's foremother's willingness to challenge the written and social word, as produced by white society, gives Ursa the strength to challenge her mother's claim that singing the blues is immoral and Mutt's physical and psychological entreaties to stop singing. In many ways, Ursa's matriline is a response to racist and patriarchal social dictates that render women powerless and insignificant. As a beautiful blues singer, Ursa projects an image of independence and authority. Drake rightly contends that "a blues woman would consider the Jezebel persona a necessary part of both her performance and her lifestyle. . . [as they were considered] 'fallen' Promiscuous, disgraceful—the worst example of black womanhood"(67-68). Although Ursa's fair skin, long hair, and seductive music, upon first glance, casts her as the stereotypical "Jezebel," she shies away from everything sexual within her personal life.⁶ As critics have noted the "Jezebel" is the most highly sexualized of all black female stereotypes. These derogatory images, created by white males and perpetuated by white society and black males, are similar to the objectification of Ursa by men, who, like Corregidora, continue to want to possess her. Nonetheless, her attractiveness and sultry-sexually charged tunes render her unable to escape the sexuality that is intrinsic to the power and authority of the blues woman and the blues matriline. Ironically, the reputation of Ursa's

⁶ In *Black Feminist Thought* Collins in further supplements hook's lists of negative Black images with that of the "jezebel, whore, or 'hoochie'," who is sexually promiscuous (81).

chosen profession or calling, as she seems to be drawn to music, parallels that of prostitutes. Despite the moral indictments of the blues, Duval Harrison maintains, “the black women in the blues tradition used the tension they lived with creatively by responding with that ‘lusty, lyrical realism.’ They deserve, therefore, recognition and understanding as people who lived through the hard realism but managed to share themselves [and their stories] artistically in spite of it all” (72). Ursa projects the truth from the underbelly of the social system. By singing, often sexually suggestive tunes, Ursa exudes a sensual power, which ultimately helps her add a new chapter to the matriline. In her position as beautiful blues singer, she captures and holds the attention of her mostly males audience. The blues, Maria Johnson asserts, allows women to “reclai[m] the black female body through song” (94). This power is significant because it positively counters the foremothers’ narrative of race, violence, and subjectivity. Because she seizes the power of sexuality in song, Ursa harkens back to the blues matriline and blues foremothers, as “from the beginning, blues performance has been a powerful vehicle for ‘theorizing’ black female sexuality. In the 1920’s when vaudeville blues women stood in the limelight, African American women used music as a way to assert presence that has largely been absent from the dominant discourse” (Johnson 94). The music gives Ursa license to experience the world as a sexual being. The blues matriline allows her to better understand her sensual side; she emerges as more than a womb or vagina. In her songs, she symbolically reveals the narratives of her and her family’s lives. Jones uses the blues as an endpoint for Ursa’s journey from vagina to voice, from object to subject.

While the voices of black women are frequently ignored “The blues woman, in contrast, is paid to sing—her every word is absorbed, repeated, and discussed by her audience” (Drake 73). In her voice is proof of her family’s violation, available for all to hear.

She inherits the traumatic power seized by her foremothers and displays it in a more positive and contemporary form. Ursa's method of preserving the slave past through music also differs in that it is in a public venue, in which she shares the truth. Ursa does not just hold the truth for an ethereal authority waiting for "the sky [to] open up to ask . . . that question" (Jones 41); she holds up the truth for the entire black community. Every night that Ursa sings in the clubs she shares symbolic pieces of her history. Through her music, she harnesses the power of foremothers, changes the power dynamics of their narrative from masculine dominance to feminine authority and shares it with her community in the tradition of the blues matriline. Thus, Jones presents Ursa as a powerful and effective mother, despite her biological bareness.

As Jones demonstrates through her portrait of Ursa, the harmful effects of an oppressive matriline can be effectively combated through personal connection to the matriline and the ability to assert individuality while valuing memory and the matriline. While Irene attempts to thwart her foremother's oppressive matriline through silence, she remains un-liberated as she refuses to pass her cautionary portion of the matriline down to her daughter or to demarcate the line between her foremothers, memory, and herself. Ursa accomplishes this by embracing the blues as a matriline that empowers women. She incorporates her foremothers memory in her blues matriline, effectively "holding up evidence" to her audiences, while still maintaining her sense of self. The blues gives her agency to explore her sexuality, to throw off the chains of patriarchy, and to contribute her matriline to the entire community. Through *Corregidora*, Jones reveals that matrilineal lines that seek to stifle all semblances of individuality are oppressive and reductive. Hence, a matriline

must change from one generation to the next to be effective, to have fertility for future maternal gardens.

Chapter III

From the Womb to the Wild Woman: Mothers, Other-Mothers And the Matriline in *The View From Here*

Sometimes I think it's just me and this baby. I find myself talking to her. I need to talk to someone, even if they can't talk back. Maybe because they can't talk back. For the time being, it is just this baby and me. Just us. Maybe God sent me his baby so I wouldn't feel helpless.

*From The View From
Here*

Brian Keith Jackson

While the two previous chapters have focused on ruptured and oppressive matriline, Brian Keith Jackson's *The View from Here* presents a positive matriline—incorporating feminine strength, independence, and strong nurturing instincts. However it is fettered by sexism and internalized patriarchal social values. The same oppressive masculinity which Morrison and Jones depict with the relationships between men and women in their novels is transformed in Jackson's novel as it is pitted against a solid positive narrative of maternal power. Jackson's Cynthia Anderson is a powerful woman who possesses social, economic, physical, and maternal influence. If there ever exists a true Black matriarch, Jackson approaches it with his portrait of Cynthia Anderson. However, her power, which seems to celebrate womanhood and motherhood, inadvertently perpetuates the helplessness, which her daughter, Anna, fights against as is demonstrated in the epilogue. Cynthia's power is masculinized as she inadvertently projects the patriarchal value system onto her daughter. Patriarchy, as a social system, gives men the

ability to deny women sexuality or to force it upon them; to command or exploit their labor to control their produce; to control or rob them of their children; to confine them physically and prevent their movement; to use them as objects in male transactions; to cramp their creativeness; or to withhold

from them large areas of the society's knowledge and cultural attainments.
(qtd. in Rich 18)

Adrienne Rich aptly cites these characteristics in her article "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" as elements that promote heteronormative sexual orientation and power disparities in sexual relationships (18). Cynthia Anderson assumes variations of several of these characteristics in her relationship with Anna. Her ambiguous messages hampers Anna's ability to embrace the full strength of her positive matriline and leaves her vulnerable to the tyranny of her husband. The presence of a positive nurturing matriline also inherently conflicts with the confines of patriarchy. Narrated by Anna's unborn daughter, Lisa, the continuation of the positive portion of her matriline increasingly becomes an imperative. Jackson exposes Anna's dilemma by positioning her as witness to a powerful, but ambiguous maternal figure, who teaches Anna the power of womanhood, an other-mother in the form of Ida Mae, who assures her of her value and encourages independence, and the destructive and repressive Ma Dear-Clarice legacy, who values fear and violence. In so doing, Jackson reveals the dangers of the matriarchy myth, as the potential to exert power by dominating and hurting other arises from it.

The tension between the two very strong guiding principles, maternal strength and ultimate male authority, creates a space where the matriline can only be maintained and celebrated through epistles and silent "conversations" between Anna and Lisa. Memories and letters help bolster Anna in the wake of her husband's destructive behavior, yet she is unable to fully embrace the matriline and thus, gain power in her marriage. While her loving and nurturing manner allows her a considerable degree of influence over her children, she nonetheless, presents an image of maternal weakness and vulnerability, as she allows herself

to be subordinated to her husband, J.T. The central issue here is J.T.'s decision to give Lisa to his sister Clariece. I submit that J.T.'s intended course of action would disconnect Lisa from a positive matriline and leave her exposed to his family's harmful maternal influence. Only when the destructive Thomas matriline is about to be passed on to her daughter, does Anna embrace the total power of the matriline and assert herself physically, mentally, and maternally. The ambiguous messages of patriarchal authority and maternal power, which Mrs. Anderson seems to simultaneously embrace, impair Anna's ability to privilege one over the other until a destructive matriline of violence and abandonment looms over her daughter, threatening to destroy little Lisa as it has already damaged J.T.

Jackson's portrait of Mrs. Cynthia Anderson, unlike the Ma Dear-Clariece matriline, combines the loving nurturing aspects of a socially fortifying matriline and the strong social and economic independence that would characterize an ideal matriarch. The absence of Mrs. Jackson's husbands affords her the opportunity to experience a great level of economic and social freedom that is not available to most women. Mrs. Anderson evidences a loving nature towards her daughter that provides a place of comfort for Anna.¹ While neither of the mother figures in *The Bluest Eye* or *Corregidora* seem to value feminine independence, the most salient feature of Cynthia's matriline that she passes on to Anna is independence. This is evident in Anna's recollection of her mother's making her learn how to swing herself. This early lesson foreshadows the necessity that Anna will later face as she has to assert herself, deriving her strength from matriline shaped by both her mother and by Ida Mae. Cynthia represents maternal power that is consistent throughout all of her roles. She wields

¹ Even after her death, Anna remembers her mother's strong legacy and comforting nature, as she holds the bible that Mrs. Anderson leaves to Junior, walks along the property that her mother leaves behind, or thinks of the elephant that represents protection, wisdom, and memory. The positive aspects of her matriline give her support and guidance.

just as much authority as she examines J.T.'s fitness to marry her only child, shares tales and anecdotes with Anna, or assumes Anna's domestic duties during her pregnancy with the twins, as both Anna and Ida Mae sit in "amazement" of her command (Jackson 40). Her power seems to come from a much more stable foundation than economic security or domination of others. She recognizes and embraces her value as an individual, a value which she attempts to inculcate in Anna as she tells her "That women [have] so many faces: a face for their husband, a face for their children, a face for strangers; only when they [are] alone could they find that face that suited just them" (Jackson 138). Cynthia's unique privileging of individuality represents the necessity that each woman leave her own mark on the matriline.

Jackson further distinguishes Cynthia's strength and individuality with her intellectual capacity, her free expression of sexual attraction and desire, and her willingness to establish and to order her own conception of the universe. In this powerful individualism, she is exceptional, as Anna remembers, "she was a good, strong woman, even when it wasn't right to be. But will it ever be right to be? Sometimes we're not given a choice in the matter" (Jackson 136). Cynthia does not wait for the opportunity or permission to be herself; she just *is*, showing her true self to the world. Cynthia's interests reach far beyond the limitations of gender, race, or class. Jackson, thus, emphasizes that "Missus Anderson was smart and read what seemed like a book a day. Books set her mind at ease, taking her to faraway lands, lands that her feet would never grace" (Jackson 71). Cynthia Anderson is similar to the powerful mothers heralded in Alice Walker's "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens," whose individuality, dreams and aspirations, are expressed through the seemingly

mundane tasks of everyday life.² However, her dreams are not left to be fulfilled by the daughters of the future. Cynthia Anderson leaves her mark as the opinionated, highly intelligent mother and lover of her only daughter.

Cynthia Anderson further departs from other maternal figures in the freeness with which she expresses her own sexual attraction to her husband and natural agency to express her affection as she sees fit. Intertwined with the matriline to which Anna heir is the respect for the love that arises from male and female relationships. While this is a grand departure from the marriages Pauline's and Ursa's heterosexual relationships, Mrs. Anderson reflects on her marriage with fondness, sharing her memories with Anna. She is unashamed of her sexual attraction to her husband as she tells Anna "I didn't need a reason to give him a kiss. We were always neckin' every chance we could" and glibly informs her "I watched him bend down, because I like to see him bend" (Jackson 70). Cynthia does not simply react to male advances; she proactively expressive sexual urges. She even engages in coy games "giving him a kiss that he would not soon forget"(Jackson 70). She owns and accepts every part of herself, including her sexuality and her spirituality.

While the Black church has traditionally been a sustaining force in the community and of even more importance to Black females, Mrs. Anderson possesses more of a spirituality than religious piety, through which she creates her own view of the universe. Her power even seems to extend to the divine as Anna reminiscences "She wasn't a God-fearin' woman, but she didn't mind givin' Him credit for things that brought her joy. She had faith in the good of things. She had a way of seein' things like nobody else" (Jackson 137). Her wishes, desires, likes and dislikes are important in the world. She sees the world and God in

² See discussion of Alice Walker's ground breaking essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" in the introduction page 4.

more personal individualistic context. The very notion that she matters is powerful for a woman and even more powerful for a Black woman. She does not have to use violence, illusion, or traumatic memory to propel herself into existence. Jackson makes the point through her community's deeming her a "witch" long after her death and her classification as "cidity" that her level of power is frightening and isolating (96;71).³ Mrs. Anderson recognizes motherhood "as a site where Black women express and learn the power of self-definition, the importance of valuing and respecting ourselves, the necessity of self-reliance and independence, and a believe in Black women's empowerment (Collins 176). Cynthia's "difference," which "can make people feel alone, even in a crowd" forges a matriline that fortifies Anna as a child and serves a spring board from which Anna must take strength and make her own contribution (Jackson 71).

Despite her individualistic "difference," which becomes a noteworthy aspect of her matriline and seems to guide her life and her personal relationships, Cynthia Anderson also imposes the patriarchal value system onto Anna, which poignantly represents the tension between feminine power, autonomy and patriarchy. There is ambiguity between the life that Mrs. Anderson lives and the rules of propriety to which she holds Anna. While she could "be her own woman. . . answer[ing] to no one. . . . [doing] as she pleased, when she pleased," she instructs Anna to behave as patriarchal propriety dictates (Jackson 38). Although her declaration of complete freedom is not as malevolent as Cholly's declaration in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, her utter freedom is one that has traditionally been denied women and is akin to the patriarchal need for control, power, and the imposition of will. Because child rearing

³ Cidity is an insult within the African American community. This term commonly refers to individuals who community members believe personally aspire to the ideals of white society whether it is through speech, dress, education, or behavior. A cidity person attempts to distinguish himself from the everyday ranks of the community.

is traditionally delegated to women as is the expectation of submissiveness, and endurance in the Black community, the freedom to do as one pleases or to be only responsible to and for oneself is a privilege more frequently available to men. Just as her nurturing nature is intense, loving and maternal, she is just as intense as a disciplinarian and authoritarian, serving as Anna's surrogate father in her husband's absence. Cynthia Anderson has true power, maternal, social, and economic, which warrants the title matriarch; however, she weakens the effectiveness of her maternal power by using the tools of patriarchy to control Anna. Anna's behavior must be consistent with society's notions of female propriety. For example, when Anna gets into a fight, ironically railing against ridicule of her and her mothers "difference," her mother sees the spanking that follows as necessary as Anna recalls her admonition that "Just because I was a bit different didn't give me—or anyone else, for that matter—just cause to go around takin' swings at folk; I was a young lady and should carry myself as much as know that the only swining' to be done was to be done by her" (Jackson 104). Even this incident sends ambiguous messages. On the surface, Cynthia is encouraging her daughter to accept her difference and ignore those who are critical of it. However, she conveys this message, using masculine cues and symbols. She goes to the closet and chooses her deceased husband's belt, methodically choosing not to use the switch, which seems a more feminine tool for punishment. She chases Anna around the room, and asserts that she is the only person that can use violence. Cynthia's patriarchal need to punish and control can also be connected to her ownership of and the threat that she will brandish a shot gun. Like a father, she must protect Anna's virtue and chastity. As the single parent of a female child, Mrs. Anderson assumes the male role and makes her will, which is informed by a patriarchal authority, the law to which Anna must abide. Anna must be a prim and

proper church going young lady. Also, despite the fact that Anna is of marriageable age, Cynthia frequently places her on restriction. Moreover, while she seems to accept her own sexual desires she “never once said anything about the facts of life to Anna. Some things are just never talked about” (Jackson 70). The domination that Cynthia exercises over her daughter seems to prepare her for the role of subordinate in their future home. Anna reflects this later when she confesses to her son Junior “I must say it seems like my life has been full of ‘I don’t knows.’ For most of my life all of my decision have been made for me. And you trust that they’re what’s best” (Jackson 172). Her relationship with her mother clearly establishes a pattern of submissiveness and acquiescence.

Jackson illustrates how Cynthia as a partial tool of patriarchy helps diminish Anna’s self-esteem. Mrs. Anderson brokers her marriage in a manner much like a father would. While she is facetiously apologetic J.T. claiming “Were the situation different and Anna’s father still alive, you wouldn’t even have to be talkin’ to me. I know that makes you feel somewhat uncomfortable. Mothers rarely get to make any decisions for their children” (Jackson 60). Yet, Jackson embeds this nod to patriarchy with Mrs. Anderson clearly attempting to intimidate J.T., rising from her chair and expressing her reservations about his suitability. Anna’s marriage is almost like an exchange of goods. J.T gets to “have” her and her mother gets the honor of *giving her away* (Jackson 58). Even little Lisa recognizes her and her mother’s status as property as she states in reference to her father’s chair “It was his property to do with as he pleased—as was Momma and, for the time being, as was I” (Jackson 5). Mrs. Anderson even has the power to give her a dowry—the house in which they raise their family. Until her death Mrs. Anderson commands such respect from her son-in-law that “usually it took one glance” to assert herself as he equal and possible superior

(Jackson 41). It is not my claim that Anna is pure object in her relationships (she intensely loves both her mother and her husband), nor is it my claim that her mother consciously wants her daughter to be submissive to patriarchal authority. I submit that Anna is passed on from one authority to the next—mother to husband—and that in her efforts to be strong and create a structured home for Anna, Cynthia exudes patriarchal values that she cannot escape even in her independence. Therefore, the strong matriline is shaped by patriarchal values.

Despite the ambiguity between the positive matriline that Cynthia passes on and her conflicting patriarchal behavior, Jackson uses Ida Mae as powerful other-mother who further emphasizes desire, individuality, and independence as aspects of the matriline that are necessary for feminine self-fulfillment. Ida Mae serves as a foil to Anna. Where Anna is a meek, mild tempered, domestic, Ida Mae is a hot tempered, opinionated, hard drinking partier. Ida Mae lives on the fringes of feminine propriety. Her excursions to the Rusty Nail to rendezvous with men, her dream of going north, and her outspoken nature all arise from her indomitable will, which does not bend to patriarchy. However, she recognizes the potential power in Anna and encourages her to embrace it. As a girlfriend, sister, other-mother Ida Mae fills a very important role in Anna's life—the role that both Ursa Corregidora and Pauline Breedlove are denied. Quashie discusses the Black girlfriend relationships in his work noting "The girlfriend is the other someone who makes it possible for a Black female subject to bring more of herself into consideration, to imagine herself in wild safety" (18). Similarly, Ida Mae notices and praises Anna's inner and outer beauty, instructing her not to "ever forget it" (Jackson 166). Before Anna's marriage, Ida Mae advises in exasperation, "Oh, Anna, grow up! Grow up, damn you. You say you want people to listen to what you say? Then start sayin' somethin' 'sides what you think you s'posed to

say. Until then, I don't really want to hear how nobody listens to you. 'Cuz till you mean what you say and say what you mean, you can't even listen to yaself' (Jackson 204). Unlike Mrs. Anderson, Ida Mae does not seek to control Anna. She does not simply serve as an example of power and strength, she encourages Anna to take a stand and assert the significance of her will and desire.

Jackson reveals glimpses of Anna's strength and freethinking before her marriage. Her dreams are not to be a liberated wonderer like Ida Mae or a strong lonely woman free of male companionship like her mother. She wants to marry and raise a family; she certainly desires and love J.T. It is possible for her to embrace the power of her matriline and express independent thought and have a strong voice within her marriage. Her hopes and dreams of marriage as a young girl are different from her reality. When she tells Ida Mae of her desire to marry, she blows dandelions watching as "the wind took each of the seeds and they vanished, floating over the water into the beginning of night. Where they'd land was left for the imagination" (Jackson 29). However, her inaction as her dream materializes and her passivity in her marriage to J.T. allows weeds to spring up in her maternal garden, which she does gradually pull both figuratively and literally as she embraces her matriline.

Unlike Anna, Ida Mae shares Cynthia Anderson's "difference" which makes her life fodder for gossip. The very same strength that she attempts to cultivate in Anna garners J.T.'s aversion for Ida Mae, as "She scared him as much as Gram" (Jackson 136). J.T. realizes that Ida Mae is aware of his weakness and male weakness in the face of such a strong autonomous figure as Ida Mae disconcerts him. While he is consumed by what others think of him, she could not care less what judgments he passes on her. J.T.'s attitude toward Ida Mae is in keeping with the patriarchal tendency that "When women do not affirm their

masculine status by assuming a subordinate role, they express the contempt and hostility they have been taught to feel toward non-submissive women” (hooks 102). Nonetheless as a other-mother, Ida Mae seeks to protect Anna, watch[ing] out for [her], takin’ the harm upon herself when it came [her] way” (Jackson 136). In both her presence and her absence, Ida Mae protects Anna, shielding her from oppressive patriarchy. When they are young women “Ida Mae told tales that Anna never could decide if they were true or not, but she would always listen, gladly. Anna would live the life of each of Ida Mae’s stories to the fullest, if nothing more than in her mind. And as far as Anna was concerned, as long as she could be part of that, that proved plenty” (Jackson 16). In her freedom, mobility, and independent lifestyle, Ida Mae uses orality to share with Anna life’s possibilities. Ida Mae lives the life that patriarchy denies Anna. Ida Mae’s imagination and exploits reveal a level of self-assurance and liberty that Anna does not openly express. After Ida Mae leaves town, her letters to Anna and Anna’s unsent letters serve as a catharsis for Anna. As she states at the opening of the novel, the letters “serve as much out of need as desire” (Jackson 10). As Ida Mae shares her life, Anna continues to live through her. Anna’s letters in return, which serve much the same way as personal journal entries, allow her to express herself to someone who both listens and allows her to be her true self. Although Ida Mae warns “I ain’t gonna be there all the time to keep the wicked away,” Anna’s letters to her help keep the wicked from consuming her (Jackson 29). Jackson offers Ida Mae as an example of feminine independence and individuality unfettered by patriarchy. Thus, Ida Mae’s contribution to Anna’s matriline attempts to mitigate the damage that Mrs. Anderson unwitting embrace of patriarchy causes.

Whereas Cynthia's patriarchal values culminate in Anna's acceptance of powerlessness and subservience to J.T., the loving, nurturing, and supportive aspects of the matriline that she receives from both Mrs. Anderson and Ida Mae gives her authority as a maternal figure. Anna is the consummate homemaker; she seems to take comfort in creating a place of peace, support, and repose for her family. She listens to her children and attempts to explain the world to them. She explains the concept of getting the spirit, people's perceptions of "difference," and encourages their imagination through stories. Anna also explains her maternal role to Junior, as his anger mounts: "You see, I can come to you. I can ask you what's the matter and let you take it out on me, because I love you. And I'd rather you deal with what you need to deal with me than let it build up inside of you, boilin' till it overflows. Junior, mommas see it all. We understand the explosions, but we still try to stop them from happenin'. That's what we do" (Jackson 196). She has a calming effect on her children; her attention to them assures them of their significance. She also has the power to control her son's conduct as Jackson demonstrates when she chastises Junior for his disrespect, as the disappointment on her face and her strong words have a greater effect than would a blow. While she does not ensure the economic viability of the family, her nurturing nature ensures that the boys are psychologically sound, as J.T.'s confrontational authoritarian stance could easily be as destructive to her son's manhood as Morrison shows Pauline's behavior is to Pecola's womanhood. Anna's nurturing is not limited to her children. She also serves as an other-mother to Miss Janie, taking care of her domestic needs, but also serving as her sole source of comfort. Although Miss Janie is significantly older than Anna, Anna nurtures her providing emotional support and serving as someone to whom she can talk—someone who actually listens. After her son takes her away, Lisa reflects "Momma

had been taking care of someone else's 'child' (Jackson 53). Anna seems to be the only person that Miss Janie trusts in her delusions and the only person who can calm her down. Just as Ida Mae is Anna's other-mother, Anna also mothers Ida Mae. She is Ida Mae's lifeline—her connection to her roots. Ida Mae endearingly refers to her as "Precious," as she represents the invaluable qualities of stability, innocence, and traditional motherliness that she needs but is not part of her feminine make-up. Anna understands her best friend without passing judgment, much the same way that Ida Mae allows and encourages Anna to be her true self. Anna ensures the emotional and psychological well being of her family.

Although Anna evidences power as a nurturer, within her marriage she is powerless. Jackson explains her silent and accommodating to J.T.'s tyrannical rule. She, too, nurtures J.T. as Lisa observes, noting "Mama wasn't so much afraid of Poppa, but she knew him better than he knew himself, and sometimes in that came the hurt, the under-standing" (Jackson 11). J.T. has an imposing presence, but he relies on Anna for emotional stability. She creates the loving home that he was deprived in childhood. Just as in her other personal relationships, she establishes herself as a reservoir for everyone to dump all their sorrows and anger. Everyone, except Ida Mae, wraps themselves in her nurturing without offering her any support. Patrice Hill Collins maintains that "The controlling image of the 'superstrong Black mother' praises Black women's resiliency in a society that routinely paints us as bad mothers. Yet, in order to remain on their pedestal, these same superstrong Black mothers must continue to place their needs behind those of everyone else, especially their sons [and husbands]" (174). Already subject to J.T.'s will, Anna's willingness to be the consummate consoler exacerbates her lack of subjectivity.

Through the tensions between Anna's nurturing and objectified relationship with J.T., Jackson reveals the insecurity that underscores J.T.'s patriarchal authority, which his maternal figures cause. Although Lisa claims that Anna is not afraid of J.T, she certainly expresses apprehension of anything that would displease him. Everything within their home is J.T.'s property, including Anna and her children. J.T. behavior is symptomatic of his need to feel significant. Shirley Hill describes his behavior as she explains "Support for traditional gender expectations also runs high among African American men who, deprived of other legitimate sources of power, often cling tenaciously to the ideology of male dominance and see controlling black women as crucial to their claim of masculinity" (98). The abuse from Ma Dear and Clarice leaves him insecure. Therefore, as a patriarch he must require submission from his wife and children. Anna is even powerless over her own body, as she must seek his permission in order to continue her pregnancy. When she tells him of her pregnancy, "Just like you like it, J.T." is her refrain as well as her creed throughout the novel. J.T. seems to have a need to assert his authority over his family and he seems especially hostile to Anna's femininity. His abusive mother and sister perpetuate a need to assert his manhood especially over females, which is illustrated by his displeasure of Anna giving Lisa a "bitch" name (Jackson 10). In his home, he has the final word "and nothing more need be said" (Jackson 7). Lisa articulates J.T.'s attitude best when she explains, "The eyes of the Lord may have been good enough for everyone else, but he wanted only his eyes peering down on Momma" (Jackson 8). Consequently, Anna's toleration of J.T.'s abusive behavior and acceptance of his "word" as gospel is her weakness. Anna accepts that she must sleep on the floor during Clariece's visits, while J.T. becomes a frightened obedient child in her presence. Anna seems to ignore his attempt to insulate her from the outside world, telling her

not to seek a job and barring Ida Mae from their home. Anna does not put up a fight even as she must sneak around to see her best friend, confidant, and support system, while Clariece is free to come as she pleases. His actions attempt to disconnect her from her only living mother figure, who would encourage her to take a stand. She ignores his inconsiderateness, need for control, alcoholism, violent temper, and insecurities, which all inversely impacts her and her children. Her vulnerability to oppressive patriarchy makes her incapable of embracing the full matriline; she is unable to accept and internalize the strength of her mother and Ida Mae. Jackson uses Anna's submissiveness to patriarchy to illuminate its potential threat to destroy the positive effect of her nurturing matriline. Thus, Mrs. Anderson ambiguity creates a conflicting duality for Anna—as a strong nurturer and submissive wife.

As the central relationship of the novel, Jackson uses Anna's and Lisa's bond to capture the reciprocal benefit of the matriline for both mothers and daughters. Caught between this conflict, Lisa's relationship with Anna illustrates the circular nature of the matriline—both sustaining and protecting mothers and daughters. As Lisa's narration reveals, she sees and experiences the world through Anna. Often it seems that she can better articulate Anna's thoughts and feelings than Anna herself as things are “decided without her voice a voice only [Lisa] can seem to hear” (Jackson 8-9). Lisa functions in a similar capacity of an other-mother or girlfriend. As Quashie argues, female bonds like those that Anna shares with Ida Mae and Lisa represents a “struggle . . . to ‘capture the I in I,’ to achieve radical self-possession. The self-possession is propelled by the political imperative toward repair: of making otherness a viable location of identity. The girlfriend [other-mother, female confidant] then, is an/other whose subjectivity depends upon but also constitutes her ability to facilitate the other subject” (40-41). Anna, as submissive wife, marginalized and

ignored, and Lisa, as the unwanted female child who will be discarded, rely on each other to acknowledge the existence and significance of each other. Reminiscent of Anna's declaration that "Right after I thank God, I thank my momma. My momma's gone, but I still pray to God. They've become one and the same," Lisa has a similar trust in her mother—never doubting her word and gaining comfort from her assurances (Jackson 134). Lisa's presence—like her letters to Ida Mae—seems to mitigate Anna's "helplessness" (Jackson 20). She values and longs for the feminine presence, later telling Lisa:

It had just appeared when I looked up, like it was waitin' on me to come outside before comin' to call. The wishin' star. And I smiled and I looked up and I closed my eyes. Made a wish. Do you know what I wished for, li'l Lisa? I wished for you. As much as I knew your Poppa was against it, I still did it. And when I opened my eyes, that wishin' star winked at me. I'm most sure of it. Kind of like it was tellin' me to open my eyes and see my wish come true. (Jackson 81)

Anna's pregnancy seems an act of providence as much as it is an act of defiance of J.T. She speaks of Lisa being "fertilized," which suggests that she is the fruit of Anna's will (Jackson 78). They communicate without words. Here, Jackson uses Anna's silence to signal a powerful maternal connection. Lisa gives Anna the opportunity to pass on Cynthia Anderson's and Ida Mae's strong matriline. She nurtures Lisa from within, telling her about her Gram and Ida Mae, treating her as if she is already physically present, helping her make biscuits and soothing her in the wake of J.T.'s anger. She passes along the matriline to her daughter in the womb. Even from the womb, Lisa evidences the nurturing qualities of bringing her family together and strengthening them. Jackson frames the novel by making Lisa the

narrator. As a narrator, Lisa introduces her bothers, father, and Clariece and provides a more intimate picture of Anna. She already evidences an intimate family connection to each of them. In her last letter to Ida Mae, Anna notes “Even a child can teach, if we choose to listen. We have to hear, because the voice may be nothing more than a whisper, if that” and notes how close her sons have become as a result of her pregnancy and the events that evolve from it (Jackson 216). Anna also describes her as a “fighter,” which suggest that she will have the strength, independence, and individualism that Mrs. Anderson and Ida Mae both display (Jackson 140). Despite Anna’s insistence that J.T “needs a girl around him to find that soft spot in his heart that I know is there,” Lisa is also necessary for Anna to realize her power and embrace the power bequeath to her from her mother and other-mother (Jackson 80). Lisa both receives the matriline and reconceives the matriline for Anna.

Jackson dispels the negativity of Mrs. Anderson’s patriarchal dominance, by having Ma Dear’s and Clariece’s abusive matriline threaten to psychologically ravage Lisa. This threat would permanently disconnect Lisa from the positive aspects of Anna’s matriline; fear of this violent matriline makes it necessary for Anna to assert her voice and impose her will. J.T’s need for authority stems from emasculation and abusive treatment from his “two mommas: the one who bore him, then Clariece, the one who took over the job” (Jackson 131). Ma Dear uses violence and public humiliation to destroy J.T.’s self-esteem and assert her authority. J.T. is so traumatized by her that she haunts his dreams, reducing him to terrified child. Unlike his own children who are comforted by thoughts of their mother, J.T. is colonized by his mother’s corporal memory.⁴ His memories of her, and Clariece’s continuation of her abuse, make it necessary that J.T. be the sole authority in his household;

⁴ See discussion of Kevin Quashie, asserts in *Black Women, Identity, and Cultural Theory: (Un)Becoming the Subject*, in chapter two.

Whereas as a child he had no control in adulthood, in adulthood he asserts his manhood by controlling. Thus, the matriline that Ma Dear passes on to Clariece is destructive. As the true “spitting image” of Ma Dear, Clariece continues to humiliate and emasculate J.T. into adulthood (Jackson 131). Clariece is selfish, petty, and attention seeking. She is critical of everyone and everything. Although she desires a child as a symbol of her secure marriage to her husband, she sees motherhood as a “burden” (Jackson 115). Jackson’s depiction of the Ma Dear- Clariece matriline illuminates the drastic differences between the two matriline. Clariece seems to be totally devoid of maternal nurturing instincts; moreover, she seems to enjoy causing children pain. And as Lisa’s presence is an action of providence, it is providence that Clariece “wasn’t able to provide a living child” (Jackson 8). The Ma Dear- Clariece matriline is not meant to be carried into the future; however it looms over Lisa ready to envelop her. The threat of the total dissolution of everything positive from her matriline, for Lisa, prompts her action. By allowing Clariece to take Lisa, Anna would be effectively abandoning her to abuse and maternal darkness. This danger slowly reawakens Anna to the strength within herself. Anna comes into her own while protecting her children. The Ma Dear- Clariece matriline has already produced J.T., who seeks to silence all of the natural strength and free will that she has.

With the threat of the dissolution of her matriline nearing, Anna is left to come into her own alone with only her memories and knowledge of the matriline to help her. The closer it gets to Lisa’s arrival the more she reflects on her foremothers. She walks through her mother’s property, draws strength from the bible that Mrs. Anderson leaves to Junior, and remembers Ida Mae warning that “there comes a day when you have to burn your bridges just to make sure you can still swim” (Jackson 168). Anna casts off the weakness and

submissiveness that patriarchal values produce in her. Claiming their home as her own and exuding power in her voice that “tells them that Poppa isn’t the last word” Anna rescues her children from a dangerous matriline and patriarchal tyranny (Jackson 222). It is her responsibility to provide a physically and emotionally secure home; with J.T., the threat is internal not external. Anna reclaims the strength of her matriline as she puts on Ida Mae’s lipstick, which symbolizes strength and acceptance of all parts of self as beautiful. She notes in her final letter to Ida Mae, “I can feel your spirit. That will have to be enough,” and leads her children to her mother’s home, where Cynthia Anderson’s strength still remains (Jackson 216). However, Anna also adds to the matriline as she recognizes that she can be strong with J.T. Although she insists that “I’d rather raise children without a man than try raising a man and children, too. Yes, You’re a good man, but I can’t make you be. You’ll have to do that for yourself. My work is done,” she does not let the door slam on her marriage, giving J.T. the opportunity to accept her strength and exercise his own demons (Jackson 224). As Lisa enters this world, Anna “feels the spirit” (Jackson 227). Being born “in the spirit,” Lisa, a culmination of Anna and her two mother figures, will carry the positive matriline into the future. Through her embrace of the matriline and birthing of Lisa, Anna reaches an equal plane with her mother and dispels the demeaning influence of patriarchy. Her rejection of her mother’s ambiguities reflects how:

Mother and daughter negotiate the tensions of being each other, becoming each other, loving each other; as girlfriends, both mother and daughter can identify and embrace a creativity that is not only having and raising a child (which for the daughter is a possibility) but also the wild creativity in their being girlfriends—two adult women who go outside the boundaries marked

for their gender and who embrace their own and each other's otherness.
(Quashes 68).

Anna's new sense of herself opens the door for her to see her mother as woman not a paragon. Similarly, Anna passes down the letters from Ida Mae to Lisa, as a means of sharing her own story in hopes that it will inform Lisa of her foibles and joys. These letters rival and dismantle the authority of the patriarchal word and mark Anna's total shift from silence to assertiveness. Thus, the patriarchal control is broken and Anna internalizes the strength of her matriline, achieving self-actualization and contributing to the maternal narrative.

Throughout *The View From Here*, Jackson demonstrates that it is not enough for mothers to be powerful and nurturing figures; they must also allow their daughters some sense of independence and individuality that is free from the oppressive influence of patriarchy. The conflict between Cynthia Anderson's patriarchal authoritarian child rearing and her independent minded value system that is part of her matriline, causes Anna to only partially accept the matriline. She is the perfect nurturer. While nurturing, as Anna demonstrates, can be very influential, nurturing alone cannot ensure the well-being and eventual self-actualization of daughters. Nurturing alone cannot counteract silence and total submissiveness. Silence in the face of an abusive patriarch can and does endanger children. Patriarchy threatened to totally extinguish that spark. Hence, unwitting internalization of patriarchal values by mothers weakens the matriline, making even positive aspects ineffective.

Jackson offers Anna three maternal alternatives, that either weaken or support to her fragile sense of her own significance. While she is affected by the positive and negative of

each of these alternatives, she struggles to only pass on positive elements to Lisa through the matriline. However, mothers must not simply internalize and regurgitate the positive aspects of their matriline. Jackson insists that Anna is an active contributor to the legacy of her female successors—beginning with little Lisa. Through Anna, Jackson illustrates that a strong maternal figure, who is able to openly express herself and retain her authority and individuality, can be reconciled with a strong man—that is what Anna adds to the matriline. Thus, Jackson's portrait of Anna's World in *The View From Here* reveals that a positive matriline lives, changes, and accepts individuality. More importantly this positive matrilineal legacy, as Jackson uses Lisa to demonstrate, is essential to Black womanhood. The inheritance of a matriline and all of the power that it makes available can ensure that African American women continue to serve in their vital roles as nurtures and sustainers of Black homes and the entire Black community.

Conclusion

My grandmothers were strong.
They followed plows and bent to toil.
They moved through fields sowing seed.
They touched earth and grain grew.
They were full of sturdiness and singing.
My grandmothers were strong.

My grandmothers are full of memories
Smelling of soap and onions and wet clay
With veins rolling roughly over quick hands
They have many clean words to say.
My grandmothers were strong.
Why am I not as they?

“Lineage”
Margaret Walker

The sentiment expressed in Walker’s poem directly captures how matriarchal power and the matriline work across generations to shape Black female identity. Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, Gayle Jones’ *Corregidora*, and Brian Keith Jackson’s *The View From Here* certainly present differing views of these cross-generational relationships. The women in these works struggle to come to terms with the matriline that they inherit. In the most potent sense, the matriline is powerful—and can be just as damning as it can be uplifting. With this great power, foremothers, mothers, grandmothers, and other-mothers have the opportunity to share their matriline and to assist in the psychological development of succeeding generations. Both the matriline and the controversial image of the Black matriarch attempt to assert and emphasize Black women as commanding forces.

Morrison, Jones, and Jackson capture the complexity of Black maternal figures and their struggles with certain elements of matriarchal power. The maternal figures throughout this study are not idyllic. They are depicted with all of the complications, pitfalls, and virtues that confront African American womanhood. Morrison illustrates the repercussions of helplessness and false power, as a ruptured matriline leaves both mothers and daughters vulnerable to the white gaze. From a different perspective, Jones exposes the dangers of a

matriline that allows traumatic history to deprive future generations of individuality. Jackson reveals how inadvertent internalization of patriarchy can overshadow actual economic, social, and matrilineal power. Each of these novels highlight the extent of matrilineal power, which suggest a degree of influence that justifies the term matriarch.

I submit that these authors present the journeys of women who are subject to both positive and negative manifestations of the matriline, with varying levels of success at the termination of their journeys. The ultimate success of or survival of a positive matriline depends on its ability to change and establish its authority independent of patriarchy. Unlike economic and political power, which is subject to the influence of others, the matriline is an inner power that survives death and can recover womanhood from white hegemony and patriarchy. What is clear from these three novels is that the matriline shaped by mothers, other-mothers, and the women who are imprinted by it is the most significant legacy of matriarchal power.

This study raises a point of inquiry, which remains to be investigated, concerning the tensions created between embracing a positive matriline and illusory scopophilia. The matriline, which uses mothers and other-mothers as role models that inform notions of appropriate conduct, attitudes, and values, and illusory scopophilia, which allows white hegemony to define black womanhood, inherently conflict. While they both involve a measure of modeling and mimicry, a positive matriline encourages individualism and ultimately self-definition, while illusory scopophilia reduces Black womanhood to object and other. This issue would be a fruitful topic of inquiry, as Black women who suffer from illusory scopophilia either try to superimpose themselves, imaginatively at least, in the roles of white femininity or they transform themselves into acceptable figures for white society in

roles of subservience. I posit that it would be significant to study what would be necessary to recover particular examples of Black womanhood from such misrecognition and internalized objectification. The presences of various other-mother figures may also play a significant part in this recovery. Thus, further study of the matriline as a force of recovery would illuminate the depths of Black maternal power.

As the mother figures from this study illustrate, the matriline is an instrument of learning where daughters learn from the past and mothers explain the complex and often unjust world that Black women face. Although previously celebrated in the African American community, if only on the surface, the role of the Black mothers is more significant than both Black and white society recognize. Maternal power is evidenced by their performance of the ordinary—from cooking and cleaning, to storytelling and encouraging. As Lisa, the unborn narrator in *The View from Here* reflects “not only are women the bearers of life, we also provide the strength that makes life worth living” (Jackson 228). The matriline is the only true reflection of the timeless strength of black womanhood. What these writers suggest then is that the only true Black matriarchal power lies in the transformative power of its matriline.

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