Matrilineaology: Mother-daughter relationships in contemporary fiction

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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MATRILINEAEOLOGY: MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS IN CONTEMPORARY FICTION

by

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ABSTRACT

Matrilineaology: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Contemporary Fiction

by

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This thesis examines Dorothy Allison’s Bastard out of Carolina, Louise Erdrich’s The Beet Queen, Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things, and Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club to attempt to answer questions such as, “How do a mother’s experiences prior to the birth of her daughter affect the way that she raises that daughter?” and “How does a mother’s history affect her attitude(s) toward her daughter?” These questions are important because they lay the groundwork for the ultimate question that this thesis attempts to answer: “Will history repeat itself?” In addition to tracing history, this thesis will identify Nan Bauer Maglin’s five themes of matrilineaology (258) within each of the four texts examined.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), Louise Erdrich’s *The Beet Queen* (1986), Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), and Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* (1989) in an attempt to answer the question of whether the daughter figures in these literary texts replicate their mothers’ lives. In other words, will the daughter characters in the four aforementioned texts inherit the same characteristics as their mothers? Will they make mistakes similar to the ones their mothers made growing up and as young women? Will the daughter characters also experience similar triumphs in their lives? In answering questions about how a daughter’s life unfolds in comparison to her mother’s, it is important to explore the ways that a mother’s experiences before the birth of her daughter affect the way that she raises her daughter. Additionally, examining the history of the mother – that which occurred even before she herself was born – will illuminate her attitudes toward her daughter and the reasons that those attitudes exist. For example, in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, hundreds of years of objectification of women by men in Chinese culture affects the attitudes of the mother characters toward their daughters. Investigating the effects of those attitudes on the daughter characters is fruitful because it illuminates reasons why a daughter might offer herself as an object instead of taking control and being a subject.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
While each of the four texts addresses the issue of mother-daughter relationships, Allison, Erdrich, Roy, and Tan all tell very different tales in different ways. Each author develops her mother and daughter characters' relationships so that at the end of each novel, the relationships change, and none of the changes within any one novel or within any of the four novels is the same. All of these differences, coupled with common themes, make comparisons inevitable.

Each of these texts represents a different culture: Allison represents poverty-level white America in the south; Erdrich represents rural Americans of European descent and Ojibwa culture; Tan represents Chinese American culture; and Roy represents Asian Indian culture. As a white, middle-class woman, I acknowledge the enormous complexity of the various cultures out of which these authors write and which they, in turn, depict in the narrative worlds which they construct. Although I mention cultural difference and class issues in the present study, I cannot give them, within the scope of this study, the primary attention which they deserve. That is the work of yet another study. My focus in the present study is on the mother-daughter relationships which Allison, Erdrich, Roy, and Tan depict in their novels.

Each author has structured her novel differently. Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* follows a linear time line and is the only novel told in the first person by only one narrator: Bone, the central character. She is the illegitimate daughter of Anne Boatwright. *Bastard Out of Carolina* is a coming-of-age novel that climaxes in Bone's brutal rape and beating at the hands of her stepfather, Glen. The aftermath of this horror is that Anne leaves Bone in the care of her sisters so that she can move away with Glen and Reese, her youngest daughter. Gwin Minrose calls *Bastard Out of Carolina* "a
brilliant meditation on the interaction of class and gender oppression in southern culture and the violence that erupts as a result” (434).

Gwin Minrose is one of four prominent Allison critics. Minrose’s work with *Bastard Out of Carolina* focuses on spaces where Bone is safe and not safe rather than on mother-daughter relationships. Nonetheless, her work is useful in later discussions of Bone and Anne’s relationship and how it changes as Glen repeatedly beats Bone. In addition to Minrose’s work, the work of Kathlene McDonald and Jillian Sandell, who address issues of class, race, and stereotype, is important in later chapters. Jocelyn Hazelwood Donlon also addresses space, like Minrose, but focuses on the “established traditions of porch romance” (133); thus, her work is not useful to this particular study of Allison.

Louise Erdrich’s *The Beet Queen* is different from *Bastard Out of Carolina* in that Erdrich writes from multiple first person perspectives, yet it is also similar in that it follows a linear time line. Set in Argus, North Dakota, the novel is part of a series of novels that focuses on Ojibway culture and characters. *The Beet Queen* centers on “Euro-American” characters, according to Dennis M. Walsh and Ann Braley (2) — unlike *Love Medicine* (1984), *Tracks* (1988), *The Bingo Palace* (1994), and *Tales of Burning Love* (1996), the other four novels in the series. The reservation on which the Ojibway live — the space that is central to the other novels in Erdrich’s series — appears in *The Beet Queen* “more as absence than presence,” as Walsh and Braley put it (2). Regardless of the lack of central focus on Ojibway culture, the novel, as a whole, does embody Ojibwa concepts such as the “notion of ‘family’” (71) which includes not only parents and children related by blood, but people who live under one roof or in one close-knit
community, thus creating a “spiritual kinship” (72). according to Meldan Tanrisal. Both Walsh and Braley’s ideas and Tanrisal’s ideas are developed in Chapter Four. Elaine Tuttle Hansen adds important support for Tanrisal by contrasting the abandoning white mother and the returning Native American daughter, as discussed in the Conclusion.

The Beet Queen traces the lives of a brother and a sister. Mary and Karl Adare, their cousin, Sita Kozka, and Mary and Sita’s friend, Celestine James. Of the four characters, Celestine is the only character with Ojibway blood; thus, she is the only one with ties to the reservation where her brothers, Eli and Russell, and aunt, Fleur, spend much of their lives. As the novel progresses, two more characters become important: Wallace Pfef, and Dot, the daughter of Celestine and Karl. Once Erdrich introduces her, Dot becomes the central character in the novel. The novel begins with abandonment: Mary and Karl’s mother, Adelaide, boards a plane and her children never see her again. Brother and sister separate, and Mary ends up in Argus where she forms an attachment to her aunt, Fritzie, an attachment very similar to the one that her cousin, Sita, has with Mary’s mother. Along with issues such as maternal abandonment, smothering mothers and female friendship, Erdrich explores issues such as mother-daughter and aunt-niece relationships. In “Race and Gender in Louise Erdrich’s ‘The Beet Queen,’” Susan Meisenhelder makes an interesting comparison between Sita and Celestine’s brother, Russell, both of whom she names as characters “who come closest to fulfilling social definitions of ideal male and female” (46) in the novel. However, much of her discussion focuses on characters and relationships not central to the mother-daughter focus here.

Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things is different from both Bastard Out of Carolina and The Beet Queen in that Roy writes in the third person and does not follow a
linear time line. The novel is set in the 1960’s in Kerala, a southern state in India. The significance of the date is that this was a time of political and social unrest in India, as the rise of the Communist Party and the still-powerful upper stratum of the Indian Caste system tore the country. The mother-daughter relationship of the novel is that of Rahel and her mother, Ammu. Rahel is the only daughter character in the four novels examined who does not narrate any part of her story. The novel traces the history of the Kochamma family beginning with Pappachi (Rahel’s grandfather, Ammu’s father) and ending with Rahel and her twin brother, Estha. The novel begins with a funeral. Rahel and Estha’s English cousin, Sophie Mol, drowns suddenly and accidentally. Roy treats her death and the events surrounding it as a mystery and unraveling the mystery is what drives the novel forward. Underlying the mystery are issues of class and gender, which are explored in connection with the relationships central to the novel: the relationship between Ammu and her children and the rest of the Kochamma family, and the family’s relationship to Velutha, the Untouchable whose life is destroyed for loving the wrong woman and the wrong children at the wrong time and place.

Because The God of Small Things was published in 1997, there is very little critical work on Roy or her novel other than book reviews. This study is among the first of the critical work on Roy and the first to address the relationship between Rahel and Ammu specifically.

Like The God of Small Things, Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club does not follow a linear time line. Complicating the novel further is the fact that Tan wrote it from multiple first person perspectives. Seven of the eight female characters whose lives constitute The Joy Luck Club have voices and tell their stories. Out of the eight characters, there are four
mothers and four daughters. Only one mother character has no voice: Suyuan Woo, June’s mother. She dies months before the action of the novel takes place. Not only does June tell her own story, she tells her mother’s — which begins in China — as well. While June has two roles to play, the other six women in the novel have only their own stories to tell. The other mothers, Lindo Jong, An-mei Hsu, and Ying-ying St. Clair, all tell the stories of their lives in China, and extend those stories to include how they came to live in the United States. Additionally, the mothers’ narratives include various points in the growth of their daughters, as well as moments when their daughters are adults with careers, and in some cases, marriages and families of their own. The daughter characters, besides June, are Waverly, daughter of Lindo, Rose, daughter of An-mei, and Lena, daughter of Ying-ying. The younger generation of female characters includes their early childhood memories in their narrations, as well as present-day conflicts with their mothers and husbands. Both the mothers and daughters address their place in society as women who are both Chinese and American.

A critic who is very useful to a study of mother-daughter relationships in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* is Wendy Ho. Ho examines themes common to each of the mother-daughter relations Tan has created. Additionally, her article contains useful background information on Chinese culture. In her article, “Daughter-Text/Mother-Text: Matrilineage in Amy Tan’s *Joy Luck Club,*” Marina Heung echoes some of the same points that Ho makes; however, she undermines her credibility as a critic by misquoting Tan’s text. M. Marie Booth Foster points out that “mothers and daughters share the telling” (210) in *The Joy Luck Club.* This is unusual in the literature of matrilineage, as both Heung and Bonnie Braendlin point out. Heung says it best when she refers to...
Marianne Hirsch’s study of women’s fiction from the eighteenth century through postmodernism, in which “Hirsch notes the predominance of the daughter’s voice and the silencing of the mother” (598).

Though Heung undermines her credibility, as noted above, she does point out that what is unusual about *The Joy Luck Club’s* position in the literature of matrilineage is that Tan allows her maternal figures to have voices, as opposed to giving sole narrative control to the daughter figures. That Heung recognizes this (598), and Braendlin echoes it (115), is noteworthy because the first of Nan Bauer Maglin’s interconnecting themes of the literature of matrilineage deals directly with the daughter who recognizes her mother’s voice in her own. In literature, an author must make her/his character aware of this recognition and the only way in which to do that is to give the daughter a voice. Thus, Maglin’s themes focus on daughter-recognized ideas.

Another of Tan’s critics, Rocio Davis, treats *The Joy Luck Club* as a short story cycle as opposed to a novel; thus, much of Davis’ work is irrelevant to a discussion of mother-daughter relationships in *The Joy Luck Club*. It is useful to point out that Davis refers to Heung and Ling in a discussion of the interchangeability of the characters and their stories in Tan’s novel. One of the examples that Heung provides is the interchangeability of the chapter title, “Half and Half” (122), which is Rose Hsu’s story, with June’s “half and half” experience with songs that she can play on the piano, and Waverly’s experience with “half and half” when her mother tells her that half of everything she is came from her father and half of everything she is came from her mother (611). Davis, Heung, Ling and Ho (quoting Ling) make similar observations regarding interchangeability. The mother-daughter relationships in *The Joy Luck Club*...
deal with the themes of matrilineage, particularly those that are concerned with voice and anger. In other words, the fact that these critics all highlight the interchangeability of Tan’s characters’ stories supports the idea that the stories all have common themes.

Similar to Davis, Stephen Souris treats *The Joy Luck Club* not as a novel, but as a series of monologues which “cohere around a central theme” (99) which he names as Chinese mothers and their “American-born daughters” (100). Souris’ work as a whole is not useful to this study, however, which focuses on the ways that maternal and filial characters’ lives parallel one another and diverge from one another.

Bonnie Braendlin’s work on *The Joy Luck Club* quotes Nan Bauer Maglin’s five interconnecting themes of the literature of matrilineage. The literature of matrilineage, as explained by Maglin, is merely women “writing about their female heritage and their female future” (257). Thus, Tan’s novel falls into that category because she is an author using characters to represent her “female heritage and female future.” The five themes Maglin identifies, which appear repeatedly in the “literature of matrilineage” are:

1. the recognition by the daughter that her voice is not entirely her own;
2. the importance of trying to see one’s mother in spite of or beyond the blindness and skewed vision that growing up together causes;
3. the amazement and humility about the strength of our mothers;
4. the need to recite one’s matrilineage, to find a ritual to both get back there and preserve it;
5. and still, the anger and despair about the pain and the silence born and handed on from mother and daughter. (258)

Maglin’s five themes, particularly those concerned with voice and anger, are exemplified not only in Tan’s text, but also in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, *The Beet Queen*, and *The God of Small Things*. In addition to *The Joy Luck Club*’s classification as part of the literature of matrilineage, the other three novels are also part of that same literature. Each novel
traces the history of the mother back at least as far as her childhood, and sometimes even further, to the mother's mother and the mother's grandmother. Along with the mother's history and experiences before becoming a mother, the authors deal with other female relationships. Thus, matrilinearity, which is based on kinship with the mother and on the female line and therefore includes other female relations such as aunts who play important roles in the lives of the daughters in all four of the novels, is a doubly important theme in the four texts.

The four texts, however, deal with common thematic issues beyond the five interconnecting themes of matrilineage raised by Maglin. For instance, the theme of female community resonates in three of the four texts, making the absence of female community in the forth, *The God of Small Things*, more apparent. In each of the texts, both the mother characters and the daughter characters struggle against objectification to gain subjectivity; they struggle to speak and act, thus constructing meaning, rather than be silent and passive, thus having meaning imposed upon them by others.

Chapter Two, entitled, "Mothers' Histories," focuses on the experiences of the mother characters prior to the birth of their daughters. Examining the mothers' experiences enables readers to see how these experiences affect the ways they raise their daughters in both attitude and in action and how the choices the mothers make in turn affect their daughters. Tracing the history of the mother becomes more complex because of the theme of matrilineage present in the texts. In the case of Tan's maternal figure, An-mei Hsu, her history stretches back as far as her grandmother, or, her daughter's great-grandmother.
Chapter Three, entitled, "Mother-Daughter Interactions," focuses on the action of each of the four novels: the lifetime of the daughter. Instead of examining the histories and experiences of the mother characters and their effects on their daughters, the question of what the daughters learn directly from their mothers is explored. Examining what the daughter characters learn from their mothers implies that the daughters will learn from mistakes that they see their mothers make and emulate the characteristics they see as admirable in their mothers.

Chapter Four steps back from the mother-daughter relationships and draws in the rest of the world around the mother-daughter pairs. Entitled, "Beyond the Mother-Daughter Relationships," this chapter explores the mothers' relationships in the novels and how those relationships affect their daughters. Many of the mother characters are part of female communities, and the mothers pass their communities on to their daughters. In the case of Dorothy Allison's character, Bone, for example, the female community she adopts from her mother becomes a much more important influence upon her than her relationship with her mother. This chapter is relevant to the question of whether the daughters will replicate their mothers' lives because it deals with the daughters' involvement in relationships that either aid them in or prevent them from choosing the paths of their mothers, or ultimately constitute the groundwork for reconciliation between the mothers and daughters.

The conclusion attempts to identify the daughter characters who replicate the lives of their mothers: daughters who make the same - or similar - choices as their mothers and/or who become adults with character traits similar to their mothers. As far as these four novels are concerned, matrilineal lines end with the daughters in the maternal-filial
relationships: Bone, the daughter of Anne; Dot, the daughter of Celestine; Rahel, the daughter of Ammu; June and her sisters, the daughters of Suyuan; Lena, the daughter of Ying-ying; Rose, the daughter of An-mei; and Waverly, the daughter of Lindo. Thus, the ways that authors resolve or do not resolve the maternal-filial relationships in their novels is important in tracing the direction of the matrilineal lines. Interwoven amongst all three of the core chapters and the conclusion are comparative analyses of the texts that focus on the mother and daughter characters and the ways that they connect and interact with each other and within the spaces they exist.
CHAPTER TWO

MOTHERS’ HISTORIES

The mother-daughter relationships in the four novels under examination do not simply begin with the inception of the daughter. They begin long before the daughter exists. They begin with the mother as daughter to her mother, and so on. What happens in the mother character’s life prior to the birth of her daughter affects her attitude towards her daughter and affects the way that she raises her daughter. The mother character’s history is an important part of her relationship with her daughter. Exploring the history of the mother is important because it is a building block toward the question of whether the daughter character will follow the same path as her mother.

The histories of the four primary mothers in Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club* vary in complexity. Tan begins An-mei Hsu’s history with An-mei’s recollection of the stories her grandmother, Popo, told her. Popo’s stories were lessons that she had to learn not only for herself, but for her mother who “dishonored her widowhood by becoming the third concubine [fourth wife] to a rich man” (242) named Wu Tsing. Ying-ying St. Clair’s story begins when she is four years old, on the day of the Moon Festival. Her mother and her amah, or governess, teach her what little girls do to catch dragonflies, a lesson she learns over and over and unwittingly passes on to her own daughter. The experiences that affect Lindo Jong’s daughter, Waverly, begin with a promise to her
parents. "'Do not disgrace us'" (48), Lindo's mother tells her as she prepares to leave her own family in order to join her future husband's family. Finally, Tan begins Suyuan Woo's history with a story about the Japanese invading Kweilin, the city in China where she lived with her babies—twin daughters.

In one very important way, Suyuan Woo is the least complex mother character of the four in The Joy Luck Club: Suyuan's story begins with her life, not stretching further back to include older generations of women. The story that Suyuan's daughter, June, refers to as "my mother's Kweilin story" (12) begins with the origin of the Joy Luck Club and ends with the loss of her two precious twin daughters. Three days after fleeing Kweilin on foot with a baby swinging in a scarf swing from each hand, Suyuan was forced by sickness and thirst to leave her children on the side of the road. Tucked into their shirts, she left money and valuables, photos of herself and her husband, and a note which began, "'Please care for these babies'" (325) and contained instructions to bring the girls to an address in Shanghai when it was safe to do so. She never saw her daughters again.

The loss of her twin daughters caused a giant chasm in Suyuan Woo's life and as a result, she was never satisfied: "Something was always missing. Something always needed improving. Something was not in balance" (19). While sometimes she was dissatisfied with one of her friends, or with her husband, more often than not Suyuan was dissatisfied with her daughter, June. "Jing-mei" is June's Chinese name, the name her mother gave her. The translation is "'Jing' like excellent jing. Not just good, it's something pure, essential, the best quality. jing is good leftover stuff when you take impurities out of something like gold, or rice, or salt. So what is left—just pure essence'"
"Mei,” is short for “meimei,” meaning “younger sister.” Suyuan’s high expectations for her youngest daughter are clearly seen in the translation of June’s name. It was Suyuan’s intention that June be the best of both the daughters her mother lost. Instead of being only one daughter, June had to be three daughters, somewhat of a “superdaughter.”

Suyuan expected her youngest daughter to have been born with a gift, something that would allow her to shine for both her mother and the sisters she never knew. Suyuan considered it her job to discover and cultivate whatever gift June possessed. The more she tried to find something that June would excel at, the more June rebelled, wanting nothing more than to be accepted for herself. One of the last of Suyuan’s many hopes for June involves the piano. After seeing a little Chinese girl playing the piano on The Ed Sullivan Show, Suyuan decided June could be a pianist of higher caliber than the girl on the television could. Three days later June found herself taking piano lessons from the man across the hall and practicing on his piano every day for two hours.

June later reflects that she never gave herself a chance to be a good pianist: “I was so determined not to try, not to be anybody different that I learned to play only the most ear-splitting preludes, the most discordant hymns” (148). June knows of her mother’s lost daughters, her sisters. She recognizes that the source of her mother’s ambition for her is in large part the loss of her first two daughters and that this loss drives her to push her remaining daughter.

After she catches her mother bragging about her natural talent for the piano (149), June decides to put a stop to her mother’s pride. She goes ill-prepared to a talent show at her church. All of her mother’s friends are in attendance, anxious to hear this child
prodigy that Suyuan bragged about. When June is finished playing, she finds that she has even surprised herself at how horrible she sounds. Her disappointment in herself is nothing compared to the pain she feels at seeing her mother’s face: “a quiet, blank look that said she had lost everything” (152). Suyuan did push her daughter; she wanted so much for the only daughter she had left. When June shamed herself, it was as if she lost June, too.

When she and her parents return home from the talent show, June is oddly disappointed that there was no shouting about her horrible performance: “I felt disappointed. I had been waiting for her to start shouting, so I could shout back and cry and blame her for all my misery” (152). When there is no shouting or mention of the piano for two days, June thinks that she will not have to continue playing. Her mother shows her she will not give up on her daughter so easily, however, and forcibly drags June to the piano to practice: “You want me to be someone I’m not!” I sobbed. ‘I’ll never be the kind of daughter you want me to be!’” (153), alluding to her lost sisters that she feels are always just under the surface of her mother’s expectations. Her mother tells her in Chinese that are were two kinds of daughters and only the obedient ones can live in her house. “Then I wish I wasn’t your daughter. I wish you weren’t my mother,” June tells her mother; “I wish I’d never been born...I wish I were dead like them!” (153).

June’s attitude toward the piano, her piano performance and its aftermath is a very good illustration of the way that an event in a mother’s life can affect her attitude toward her daughter. Suyuan had such high expectations for the only daughter she had left that she pushed and pushed, making the remaining daughter feel that nothing she ever did would be adequate to make up for the two daughters her mother had already lost. As a
result, June refused to try: "It was not the only disappointment my mother felt in me. In the years that followed, I failed her so many times, each time asserting my own will, my right to fall short of expectations" (153-54).

A daughter falling short of her mother's expectations is not an uncommon theme in *The Joy Luck Club*. An-mei Hsu falls short of her mother's expectations, as well. Her story begins with her assertion that Popo, her grandmother, tells her stories that she cannot understand. The stories Popo tells are stories that both she and her mother should have been listening to. However, An-mei's mother was in Shanghai, living as a fourth wife to a rich man. "'When you lose your face, An-mei,' Popo often said, 'it is like dropping your necklace down a well. The only way to get it back is to fall in after it'" (36). By shaming her widowhood, An-mei's mother has done this very thing — lost her face. An-mei later follows her, disappointing Popo a second time, losing her face, as well. It is not until her mother's suicide that An-mei really understands what Popo's story was about; it is not until then that An-mei realizes that the minute she walked away from Popo, she began to take control of her own life. Taking control of one's life, like falling short of expectations, is a common theme among the mothers and daughters. In following the matrilineage of the mothers and daughters Tan has created, is it important to recognize that these may be the first women in their lines actually to do such a thing as take control of their own lives.

An-mei learns from her mother as well as her grandmother. One of the lessons An-mei's mother teaches her is how easy it is to lose oneself to something false. An-mei herself learned this lesson when she fell for the friendship of a woman and man that she met on a train. The man was Wu Tsing, and the woman, Big Mother, his second wife.
The pair tricked An-mei’s mother into bed with Wu Tsing because they needed a woman who would bear him a son and An-mei’s mother looked like she could produce a son for them. When Big Mother “complained to many people about the shameless widow who had enchanted Wu Tsing into bed,” (267) she had had no choice but to become his fourth wife. This lesson was a very important one for An-mei’s mother because it changed her life for the worse. In order that her daughter not learn the lesson at the hands of someone cruel who would hurt her, An-mei’s mother taught her the lesson herself – with the help of a necklace – when opportunity presented itself.

Upon her return from visiting relatives in Peking, Big Mother gave An-mei a beautiful strand of pearls. An-mei was enamored with the gift, and with Big Mother for giving it to her. An-mei’s mother had to take action: she had to reveal Big Mother as a manipulator. After crushing one of the “pearls” under her shoe, thus proving that the necklace is not pearls at all, merely cut glass, she reties the strand and makes An-Mei wear the necklace for one week. When her mother let her take the necklace off, she asked An-mei, “‘Now can you see what is true?’” (261). An-mei did. She saw that Big Mother was not true; she tried to win An-mei over with fake gems. Her mother, on the other hand, was true and would always guide An-mei down the correct path.

An-mei’s mother also teaches her to swallow her own tears. Her mother tells her the story about the turtle that lived in the pond near Popo’s home. The turtle said to her one day as she was crying, “‘I have eaten your tears, and this is why I know your misery. But I must warn you. If you cry, your life will always be sad’” (243). The turtle spit her tears out in the form of eggs which hatched to become magpies, “birds of joy” (243). “‘Now you see,’ said the turtle, ‘why it is useless to cry. Your tears do not wash away
your sorrows. They feed someone else’s joy. And that is why you must learn to swallow
your own tears”” (244). An-mei’s mother thinks she is passing a valuable lesson on to her
daughter, one that she found useful as a woman in China. In reality, her mother is
continuing the tradition of the objectified woman in Chinese culture: a woman should
“desire nothing” and “swallow other people’s misery” (241). By telling her daughter she
should “eat [her] own bitterness” (241), An-mei’s mother is reinforcing silence as a way
of life, thus objectifying her daughter. A Chinese woman should take what is given to her
without question or comment. Perhaps this is why An-mei’s mother is never named in the
novel: she is an object with no desires and no outlet to express her pain.

An-mei tries to stifle within herself the lesson that her mother taught her with the
turtle’s story. That lesson is not useful. The fifth of Nan Bauer Maglin’s themes in the
literature of matrilineage is “the anger and despair about the pain and the silence born and
handed on from mother and daughter” (258). As her daughter, Rose, grows, An-mei
attempts to teach her the opposite of what she learned from her mother. This is the “anger
and despair” that is manifest at having silence passed down to her from her mother.

An-mei also learns that Popo was right about losing one’s face. When her mother
became a fourth wife, she lost her face. It took her death, a suicide — the part of Popo’s
story where she falls in the well — to get her face back again. That was not the most
important lesson she learns from either Popo or her mother. The most important lesson
she learns is to listen to her heart, to speak out, to take action. She does have a voice and
she does have choices; she can reclaim her face of her own free will.

Suicide may not have been the most productive way to make herself heard, but
“That was what people did back then. They had no choice. They could not speak up.
They could not run away” (272). In the scene at An-mei’s mother’s deathbed, Tan incorporates another of Maglin’s themes: An-mei is both amazed and humbled at the strength her mother shows by planning her death so that she dies two days before the new year. She “plan[ned] her death so carefully that it became a weapon” (270).

In China, on the third day of death, the soul comes back to earth to settle old scores. By killing herself when she does, she ensures that her soul will be active on the first day of the new year, thus forcing Wu Tsing to promise to take excellent care of An-mei and Syaudi, the son her mother had been forced to give up to the care of Big Mother. “I know my mother listened to her own heart, to no longer pretend” (270), An-mei reflected.

An-mei takes the lessons she learns from her mother and Popo to America. When she has a daughter, Rose, she tries to teach her the important lessons she learned and the opposite of the ones that were harmful so that Rose would never know the pain An-mei experienced in China. She has the best intentions; however, her intentions are not enough. Rose turns out exactly the way she would have had she been raised in China: “Maybe it is because she was bom to me and she was bom a girl. And I was bom to my mother and I was bom a girl. All of us are like stairs, one step after another, going up and down, but all going the same way” (241). Rose follows in the footsteps of grandmother and mother; as an adult, she believes that she has no choice and no voice. She loses her face to her husband and she is easily swayed into seeing good where there is none. Rose’s story is examined in greater detail in Chapters Three and Four.

Like the past she creates for An-mei, the events Tan includes in Ying-ying St. Clair’s history begin with lessons from her mother. Ying-ying was born a tiger, in the
year 1914. According to her mother, 1914 "was a bad year to be born, a very good year to be a Tiger" (282). Ying-ying lived because her tiger spirit was stronger than the bad spirit that inhabited the world then. That is how her mother explained Ying-ying's headstrong ways.

Ying-ying's mother explained to her the two ways of the tiger, which correspond to the two colors of the tiger, gold and black. "The gold side leaps with its fierce heart. The black side stands still with cunning, hiding its gold between the trees, seeing and not being seen, waiting patiently for things to come" (282). Because Ying-ying was such an active, curious child, the black side was the side of her tiger spirit that her amah tried to cultivate so that Ying-ying's mother would not be displeased with either the amah or her young daughter, Ying-ying. The black side of Ying-ying's tiger spirit was particularly important on the day of the Moon Festival, the day that the whole family makes a trip to see the Moon Lady. The trip corresponds to the one night of the year when a person can tell the lady in the moon one of her (or his) secret desires. Any other time, announcing desires was not acceptable behavior: "A girl can never ask, only listen" (68). On that same day, Ying-ying's mother reinforces the black in her daughter's tiger spirit: "A boy can run and chase dragonflies, because that is his nature," she said. 'But a girl should stand still. If you are still for a very long time, a dragonfly will no longer see you. Then it will come to you and hide in the comfort of your shadow" (70). Of all the lessons Ying-ying carries with her to America, this one proves to be the most important. It is this lesson that cultivates Ying-ying's black side so that she becomes an object, a character to be acted upon, instead of a subject, a character who takes action.
Ying-ying learns to be so still that she is able “to know a thing before it happen[s]” (278). This is the case with her first husband. She knows she will marry him from almost the first instant she sees him. She does not marry him out of love, but because by the time he enters her life, she is already eighteen, almost beyond marriageable age. Ying-ying comes to love her first husband, the way it is “when a person joins your body and there is a part of your mind that swims to join that person against your will” (281). When he leaves her, shamed and pregnant, for other women, she kills the baby she knows will be a boy. She kills it because of the hatred she feels for its father.

She spends the next ten years wandering among her second cousin’s family in Shanghai: “If you ask me what I did during those long years, I can only say I waited between the trees. I had one eye asleep, and the other open and watching” (283). She was emulating the black side of her tiger-ness. After ten years, she gets work as a shop girl where she meets Rose’s father, an American named Clifford St. Clair. Like her first husband, she knows she will marry this man well before the subject comes up. She knows this not because she loves him, but because she knows “he was the sign that the black side of [herself] would soon go away” (284).

When she gets news that her first husband was been killed by an opera singer whom he tried to leave, “I decided to let Saint marry me...I let myself become a wounded animal. I let the hunter come to me and turn me into a tiger ghost. I willingly gave up my chi, the spirit that caused me so much pain” (285). She willingly gives up her right as a human being with subjectivity in favor of being an object, a thing with no spirit.
In America, Saint changes the name on her immigration papers from Gu Ying-ying to Betty. He also writes down the wrong birth year — 1916 instead of 1914. "So, with the sweep of a pen, my mother lost her name and become a Dragon instead of a Tiger" (107), reinforcing her role as object rather than subject. In Chinese culture, the birth year is important because each year is connected to an animal whose characteristics define the people born in that year. The fact that Tan writes a male character into her novel who exchanges such an important date only further resonates Ying-ying's sense of powerlessness at the hands of men. Because Ying-ying loses her subjectivity, she raises a daughter with "no chuming, no inside way of knowing things" (282), a woman prone to objectification. She raises a daughter with no Chinese spirit, only American ways. "With all these things, I did not care. I had no spirit" (286).

It takes a visit to the home her daughter shares with her architect husband to open Ying-ying's eyes to what she must do: regain her tiger spirit and pass it on to her daughter. "All around this house I see the signs. My daughter looks but does not see. This is a house that will break into pieces" (275). Ying-ying sees a barn that is disguised as a house. She sees a slanted floor and a guest room, "which is really a former hayloft shaped by a sloped roof — has 'two lopsides'" (165). She sees spiders in the corners and fleas, too. "And it annoys me that all she sees are the bad parts. But then I look around and everything she's said is true. And this convinces me she can see what else is going on, between Harold and me. She knows what's going to happen to us" (164).

Her daughter, Lena, knows too, but has not taken action, has not found the spirit to do something about the situation in which she has found herself inside her marriage. Her marriage is based on a system of financial transactions, a system of checks and
balances so that one half does not ever pay more than the other half. Lena and her husband keep lists on the refrigerator of who has spent what money. They split everything down the middle except the house payment, which Harold has figured based on the percentage of what she makes versus what he makes. The two have every aspect of their money situation negotiated right down to vacations and the ice cream Harold buys every Friday.

Ying-ying also spots this flaw, subtly showing her daughter how ridiculous the whole situation is, putting thoughts into her daughter's head because her daughter cannot think them herself. "'This, you do not share!'" (176). Ying-ying points at "ice cream" on the list of items for which Lena owes Harold money. Lena has hated ice cream since she was a young girl. She realizes that she has been paying for something she never eats, and that it has never occurred to her that because she does not eat it she should not have to pay for it. Lena also realizes that Harold has never noticed that she has not once eaten the ice cream, that Harold does not know that she hates ice cream.

This small item on a list of food they share is an illustration of Lena's entire relationship with Harold, from the dating stages until their present-day state of marriage. The ice cream is an illustration of the fact that their system is not fair. Lena does her best to support Harold in any way she can. She encourages him to leave the architectural firm at which they both work so that he can start his own firm. When she wants to invest in his venture out of love for him and to show her support, he will not take money from her. He insists on keeping the money issue separate from their relationship. Even when he asks her to move in with him, he tells her that her half of the rent will really help him keep costs down while he starts up his business. Instead of speaking up, telling Harold that she
would like it if they shared money as well as each other’s lives, Lena allows Harold to
objectify her, to define her life as *he* sees fit.

She leaves their firm at the same time Harold does so that she can work with him.
Her ideas help him to define his company’s role within the world of architecture. Yet she
never receives credit for all her hard work. In the firm’s first two years, Lena never gets a
promotion. Harold tells her that for him to promote his wife would not seem fair to the
other employees. “And when I do think about it, how much I get paid, how hard I work,
how fair Harold is to everybody except me, I get upset” (173). Yet, because she is her
mother’s daughter, she lives with her situation.

Because Ying-ying knows a thing before it happens, she realizes that she has done
nothing to show her daughter the kind of woman that she should be:

For all these years I kept my mouth closed so selfish desires would not fall
out. And because I remained quiet for so long now my daughter does not hear
me...All these years I kept my true nature hidden, running along like a small
shadow so nobody could catch me. And because I moved so secretly now my
daughter does not see me...We are lost, she and I, unseen and not seeing, unheard
and not hearing, unknown by others. (64)

Ying-ying takes action, knocking over an unsteady marble table with a vase on it that
decorates the guestroom in Lena and Harold’s house. She tells her daughter the table fell
down and does not apologize. Lena tells her that it does not matter, “I knew it would
happen” (181). Ying-ying asks her why she did not stop it. “[I]t’s such a simple
question” (181) that begins to pave the way for both mother and daughter to (re)gain their
spirits.

Unlike An-mei and Ying-ying, the history that Tan writes for Lindo Jong does not
include lessons she learned from other generations of women. Lindo’s recollections begin
with a promise to her parents that she will not shame them in her husband’s home; but, the real story begins on her wedding day when she realizes that she can see the power of the wind: “I was strong. I was pure. I had genuine thoughts inside that no one could see. that no one could ever take away from me” (53). She promises herself on that day that no matter what happens to her, she will never forget who she is.

Months into her marriage, she realizes that her husband will never touch her. that she will never be able to give her mother-in-law the grandchildren she desires. In an effort to escape her marriage without shaming herself or her family, she manipulates her mother-in-law into allowing her to leave her marriage. She uses all that she knows about the workings of the household and about Tyan-yu himself in order to leave. She tells her mother-in-law that she has seen a man with a beard and a mole in a dream. The man she describes is the man she saw in a painting, a man she knew to be Tyan-yu’s grandfather. She tells her mother-in-law that the ancestors planted signs “to show that our marriage was rotting” (61). The signs include a black spot on Tyan-yu’s back, a spot Lindo knows from months of sleeping quietly next to him; an empty place in the back of her own mouth where a tooth had fallen out years before; and, a pregnant servant girl, whom the ancestors in her dream claimed was “Tyan-yu’s spiritual wife” (62). She tells her mother-in-law that the seed in the girl’s body was planted by the grandfather in her dream and would “grow into Tyan-yu’s child” (62).

Hours later, the matchmaker’s servant, the one who had been in charge of making sure that Lindo and Tyan-yu’s marriage candle stayed lit for the entire first night of their marriage, confesses that she let the candle go out. Lindo knows this already, as she was
out walking alone, late on her wedding night after Tyan-yu brushed her aside and banished her to the couch in his bedroom.

Lindo’s invisible strength allows her “not to show [her] own thoughts, to put [her] feelings behind [her] face so [she could] take advantage of hidden opportunities” (289). Because she appears happy and grateful to be Tyan-yu’s wife, her story is believable. Because Lindo knows herself, she sees a situation that she is not content with and she fixes it. She does not allow herself to be objectified by her mother-in-law and her husband.

Lindo says her daughter is American all through, which is not what she wants for her children. Instead, she wants them “to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character” (289). Lindo thinks that Waverly followed her Chinese ways “only until she learned how to walk out the door by herself and go to school” (289). What she does not realize is that Waverly has learned Chinese character. The power of the wind manifests itself in the form of her skill at chess. (As a child, Waverly is a champion chess player.) Waverly’s power of invisible strength reveals itself in her ability to get what she wants without it giving away her ultimate goal.

The first time that someone suggests that Waverly compete in a neighborhood chess tournament, Waverly recognizes that her mother will not consent to let her play without a bit of manipulation on her part. She convinces her mother not by asking to play, but by telling her mother that she does not want to play in the tournament because “[t]hey would have American rules. If I lost, I would bring shame on my family” (97). Soon thereafter, Waverly participates in and wins her first tournament. Because Waverly is her mother’s daughter, her mother’s history impacts her in the way that she approaches her
life. Waverly fights to be her own person, just the way her mother had to fight to be her own person. Good or bad, Lindo has passed on to Waverly her ability think for herself and use her invisible strength to her advantage.

In trading her objectification away for subjectivity, Lindo proves herself to be a rebel. She breaks the rules. In China, wives are not supposed to even think about leaving their husbands, let alone orchestrate their own departure. Wives are not supposed to think for themselves. They do not have voices, nor do they have choices. In this way, she is much like An-mei Hsu’s mother, who orchestrates her own death so as to escape her marriage and secure a better future for her daughter. Both women find themselves in situations in which they will never be happy. Both women find loopholes and charge out of their situations. Lindo breaks free to a new life; she starts afresh and remarries. An-mei’s mother breaks free in death, leaving freedom for her daughter behind. What these Chinese mothers have in common with Ammu, the Indian mother in Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things, is that Ammu, too, is a rebel. Ammu breaks the rules of her culture and position as a woman much the way that Lindo and An-mei’s mother do.

Ammu’s rebellion begins differently than either Lindo’s or An-mei’s mother’s. Rebellion begins for the Chinese women when they take action to extract themselves from their marriages. Ammu’s rebellion is in the act of marrying. Marriage, in Ammu’s mind, is a way to escape her life at Ayemenem with her family. She meets her husband while vacationing in Calcutta the summer she is eighteen.

Ammu spent her childhood in Delhi with her family. She finished her schooling just as her family was moving to Ayemenem. Her father did not believe that it was
necessary for women to go to college, and so Ammu had no choice but to move from Delhi with her family.

At Ayemenem, there is nothing for Ammu to do except wait for a marriage proposal. In the two years Ammu spends there, none come for her. Her family is not wealthy enough then to offer a suitable dowry. At age eighteen, Ammu is desperate: “All day she dreamed of escaping from Ayemenem and the clutches of her ill-tempered father and bitter, long-suffering mother”(38).

Out of desperation, she marries the man she meets at someone else’s wedding, who is of a family of “once-wealthy zamindars who had migrated to Calcutta from East Bengal” (39). He proposes to her after only five days and Ammu accepts. She does not accept because she loves him, she accepts because “anything, anyone at all would be better than returning to Ayemenem” (39). Her parents do not reply when she writes them with her news. Marrying without the approval of her parents, and marrying a foreigner, no less, are among the first of the rules that Ammu breaks. Ammu’s independent spirit, the spirit that drives her from her parents’ home and into her marriage in the first place is another of the Ammu’s early broken rules because, as a woman in India, she does not have a right to independence.

Later, Ammu realizes that she married an alcoholic and a compulsive liar. By the time her “two-egg twins” (4) are born, their father is in an alcoholic stupor. Ammu is the only thing standing between him and losing his job, though she has nothing to do with it directly. Because Mr. Hollick, her husband’s supervisor, takes a fancy to her, he has her husband in for a meeting, suggesting that he take a leave and go somewhere, “to a clinic perhaps, for treatment” (41), while Ammu is “sent to his bungalow to be ‘looked after’”
When he tells Ammu Mr. Hollick’s idea, she does not react. And so he beats her until he passes out. The beatings continued until “his bouts of violence began to include the children” (42).

The twins are two years old when Ammu leaves her husband and returns home, unwelcomed. By leaving her husband, Ammu breaks another rule: women did not leave their husbands. Women did not get divorced, especially when there were children to be considered. Ammu’s divorce is at once a convergence point with and a departure point from the Chinese mothers. Of the two Chinese mothers who leave their husbands, neither returns home to her family and neither takes her children with her when she leaves. Lindo had no children, and An-mei’s mother left hers behind.

At the age of twenty-seven, Ammu thinks she has lost her one chance at happiness. She knows then that she has nothing more to lose. She lives at her family’s home in Ayemenem with her twins. She is divorced. Her family’s disapproval is manifest in Baby Kochamma, her great-aunt, who disapproves of Ammu in degrees, each one worse than the last. First, Ammu marries and returns home with children. Next, Ammu divorces, and a divorced daughter “had no position anywhere at all” (45). Worse even, enough to cause “outrage” is that Ammu is a “divorced daughter from a love marriage” (45). Finally, “a divorced daughter from a intercommunity love marriage” (45) is enough to make Baby Kochamma “quiveringly silent on the subject” (45). As already noted, women in India did not divorce. Generally, they did not marry for love, either. However, when women did marry for love, the marriage was expected to last. A love marriage which ends in divorce is even worse than an arranged marriage which ends in divorce. As evidenced by the Kochamma family’s reaction to Ammu’s marrying a foreigner,
intercommunity marriages were generally unacceptable; thus, an intercommunity marriage based on love was doubly difficult to accept. An intercommunity marriage based on love which ends in divorce is triply unacceptable.

Baby Kochamma’s disapproval of Ammu spills over onto the twins, as well. She is very suspicious of them. She eavesdrops on their conversations and follows them around. She never loses her suspicious attitude toward them, even when they become adults: “She didn’t even trust the twins. She deemed them Capable of Anything. Anything at all” (29).

Ammu does nothing to rally support for herself, either. She continues to break rules and assert her independence. Her twins do not have a surname at the age of five “because Ammu was considering reverting to her maiden name, though she said that choosing between her husband’s name and her father’s name didn’t give a woman much of a choice” (37). Both her father’s name and her husband’s name are symbols of the patriarchal society that she fights, first by wishing to stay in Delhi to attend school, and second by marrying, thus escaping one patriarch – her father. In divorcing, she escapes another patriarch – her husband, thus upsetting the patriarchal society which dictates that a woman must answer to a man.

On top of her family’s disapproval, “the constant, high, whining mewl of local disapproval” (42) is in the background of Ammu and her twins’ lives unceasingly. As a result, Ammu is tougher on her children, quicker to discipline them, especially Rahel. When Rahel innocently asks Mammachi (grandmother) if she can inherit the little tool that she uses to take out her contact lenses, “Ammu took her out of the room and smacked her” (49), as if she should have known not to discuss people’s deaths with them.
Another time, Rahel excitedly stands up on the car seat to lean out the window and shout at a man she thinks is Velutha, a dear friend to the family. Ammu turns around in the car and slaps “the only part of her left in the car to slap” (68) and tells her to behave herself, not bothering to explain to Rahel that her behavior was inappropriate for the time and place. They were caught in the middle of a Communist march – not a good place for a bourgeois family to be. Even Chacko, Ammu’s brother, tells her, “‘It’s fascist, the way you deal with them’” (81).

Ammu is not only tougher on her children, she is also more protective of them. When she sees how easily they love people “who didn’t really love them” (42), she gets exasperated and sometimes she wants “to hurt them – just as an education, a protection” (42). One such incident occurs on the day that she tells them the story of Julius Caesar, who was stabbed by his best friend. Her lesson: the twins cannot trust anyone. When they asked if the three of them can trust each other, she tells them, “it remain[s] to be seen” (79). Ammu’s response is extremely ambivalent – an unsettling response coming from a mother whose children who have no one except each other.

Ammu’s feelings that the twins should know who and what to trust are parallel to those seen in An-mei’s mother. An-mei’s mother crushed the bead from Big Mother’s necklace under her shoe to teach her daughter the same lesson. It was important to An-mei’s mother, as it is to Ammu, that her children know what is real and what is not.

Ammu’s disappointments in life make her distant from her twins. She listens to the radio on some days, and when she does, “there was something restless and untamed about her” (43). She spends hours by herself, listening to her radio, smoking, not speaking at all. Everyone, including her children, knows to be wary of her on days that
she is like this. People sense that Ammu “lived in the penumbral shadows between two worlds” (44) – the world of motherhood, and a secret world of her own making. On days like this, “everybody agreed that it was best to just Let Her Be” (44).

Ammu’s distance, especially on days when she is unreachable, combined with the village disapproval and Baby Kochamma’s attitude toward them – both more the result of their mother’s actions than their own – drive the twins closer together. They “thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us” (5). They have no one else to count on. This strong, invisible connection between sister and brother makes Rahel’s life even harder later, when she and her twin are separated for good.

Even though Ammu is physically present in her daughter’s life, she is not always mentally present, especially on days when she wanders the beach “as though she had temporarily set aside the morality of motherhood and divorcee-hood” (43). Thus she can be considered an absent mother, at least for some of Rahel’s childhood. In this way, Ammu can be compared to the first of three mothers in The Beet Queen. Adelaide Adare is an absent mother, as well. Unlike Ammu, Adelaide completely abandons her children, a girl and two boys, by boarding a plane with “The Great Omar...Aeronaught Extraordinaire” (11) and flying away, never to return.

Erdrich explores very little of Adelaide’s history in the novel. Adelaide’s part opens in a white house where she lives with her two children, Mary and Karl. The little Adare family lives alone, rarely interacting with anyone; except Mr. Ober, who visits their mother two or three times a week. Mr. Ober would visit with Mary and Karl before they went to bed and then stay long into the night with their mother. He was always gone in the morning. It is not until Mr. Ober dies suddenly that the children learn that their
mother is a “kept” woman, and that Mr. Ober was Karl’s father (and probably Mary’s, as well). Mr. Ober was a married man, and so when he dies, his mistress. Adelaide, loses everything. The little Adare family flees the house on the day of the funeral and goes “to the Cities” (Minneapolis/St. Paul) (7). Adelaide thinks that “with her figure and good looks, she could find work in a fashionable shop” (7). Working in a shop is all that Adelaide can do. She has no skill to rely on and no education.

The plan fails when Adelaide learns she is pregnant. Shortly after Adelaide gives birth, she and her three children go searching for an inexpensive place to live. They stop at a fair along the way, where they watch “The Great Omar” as his plane “dipped, rolled, buzzed, glided” (11) through the air. When “The Great Omar” lands, he offers rides to anyone who dares. Adelaide holds her purse above her head and shouts, “‘Here!’” (11), leaving fourteen-year-old Karl and eleven-year-old Mary standing with their newborn baby brother, unnamed because Adelaide had refused to give him one. After Adelaide’s swift and unexpected departure from their lives, a stranger in the crowd who claims that he will take good care of the child takes Mary and Karl’s unnamed brother from them.

On their own, Mary and Karl make their way back to the boardinghouse where they had been living since their mother discovered she was pregnant. After the two cry on Adelaide’s bed, Mary takes charge, deciding that they had better go to Aunt Fritzie in Argus.

Erdrich develops Adelaide’s history through the eyes of Sita, her older sister Fritzie’s daughter: “My mother said she’d always spoiled Adelaide because she was the baby of the family” (28). This bit of Adelaide’s history may be part of the reason that Adelaide is incapable of being responsible for her three children: she had always had
someone to take care of her and spoil her. Her older sister played the role. Mr. Ober
played the role. Having to provide for others what had always been provided for her
might have been more than she could handle. The direct impact that Adelaide’s history as
a “kept” woman has on Mary is that it teaches Mary that she has to find a way to be
useful to Fritzie and Pete: “I planned to be essential to them all, so depended upon that
they could never send me off. I did this on purpose, because I soon found out that I had
nothing else to offer” (19). As the years pass, Mary becomes so essential that when
Fritzie and Pete leave South Dakota because of Fritzie’s ailing health, they leave their
store in Mary’s care.

Even Adelaide recognizes her own inadequacy as a self-supporting woman and
wants better for her daughter. Years later, Erdrich brings Adelaide back into the novel
briefly to worry about her daughter not being able to support herself. She sends Mary a
sewing machine, saying, “‘If Mary learns how to sew, she’ll always have something to
fall back on’” (60). By the time the sewing machine gets to Mary, however, she is
running the shop. In her bitterness, and the hatred she feels toward her mother for
leaving, she sends the sewing machine on to Sita, telling Sita that Adelaide sent it to her.

Sita accepts Mary’s story without question. Adelaide had always been Sita’s
favorite person. Sita admires everything about Adelaide. Sita thinks that Adelaide has
style and “understands how to use [her] good looks to her advantage” (28). Additionally,
Sita’s connection with Adelaide is the only place that Fritzie’s history can be explored,
because other than the fact that she is married to Pete and runs a butcher shop, Fritzie’s
history remains a mystery.
Though Fritzie does not approve of Adelaide, she accepts that her daughter has a connection with her younger sister. Fritzie’s attitude toward Sita is based on her recognition that Sita is very much like Adelaide. She humors Sita on occasion, but does not let her get away with being mean or selfish to her cousin. Nor does she let Sita get out of working in the store, “the same as anyone cleaning gizzards” (28). It is quite possible that Fritzie and Adelaide had some sort of falling out, after which Adelaide ceased communication with Fritzie. Mary remembers suggesting that they go to Fritzie right before her mother’s flight. Adelaide’s reply was favorable enough, “‘We could go back to Fritzie’” (10), but Mary could tell that that was “the last thing she wanted to do” (10). Hence, when Fritzie recognizes that Sita will follow a path much like Adelaide’s, she may try harder to be accepting. Fighting Sita’s natural inclinations might have cost Fritzie their relationship the way that it might have cost Fritzie her relationship with her sister.

Celestine is the third and final mother in The Beet Queen. Celestine is a childhood friend of Mary and Sita, thus a generation younger than Fritzie and Adelaide, but that is not the only difference. Where Adelaide is an absent mother and Fritzie is quite normal, Celestine is smothering. Celestine’s mothering is shaped by an absent mother – her mother died when she was young. Celestine tries to be the mother she would have wanted: “I do the wrong thing and give her everything until there is nothing left. I try to be the mother I never had, to the daughter I never was” (215).

According to Mary, having Dot “was the first thing Celestine ever did out of the ordinary” (180) and so Celestine was very possessive of her child. When Mary points out that Dot resembles her, “pale, broad, and solid” (181), Celestine defines Mary’s role in Dot’s life: “‘You’re her aunt and that’s all. I’m her mother’” (182).
Celestine’s stinginess with her daughter leads to a sort of competition with Mary for Dot’s affection. As a result, Mary also spoils the child. Mary’s spoiling manifests itself as defending Dot when Celestine is angry with her, even when Dot is clearly in the wrong. For instance, when Dot gets in trouble at school and then lies about it, Mary sticks up for her. Mary goes so far as to play a horrible trick on Dot’s teacher as payback for what Dot says the teacher did to her. When the truth is discovered – Dot had lied to Mary – instead of being angry at Dot for lying to her, Mary laughs. Louise Flavin writes that “[s]ince Mary was abandoned by her own mother, it is not surprising that she lavishes attention on her niece and becomes increasingly permissive and defensive of her bad behavior, in effect nurturing the uncared-for child within herself” (22).

Mary’s permissive and defensive behavior regarding Dot causes problems between herself and Celestine; but, regardless of the problems between her mother and aunt, Dot has two people in her life to give her everything she wants and she takes them for everything they have. As a result, Dot becomes “a bully, a demanding child, impossible to satisfy” (181). According to Mary, her first word is “more.” Dot is greedy and grows fat. Celestine and Mary still cannot deny her because, as Mary says, drawing on history, “We had gone hungry as children” (181) and they did not want Dot to experience hunger as they had. They did not want to tell Dot “No” when they could easily afford to tell her “Yes,” and give her whatever it was she was asking for.

In the context of the passage, Mary’s use of the word “hungry” refers to food. However, “hungry” can also refer to motherly love and affection. Dot gets plenty of this from both Celestine and Mary as well. Both Celestine and Mary had gone hungry for motherly love and affection as well because they were both motherless.
Where Celestine goes without examples of mothering, the mother character in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Anne, has a large family which offers many examples of mothers. Anne is the youngest of all her siblings. By the time she has her first daughter, Ruth Anne (Bone), at age fifteen, two of her older sisters are married and have children of their own. She also has her mother as an example. None of these women was smothering; none of these women was absent.

Anne has four sisters and three brothers. Granny Boatwright loves her boys best because they love her best: "'My three boys worship me...but my girls, Lord! I've got five girls and they never seem to appreciate me'" (18). In the world of the Boatwright women, especially Granny, "Men could do anything, and everything they did, no matter how violent or mistaken, was viewed with humor and understanding" (23).

Granny taught Anne and the rest of her girls (much by example) to be tough and to provide for their children. She also taught them to coddle and humor their husbands as long as their husbands did right by them (cheating and beating wives and children does not fall into this category). Maybe because Anne was her youngest, or maybe because Anne was only fifteen at the time, but when Granny found out Anne was pregnant, she stepped in and ran the boy who did it out of town for messing with her daughter. Perhaps that is why Anne never stepped in to stop her husband, Glen, from beating her daughter, Bone: someone else had always fought her battles for her. It is likely that Anne, as the youngest of a family of eight children, always had someone to look out for her. She did not have to take care of her problems because there was always someone to handle them for her. The fact that Granny ran Bone's father out of town is a prime example. When
Anne has problems that none of her family knows about, she is ill-equipped to deal with them.

Granny’s privileging of her sons is something that Anne recognizes early in her life and takes with her. “She’s always loved her boy children more. It’s just the way some women are” (18), she tells her daughters before dropping them off with their Granny on her way to work. Granny’s attitude toward her boys might have fueled Anne’s need to have a man in her life. Granny always had her husband, Anne’s father. When her husband died, she had all of her sons to take care of her.

Anne marries Lyle Parsons when Bone is two. Lyle wants to take care of her and provide everything for her. He is serious about that, serious to the point that he does not want Anne to work. She stops working briefly; but, when money gets tight and she is pregnant with her second daughter, Reese, she takes a job at a factory. “Lyle didn’t like that at all” (6).

Shortly after Reese is born, Lyle is killed in an accident. To support herself and her two young daughters, Anne first takes a job in a mill, quitting when the dust gets to her. She then takes a job waiting tables at a diner. Anne is very capable of taking care of her daughters. She leaves them with one of her sisters or with her mother on days when she works, often not picking them up until long after they have gone to bed. She is never bitter about the burden of providing shelter, food and clothing for two young daughters as well as herself, though she is not much older than a child herself, at the age of eighteen.

Lyle, like her siblings and her mother, adored her and spoiled her, tried to do everything he possibly could for her, much the way she was probably adored and spoiled by her family growing up. There was always someone around to tell her how pretty she
was or to take care of her. When she loses Lyle, she loses that as well, and this makes her more susceptible to Glen’s charms when he comes to the diner where she works and begins to court her. She thinks, “He’d make a good daddy” (13), and imagines that he is “a steady man” (13). She needs a husband. On her wedding day, her sister Alma says that Anne needs Glen, “needs him like a starving woman needs meat between her teeth” (41).

As Jillian Sandell points out, Anne’s need for Glen is both “psychological and economic” (221). She needs him to help her support herself and her girls, perhaps even support all of them so that she does not have to spend so many hours on her feet at the diner. She also needs him emotionally: she needs someone to love and adore her, to fill the void that Lyle left when he died.

Even after Anne marries Glen, she has to work hard every day of her life to support her children and, on occasion, her husband. Anne does what she has to do, and does not seem bitter or resentful of her children because of it. One night when there is no money for food, Anne has to feed Bone and Reese soda crackers and ketchup. To keep their minds off of their unsatisfying meal, she entertains them with stories of her own childhood:

We used to pass the plates around the table, eight plates for eight kids, pretending there was food gonna come off the stove to fill those plates. talking about food we’d never seen, just heard about or imagined, making up stories about what we’d cook if we could. (72)

After the girls’ stomachs were filled, Anne puts on red lipstick, combs her hair, and pulls on hose. Her resentment at having to support both her daughters and her husband surfaces; she gets angry at Glen for being “so casual at finding another job” (73). She tells him, “‘Not my kids’” (73), and “‘I was never gonna have my kids know what it was
like. Never gonna have them hungry or cold’’ (73). That night, Anne sells her body to
feed her children. She has only one thing left to feed her children with, and she uses that
one thing without bitterness or resentfulness.

Anne’s attitude toward her girls, particularly Bone, does not change even when
she leaves Glen for the first time. She leaves him because he beat Bone. The tone of the
passage and the actions between mother and daughter and the words spoken never seem
to indicate that she blames Bone or sees Bone as an obstacle to her happiness with Glen.
Of course, the move is only temporary, as implied by the fact that she only moves herself
and her girls to one of her sisters’ houses. The Boatwright women have a history of
leaving their husbands or kicking them out only to return to them or allow them back
when they feel the men have learned their lesson.

Anne’s attitude toward Bone does change when Anne leaves Glenn for the second
time. She is no longer able to look at her daughter. She is ashamed that she let Glen’s
beatings go on for so long. She is ashamed that she did not protect her child better.
Worse, though, is the knowledge that she wants to go back to Glen, that she needs Glen
even after all he has done to her daughter, that she needs him even though, if given the
chance, he will continue to beat Bone and Bone will pay the price for her mother’s
history of needing someone in her life to adore her and love her.

Until this trying time when Anne’s need for her husband puts her child at risk,
having a strong family of women and understanding and accepting her position as the
only stability in the lives of her two daughters makes Anne a wonderful, nurturing, caring
mother. Bone is very secure with her mother. Bone is happy, or at least content, in her
mother’s presence. Bone enjoys and seeks out the company of her mother. This should

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have been the most normal of all the mother-daughter relationships discussed because it is such a nurturing and affectionate relationship. Anne and Bone do not have language and cultural barriers the way that the Chinese mothers and daughters do. Anne has not broken any of society’s rules the way that Ammu did, setting her children up to live with the judgments others make about them. Anne also has a large, supportive family with plenty of mothering role models, unlike Celestine, in *The Beet Queen* and Arundhati Roy’s character, Ammu.

The supportive environment that Anne has is one important difference between her and Ammu. Ammu does not have the supportive family structure to help her through her divorce and return to Ayemenem with her twins. When she does return, her own father doubts her when she tells him how her husband beat her and how the beatings started with Mr. Hollick’s proposal. It is not even the part about the beatings that made him skeptical, “but simply because he didn’t believe that an Englishman, any Englishman, would covet another man’s wife” (42). The lack of support in Ammu’s life may have contributed to the bitterness and resentfulness she sometimes feels toward her children. It may also have contributed to the times when she is inaccessible to her children, a mother who is physically present, but one who is emotionally and psychologically absent.

In comparison, Anne is never inaccessible to her children, especially to Bone. Bone has a way of “slid[ing] quietly under her armpit and sit[ting] with her, saying nothing” (32) in comfortable silence on the porch. At any time, Bone might ask Anne what she is thinking, and Anne would tell her a story about one of her cousins, or about the stars, or she’d say, “‘You and Reese like Glen, don’t you?’” (33). Eager to see her
mother happy, Bone would reassure her that they did, "and watch her face relax so her 
smile came back" (33).

In answering the question of whether history repeats itself, it is important to take a 
mother's history into consideration. Each mother was once a daughter and has a history 
that stretches beyond her life. Each mother brings this history into her own life as a 
mother. What happens to the mother before her daughter is born is important because, as 
shown thus far, it does have an effect on both how she raises her daughter and on her 
attitude towards her daughter. After examining the mothers' histories, the next logical 
step is to examine the present, or, in the narrative time of each novel, the daughters' 
lifetimes.
CHAPTER THREE

MOTHER-DAUGHTER INTERACTIONS

In identifying converging points in the lives of the mother and daughter characters in the novels examined, it is important to examine not only the mothers’ histories and how their daughters are affected by them, but also what the daughter learns directly from her mother by way of observation or verbal lessons and stories. Instead of focusing on the mothers’ lifetimes, as in the previous chapter, this chapter moves forward in time, focusing on the daughters’ lifetimes. Questions such as, “What events in a daughter’s life play important roles in the woman she becomes?” and “How is a mother involved in the experiences that shape her daughter?” are important in the quest to identify whether the daughter characters will follow in their mothers’ footsteps or diverge onto new paths. In thinking about the daughters’ lifetimes, outside influences such as gender and class are important because often, these affect the mother, and what she learns about gender and class, she will pass on directly to her daughter. Such is the case of Bone in Bastard Out of Carolina: Bone learns about class from her mother – not just class in the sense that the Boatwrights are among the lower class of society, but, rather, class in terms of the correct way to act, regardless of one’s rung on the economic ladder. In terms of economic class, Bone thinks:

Stupid or smart, there wasn’t much choice about what was going to happen to me...Growing up was like falling into a hole. The boys would quit
school and sooner or later go to jail for something silly. I might not quit school, not while Mama had any say in the matter, but what difference would that make? What was I going to do in five years? Work in the textile mill? Join Mama at the diner? It all looked bleak to me. (178)

This attitude is not one that was passed from Anne to Bone, however. In fact, Anne tries to downplay their position on the economic ladder: "We’re not bad people...We’re not even really poor...We’re not bad people. And we pay our way. We just can’t always pay when people want" (82). Both Bone and Reese knew better, however: “We know what the neighbors called us...We knew who we were” (82).

Anne tries to avoid emphasizing their poverty-level status, but not because she is overly bitter about it, or because she is violently discontented with their position. Bone’s mother is resigned to the probability that her life will always be a struggle in terms of money. The Boatwright’s position on society’s economic scale has been the same for at least four generations. She does not ever appear bitter; she never once expresses discontentedness with her situation to her daughter. She takes having no money as being part of life, perhaps because she has never had money and neither did her parents or grandparents. Anne tries not to draw attention to their status so that Bone and Reese do not feel so badly about their life of poverty, and because she wants more for her daughters. If they do not realize how low they are, then they will not be so easily discouraged when they try to better themselves.

Though she lacks financial stability, and therefore, economic “class,” Anne Boatwright has plenty of class; the kind of class that defines the rules that all civilized people should live by. If she has her way, her daughters will never lack in it, either. She has rules pertaining to how her girls should act, and one of them is that they are never to
steal: "'You want something, you tell me, and if it's worth the trouble we'll find a way. But I an't gonna have no child of mine caught stealing'" (92). Hence, when she catches Bone with stolen Tootsie Rolls, she tries to teach her daughter a lesson. The lesson Bone learns, however, is about pride — pride in doing the right thing, regardless of how others perceive the situation — as well as about stealing: "'You do the right thing because the world doesn't make sense if you don't'" (145).

Anne drives Bone back to the store to own up to what she did. In the car on the way to Woolworth's, Anne tells Bone what Granny did to her and Raylene when she caught them cheating the man who hired them to pick his strawberries. They had been pulling both the ripe strawberries and the green ones and piling the ripe ones on the top of the box to cover up the green ones underneath. When Granny found out, she went down to the fields, "'turned half a dozen boxes upside down. Collected a bucket of green strawberries and paid the man for them'" (96). She took Anne and Raylene home, sat them down at the table in the kitchen and made them eat every green strawberry in the box. They learned their lesson when they threw up strawberries all night long. When they get to the store and Bone confesses, paying the manager for the candy she and Reese had eaten, and handing him the candies they had not, the manager "'looked like he was swallowing an urge to laugh'" (97) at both daughter and mother. His attitude makes Bone angry; she can tell by the way that her mother holds her shoulder that Anne is angry, too: "'I could feel the heat from my mama's hand through my blouse, and I knew she was never going to come near this place again'" (98). The important part of the trip is that Bone did the right thing in owning up to her mistake. The manager treated her badly and
that was his prerogative. Bone has nothing to be ashamed of, outside of the initial crime of stealing.

Woolworth’s is not the only lesson in pride that Bone learns from her mother. The most important lesson Bone learns about pride is the one Granny tells her about her mother. Granny tells her about each time Anne went down to the courthouse when Bone was very young to get Bone a birth certificate that did not have “ILLEGAL” stamped across the bottom in “oversized red-inked block letters.” Her pride drove her down to the county courthouse on three separate occasions in hopes that she could get a birth certificate free of the red stamp. “Mama hated to be called trash” and to her, that stamp represented the label that people put on her: “No-good, lazy, shiftless.” Each year, the people at the courthouse laughed behind her back, or even to her face, mildly disguised, of course. One year, she even hired a lawyer to try to get a different birth certificate for her. The lawyer told her there was nothing he could do for her. “By now, they look forward to you coming in’” (9), he told her.

Granny kept telling her to put the birth certificate away. “As long as it’s something that’ll get a rise out of you, people’re gonna keep using it’” (14), which is exactly what happened. No one who knew the Boatwrights cared that Bone was illegitimate. Everyone within the Boatwrights’ acquaintance knew who Bone’s father was and why he was not part of Anne and Bone’s life. Anne’s trips to the courthouse year after year only fed the gossip mill.

Fortunately, the courthouse burns, and all the records with it. No one can ever again give Anne a birth certificate with a red stamp on it. Upon hearing that the
courthouse was on fire, Anne left work immediately to go home and burn up all the “useless papers” (16) that passed for Bone’s birth certificates.

Bone has the same kind of pride that Anne does. She gets this pride from spending so much time with her mother – talking with her, listening to her, and just being next to her. Anne and Bone have a very secure, affectionate relationship. One of Bone’s favorite times of day is in the evening when she had “the unspeakable pleasure” (30) of sitting in her mother’s lap while her mother brushed all the snarls from her long hair. “I would have cut off my head before I let them cut my hair” (30-1), she says, because it would have ended the nightly ritual.

Their relationship is so close that one can sense what the other is feeling although the other does not speak. When Bone senses that her mother is worried, she goes to her, leans against her hip, and whispers, “It’ll be okay” (57), while her mother’s hand “stroke[s] down the back of [Bone’s] head, smoothing out [her] hair” (57). Anne is the same way with Bone. At the funeral of Bone’s friend, when Bone puts her face into her mother’s dress, her mother’s hand strokes her neck and down her back “as if she understood [Bone] completely” (203).

Anne’s caring, nurturing ways even survive Glen’s initial beatings. It never occurs to Bone that her mother could and should be doing something to stop Glen from beating her. Bone’s anger and hatred is never aimed at her mother, only at Glen and the rest of the world for not stopping him. Instead of seeing her mother as the one who could most easily stop the beatings by leaving Glen for good, Bone sees her as a woman doing the best she can under the circumstances. Bone sees her as the peacemaker and the person who cleans her up, wiping her tears and washing her raw skin when Glen is done belting.
her: “Afterward she would cry and wash my face and tell me not to be so stubborn, not to make him mad” (110). Her mother teaches her to be silent and to cover up the truth about Glen’s never-ending cycle of beatings. Bone’s feelings of anger at the pain she endures at the hands of her stepfather, and her anger that she must follow her mother’s lead and maintain silence about Glen’s beatings are evidence of the fifth of Maglin’s five interconnecting themes in the literature of matrilineage. Bone feels “anger and despair” at “the silence borne and handed on from mother and daughter” (Maglin 258).

According to Adrienne Rich, “Lying is done with words, and also with silence” (186). Thus, in handing silence as a way of life down to her daughter, Anne is teaching Bone to lie. Anne also reinforces lying when she listens without comment to Glen lie about his family. Anne, Bone and Reese all know that what he says are lies, but none of the three will ever call him a liar.

Bone watches as Anne lies to her family about how much Glen loves her daughters. Anne never tells Bone not to tell anyone about the beatings, but “Don’t tell” is implied in the way that Anne seems to hold Bone responsible for getting beaten. “‘Baby,’ she called me. ‘Oh, girl. Oh, honey. Baby, what did you do? What did you do?’” (107). Glen lies to Anne about what Bone did to deserve a particularly awful beating: “Daddy Glen told her I had called him a bastard, that I had come running through the house knocking things over and called him that name” (107). Another time, Anne asks, “‘Why, honey? Why did you have to act like that?’” (234), as if it was Bone’s fault that Glen beat her almost senseless over and over.

Rich also notes that “[i]n lying to others, we lie to ourselves. We deny the importance of an event…and thus deprive ourselves of a part of our lives. Or we use one
piece of the past or present to screen out another” (188). In lying to her family about Glen, Anne is lying to herself. Glen does not love Bone, but if she repeats it long enough, she will begin to believe that it is true. The fact that she does hold Bone responsible for getting beaten is evidence that she believes Glen loves her daughter. In beating her, he is punishing her for whatever infraction he thinks she has committed in order to teach her to behave. Thus, Glen is demonstrating his love for Bone by beating her because this is teaching her the correct way to behave. In denying that Glen’s beatings are important and denying that they are actually Glen’s fault, rather than Bone’s, Anne is “depriving” both her daughter and herself a part of their lives: a life where fear does not rule their every move. In blaming Bone for the beatings instead of Glen, Anne is using Bone to screen out the bigger problem: her dependence on Glen, which is so great that it enables her to continue to allow Glen to beat her daughter.

To her credit, Anne does realize that Bone “’an’t never gonna be safe with him’” (132). By “him” she means Glen. She devises ways to keep the two away from one another, and goes to great lengths to do so. She does everything she can to deny her problems, staying with her husband and keeping her daughter safe at the same time.

Anne’s main strategy for keeping Bone safe is sending her to various aunts’ houses. At first, she sends both Bone and Reese to Alma’s or Ruth’s. As Bone gets older, she is allowed to go all the way out to the river to her Aunt Raylene’s where the older cousins hang out. One summer, Bone stays with her sick Aunt Ruth. It is at Ruth’s that Bone gets to practice her talent for lying. Ruth asks her if Glen has ever touched her, and she tells Ruth “’No’” (124).
Anne and Bone’s relationship becomes twisted in all their deception over Glen’s beatings. Anne knows that she should leave Glen, but she seems not to be able to bear doing so. It is not until the rest of the Boatwrights accidentally find out what Glen is doing that she is forced to leave him. By then, Anne has made Bone feel so responsible for what happens to her that she is the one apologizing when the family finds out about the beatings: “Mama! I’m sorry. I’m sorry” (246). Later, Bone reflects, “I kept trying to figure out how I could have prevented it all from happening...kept everything smooth and quiet” (249). When Raylene tells Bone that it will take time for Anne to forgive herself, Bone does not understand what her mother would need to forgive herself for: “Mama hadn’t done anything wrong. I was the one who had made Daddy Glen mad. I was the one who made everybody crazy” (250).

Gwin Minrose notes, “As nearly all experts in child abuse point out, abuse inevitably escalates, and the child feels responsible. Then the discovery of violence and/or incestuous abuse often destroys the family unit and makes the victim feel guilt once again, this time for the family’s dissolution” (435). This is exactly the cycle that Bone experiences. The abuse escalates — to the point where it leaves marks that cannot be explained away by attributing them to accidents such as tripping, running into doors and falling off porches — and then is discovered. In the discovery Bone feels enormous guilt, as if everything, beginning with the beatings themselves, is her fault. When the family finds out about Bone’s beatings, her relationship with her mother undergoes a drastic change. It is almost as if the secret they keep about the beatings is the only thing that holds their relationship together. Hence, “the discovery destroys the family unit,” especially because after the family knows, Anne is forced to leave Glen. She is also
forced to face herself and live with the guilt that not only did she let her husband beat her child, but also, if no one had found out, he would still be beating Bone because they would still be living together. She also has to live with the guilt that she wants to, and eventually will, go back to Glen.

Because of Anne's guilt, her relationship with her daughter is no longer the comfortable, affectionate relationship that it once was, even though Bone tries. She tries to comfort her mother and make sure that she is all right the way she did when they still lived with Glen. Her mother responds, but, "I knew from the way she was touching me that if I had not come to her, pushed myself on her, she would never have taken me into her arms" (252). This seems to be just one more punishment that Bone must live with for being beaten.

Anne is a very different woman from Roy's maternal character, Ammu. Anne stays with Glen even when he beats his daughter. If Raylene had not discovered the beatings, Anne would not have left Glen. Ammu, on the other hand, allowed her alcoholic husband to beat her; yet when his beatings started to include her children, she left him. Ammu left her husband to go home to her family, knowing she would have to face their judgment of her actions, knowing she would not have their support. In leaving Glen, especially because he was beating her daughter, she would have had the support of her entire family. Yet she chooses to stay, perhaps out of love for Glen, perhaps out of need. Her reasons are not the point. The point is that Ammu, facing much harder circumstances, leaves.

Ammu's departure is evidence of her independent streak, the part of her that pushes her to break the rules and not give in to her society's expectations. Her society
expects her to stay with her husband, regardless of what he does to her or her children. Her mother stayed with her father when her father beat both her and her mother. She goes against her society’s expectations when she returns to her home in Ayemenem with her two-egg twins. In returning, she all but gives up her independence. She believes that her one chance at escaping her family and her life in Ayemenem is gone. She believes that her chance at true happiness is gone. She believes that she will get no more chances. She has only her twins left, and this makes her more unpredictable because she has no more rules to break, no outlet for her independent nature. She is caught between “the infinite tenderness of motherhood and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber” (44).

The “reckless rage” side of Ammu wins over the tender mother side as Ammu progresses from a physically present, temporarily mentally absent mother — on days when she walks along the riverbank and listens to her radio — to a permanently absent mother. Her progression toward permanent absence begins when she finds an outlet for her independent nature: loving Velutha, the Untouchable, the man her children love by day as their friend, the man she cannot love, cannot touch, according to the caste system in India.

When Ammu’s affair with Velutha is discovered, a series of events is set in motion that, in the end, forces Ammu to send Estha away to live with his father. In this way, Ammu becomes permanently absent to Estha. Ammu’s progression toward permanent absence from Rahel’s life takes years longer. Ammu’s absence from Rahel’s life begins when Chacko tells her to pack her bags and leave because “she had destroyed enough already” (151). She does not take Rahel with her when she leaves. Instead, she
leaves Rahel with Chacko, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma and they send her off to boarding school.

Ammu’s absence reinforces the hardest lesson Rahel ever learned from her mother. She asks Ammu a question: “‘So why don’t you marry him then?’” (106). She asks it not seriously, but carelessly in an off-hand, smart-alec way after Ammu speaks highly of the “Orangedrink Lemondrink man” (106) at the movies who was “‘surprisingly sweet with Estha’” (106). Rahel’s question was the kind of question that did not even merit a response, yet gets one all the same. Ammu stops in the middle of the staircase on the way out of the movies and asks Rahel, “‘D’you know what happens when you hurt people?’” (107). She answers her own question with, “‘When you hurt people, they begin to love you less. That’s what careless words do. They make people love you a little less’” (107). This lesson stays with Rahel, appearing at odd moments in the form of “a cold moth” (107) which lifts its feet and “spread its velvet wings” (108) on her heart. In that moment, “Love had been re-apportioned” (109). Rahel tries desperately to make everything better by offering to skip dinner as punishment for her careless words. It does not work, because, as Baby Kochamma points out, “‘Some things come with their own punishment’” (109). Ammu’s words haunt her when, in a rage at being locked in her room by Baby Kochamma after the discovery of her affair, she screams through her door at her two-egg twins, “‘If it wasn’t for you I wouldn’t be here! None of this would have happened. I wouldn’t be here! I would have been free! I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born. You’re the millstones round my neck’” (239-40). Because of her words, her children love her a little less.
Rahel also learns the art of breaking rules from her mother, and, like her mother, the rules she breaks start out small. She is expelled from her first boarding school at age eleven after committing a series of infractions that include getting caught “outside her Housemistress’s garden gate decorating a knob of fresh cow dung with small flowers” (17). The last straw at Nazareth Convent, however, is “hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors” (17). The act itself is not enough to get her expelled; however, her explanation for the act is. She explains her behavior by telling the school officials that she was doing it “to find out whether breasts hurt” (18). She is kicked out because breasts were not supposed to exist in Christian institutions at the time, let alone be specifically addressed.

Rahel is expelled from two other boarding schools as well. The first time, she was expelled for smoking. The second time, she was expelled because she set fire to her Housemistress’s false-hair bun. Regardless of her relish for breaking the rules, the teachers at all three schools agreed that Rahel “was extremely polite” (18) and that she “had no friends” (18). “It was...as though she didn’t know how to be a girl” (18), the people at one school whispered to each other. That Rahel does not have any friends and does not know how to be a girl is not surprising, considering that she has no mother and no family to teach her, and no twin to count on. This is a distinct difference between Rahel and Dorothy Allison’s character, Bone. Bone actually has a support structure. She has other loving women in her life who teach her to be a woman. Bone’s mother has the presence of mind to make sure that Bone will be taken care of when she is gone, that someone is there, ready and able to take over the raising of her daughter. Rahel has no one, only boarding schools.
Rahel has only boarding schools and memories. Of particular impact is her memory of an interaction between her mother and a Touchable policeman whose eyes were “sly and greedy” (9) and who “stared at Ammu’s breasts as he spoke” (9). When Ammu arrives at the police station to make a statement concerning Velutha, who is wrongly accused of taking her two children plus her niece, Sophie Mol, and causing the death of Sophie Mol, the policeman tells her she should go home quietly. He calls her “veshva” and her twins, “illegitimate” (9). Rahel sees him tap her mother’s breasts “with his baton. Gently. Tap tap. As though he was choosing mangoes from a basket. Pointing out the ones that he wanted packed and delivered” (10).

Rahel later understands that the policeman, Inspector Matthew, knew whom he could pick on and whom he could not. Rahel also comes to understand that he did not tap her mother’s breasts because doing so hurt her physically, as she thought at age eleven, but because he could. He was a Touchable male in a society where females, especially ones who had shamed themselves and their families by publicly admitting to affairs with Untouchables, were nothing. As an adult, Rahel comes to understand that Inspector Thomas was calling Ammu a whore, and herself and her brother, Estha, bastards. When she is old enough to understand the caste system in India — her own role as a woman of the bourgeoisie, the policeman’s Touchable status, and Velutha’s Untouchable status — she understands why Inspector Thomas called her family those things.

To have “illegitimate” children in the Indian caste system, particularly within the bourgeoisie, is unacceptable. “Illegitimate” children, or even those who appear “illegitimate,” bring shame to families such as the Kochamma family. Ammu’s “illegitimate” children are almost as scandalous as is her status as a divorced woman.
“Illegitimate” children provoke scorn among the villagers – as shown by the policeman’s attitude – and among Ammu’s own family. Ammu’s family’s reaction to her “illegitimate” children, coupled with the reaction of the villagers, is much different than the reaction of the Boatwrights and the people who live on the same level of poverty that they do. The society in which the Boatwrights live does not have a strong reaction either positively or negatively to illegitimate children. As shown in Chapter Two, Granny Boatwright does not care about Bone’s status and insists that the only reason anyone else does – the people who work in the courthouse, for example – is because Anne draws attention to it. People at the poverty level have no time to be worried about who is married and who is not when children are born. They have no time to worry about an “illegitimate” stamp on a birth certificate because they are too busy keeping themselves in food, shelter and clothing. Anne only cares because, as noted earlier, she has a great deal of pride. The people who mistreat Anne in the courthouse do so because it is evident to them in the way that she returns each year that the label “illegitimate” bothers her tremendously. If she did not bring it to the attention of the people around her, there is no one who would think twice about Bone’s status as an “illegitimate” child. Ironically, if the society in which the Boatwrights existed did care about Bone’s status, they would be justified because, technically speaking, Bone is illegitimate. Ammu’s children are not.

Ammu was married when she had her twins.

The last time Rahel sees her mother, she is back in Ayemenem after being expelled from boarding school. Ammu returns to Ayemenem for a visit after losing “the latest in her succession of jobs” (175). Rahel recalls as an adult that Ammu brought her presents for a seven-year old though she was nearly eleven:
It was as though Ammu believed that if she refused to acknowledge the passage of time, if she willed it to stand still in the lives of her twins, it would. As though sheer willpower was enough to suspend her children's childhood until she could afford to have them living with her. (152)

Rahel recalls that “She hated her mother then. Hated her” (153). Rahel hated her mother then for leaving her to boarding schools, for not helping her to grow up — for being an absent mother. Worst of all, she hated her for separating her from her beloved twin brother.

In remembering her hatred, she also remembers her mother’s visit because it was the last time she saw her mother alive. Rahel’s memory of hatred is poignant because it is a memory she has while she watches Ammu’s body as it is fed into the incinerator at a crematorium. Like Allison’s Bone, there was a time when Rahel loved her mother very much. This, too, she remembers at the crematorium. She remembers the loving, tender side of Ammu that was the opposite of the “suicide bomber” (44) that tore her from Estha, from her home, and from her childhood:

The way she used Kipling to love her children before putting them to bed: *We be of one blood, thou and I*. Her goodnight kiss. The way she held their faces steady with one hand (squashed-cheeked, fish-mouthed) while she parted and combed their hair with the other. The way she held knickers out for Rahel to climb into. *Left leg, right leg.* (155)

As an adult, Rahel knows that she never really hated her mother. She recognizes as an adult what she did not as a child: “the importance of trying to really see one’s mother,” as Maglin puts it, “in spite of or beyond the blindness and skewed vision that growing up together causes” (258). In reflecting on the part of her mother that she loved without question, as opposed to remembering only the end of her relationship with her mother and the rest of her family, Rahel is able to look at her history through new eyes. At thirty-
one, she understands that her mother “was a bomb waiting to go off” (133) and that her affair with Velutha was the explosion — the indication that she could no longer follow the rules she had agreed to in the action of returning to Ayemenem. She understands that while “Ammu, Estha and she were the worst transgressors” (31) they were not the only ones. Her childhood had been “a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened” (31) and everyone involved was in some way responsible for Velutha’s death as well as Sophie Mol’s.

Rahel’s life parallels Bone’s in that both girls’ mothers leave them. The differences in the two situations are remarkably similar, as well. Both women leave their daughters for men. Anne leaves Bone for Glen, maybe because she knows, especially after he rapes and nearly kills her daughter, that one day he will succeed unless she leaves her daughter and returns to him.

Ammu’s situation is not quite as simple. In any other world, she and Velutha could have been together. Her children love him desperately, as does she, if only because he is an outlet for the raging side of her personality. Unfortunately for Ammu, the caste system in India dictates “who should be loved. And how. And how much” (311) and does not allow Ammu, member of the bourgeoisie and Velutha, Untouchable, to be together. In making her decision to go to Velutha, she hardly considers the parallel ramifications of her actions. She vaguely considers the scandal upon her own name, but at no time does she take her children’s lives into consideration. Her action set in motion the chain of reactions that destroyed the lives of her two children. They lost their beloved friend: “He left behind a Hole in the Universe through which darkness poured like liquid tar” (182) and they lost their mother: “She left them behind, spinning in the dark, with no moorings,
in a place with no foundations” (182). Ammu’s decision also causes the most important separation of all for both Estha and Rahel: being separated from each other.

Rahel and Estha have an invisible connection upon which they both draw strength. Even after being apart for over twenty years, when Estha enters a room, Rahel can feel his presence: “She didn’t turn her head, but a glow spread inside her. He’s come. She thought. He’s here With me” (222). The strength they draw from each other is similar to the strength that Lindo Jong learns to draw from looking deep inside herself. The power of invisible strength is part of the Chinese character that she passes on to her daughter, Waverly. Waverly recalls: “I was six when my mother taught me the art of invisible strength” (89). “Therin lies Lindo’s contribution to her daughter’s voice,” notes M. Marie Booth Foster (216). Waverly remembers pleading with her mother for a bag of salted prunes. Her mother told her to “‘Bite back [her] tongue’” (89), later explaining, “‘Strongest wind cannot be seen’” (89). In other words, Lindo tells Waverly to find other ways to get what she wants rather than asking. Lindo tells Waverly to use what she knows about her situation in order to win and make it look like she was not trying at all. The strategy works the very next week. Waverly remembers what her mother said and holds her tongue as she and her mother enter the store with the plums. At the checkout, Lindo puts a bag of plums on the counter with their other purchases.

The incident in the market with the plums is significant in that the invisible strength Waverly used to bite back her tongue is the same invisible strength that she later harnesses in her quest to become a champion chess player. Before she becomes a champion, however, she needs to learn how to play. It is while learning to play chess that Waverly learns another valuable lesson from her mother: the importance of finding out
the rules and learning them for herself, rather than relying on someone else to explain them. That way, no rule is left out of the explanation and Waverly will never be caught unaware. Waverly learns this lesson not as it applies to chess, but as it applies to entering foreign countries, which is the illustration Lindo uses to teach her daughter. "Every time people come out from foreign country, must know rules. You not know, judge say, Too bad, go back" (95). The natives know the rules and why the rules are the rules; but, instead of telling visitors, they make them find out for themselves. They make them find their own way rather than using one that has already been established.

In taking her mother's advice, Waverly learns the game her way, which eventually makes her a nearly unbeatable player. In learning for herself, she discovers that in the game of chess, "one must gather invisible strengths and see the endgame before the game begins" (96). Furthermore, learning for herself reinforces her mother's lesson about invisible strength. Finally, through learning chess, she learns another of her mother's tricks: "never reveal 'why' to others. A little knowledge withheld is a great advantage one should store for future use" (96). For instance, if Waverly should reveal "why" to an opponent, that opponent would have the same information she did and would later be able to use her own information to beat her. Revealing "why" is similar to passing on the power of the wind and the secret of invisible strength to someone not worthy. Lindo teaches her daughter the power of the wind and the power of invisible strength to make her stronger, because Waverly is her daughter. She would not teach these things to just anyone. In passing on the power of the wind and the power of invisible strength, Lindo teaches Waverly to learn and think for herself. Lindo gives Waverly the first steps toward independence.
One lesson that Lindo also tries to teach Waverly goes misunderstood by Waverly. The lesson is a dual one: firstly, the importance of being proud of oneself, and secondly, that one should be grateful for the freedom to speak that pride. Every week Lindo makes Waverly accompany her to the market. It is the one household chore she cannot get out of no matter how much she insists she needs to practice her chess strategies. By this time, Waverly has made a name for herself as a champion chess player among her community. She has recently won a regional title and has a cake in the window of the bakery below the Jong family's flat. The cake reads: "Congratulations, Waverly Jong, Chinatown Chess Champion" (99). At the market, Lindo announces who her daughter is to anyone who will listen. Waverly, embarrassed by this act, finally tells her mother, "I wish you wouldn't do that, telling everybody I'm your daughter" (101).

Lindo understands what Waverly says to mean that she is embarrassed to be Lindo's daughter, rather than that she is embarrassed that Lindo draws attention to her at all. Lindo is expressing how proud she is of her daughter – how proud she is that Waverly is her daughter. Waverly does not understand this pride. Waverly sees what her mother does only as bragging. Chinese pride looks like bragging to those children who are raised into American society. She does not understand that in China, a woman shouting in the street about a champion daughter is both unacceptable and unheard of. She does not understand that in China, a woman spent her leisure time "perfecting needlework and tapestry for beautifying the home" (quoted in Ho 335), not perfecting her game of chess. She does not understand that in China, women obeyed fathers before marriage, and then husbands, and eldest sons "after her husband's death" (Ho quoting Ling 335); they did not act on their own and they certainly were not allowed voices with
which to display pride in their daughters. Daughters were considered useless in Chinese culture. Before Waverly thinks to explain that she sees her mother’s words as “bragging” rather than “pride,” Waverly adds, “‘Why do you have to use me to show off? If you want to show off, then why don’t you learn to play chess?’” (101). At this, her mother merely stares at her through “dangerous black slits” (102) and Waverly turns and races down the street, away from her mother. When Waverly returns home, her mother tells the family, “‘We not concerning this girl. This girl not have concerning for us’” (103).

In this situation, neither mother nor daughter wins. Waverly does not learn the history behind her mother’s pride in her daughter; Lindo does not understand the American meaning behind Waverly’s words. Neither mother nor daughter tries to bridge the gap in communication and explain herself to the other. The incident is discarded as water under the bridge until something similar occurs one day, again in the market.

Waverly shouts to her mother in the middle of the street, in front of crowds of people that “she didn’t know anything, so she shouldn’t show off. She should shut up” (187). She says this because she is tired of her mother’s showing her off “like one of my many trophies she polished. She used to discuss my games as if she had devised the strategies” (187). This time, Waverly’s successful manipulation of situations such as a chess game and getting permission to play in the chess tournament comes at a price. Waverly begins to take advantage of her power to manipulate. When her mother will not speak to her the next day, Waverly decides that her mother is trying to trick her, that her mother has devised a “sneaky way to get someone to pounce back in anger and fall into a trap” (188). Instead of recognizing that she has truly hurt her mother and her mother is upset with her, she thinks her mother is playing a game of manipulation. Waverly has no
sense of "shou" (Ho 332), no respect and honor for her mother. She tries to beat her mother at what she thinks is her mother's own game. Instead of talking to her mother, straightening out their argument, she counterattacks by not speaking to her mother the way that her mother does not speak to her.

When that does not work, Waverly decides to make a show of quitting chess for a few days by watching TV with her brothers and loudly cracking her knuckles. Waverly thinks she knows just as many sneaky tricks as her mother. Her mother just knows them better. Waverly even skips a tournament and still gets no reaction from her mother. "I was crying inside" (188), she recalls. An opponent she defeated twice before won the tournament. "I realized my mother knew more tricks than I had thought. But now I was tired of her game. I wanted to start practicing for the next tournament. So I decided to pretend to let her win. I would be the one to speak first" (189). In Lindo's mind, her daughter should have been the one to speak first all along: she should have been the one apologizing for dishonoring her mother by shouting in the marketplace. In assimilating her daughter to American ways, Lindo does not consider that her daughter will not be able to grasp what she thinks ought to come naturally to her daughter. Not knowing the true root of Lindo's silence causes Waverly to misread her mother's silence, and neither mother nor daughter tries to communicate her interpretation of the events. Instead, they continue their same miscommunication, the roots of which are cultural differences between Chinese and American, mother and daughter. Waverly expects her mother to be thrilled when she announces that she is ready to start playing chess again. Instead, her mother says, "'You think it is so easy. One day quit, next day play. Everything for you is this way. So smart, so easy, so fast'" (189).
After that, nothing is the same. Waverly wins her mother back by catching a terrible cold. However, she notices that when she gets well, her mother no longer takes the same interest in her chess that she did prior to their argument: “It was as if she had erected an invisible wall and I was secretly groping each day to see how high and wide it was” (190). When Waverly loses her next tournament, her mother “seemed to walk around with this satisfied look, as if it had happened because she had devised this strategy” (190). Somewhere in the middle of the game playing with her mother, she loses her gift of chess, playing with “fear and desperation” (190) instead of with “supreme confidence” (190). The “fear and desperation” that replace Waverly’s “supreme confidence” are in part, the result of losing her mother’s approval. She took for granted that she had it, and so when Lindo does not take the same interest in her chess, Waverly begins to play to get it back instead of playing for the enjoyment of the game. As Booth Foster points out, when Waverly no longer receives her mother’s approval, she realizes that she really enjoyed it (215). Waverly takes her chess for granted by using it as a weapon. Thus, Lindo’s satisfaction is not because her daughter loses her gift, but because she thinks that Waverly will finally be able to understand why it is important to take pride in her abilities – one day they may disappear.

Waverly’s inability to recognize when Lindo is only trying to help, or be supportive, or is truly hurt by something that Waverly does becomes problematic later in life for Waverly. She misinterprets much of what Lindo does as manipulation, as a game, because she related to that so well as a child. As an adult, Waverly acknowledges, “My mother knows how to hit a nerve. And the pain I feel is worse than any other kind of misery. Because what she does always comes as a shock, exactly like an electric jolt that
grounds itself permanently in my memory” (187). For this reason, she is nervous about telling her mother about Rich, the man who is not only living with her and her daughter, Shoshana, but also the man whom she intends to marry. Waverly is afraid that her mother will find faults with her soon-to-be-husband that will “transform him from the divine man [she] thought he was into someone quite mundane, mortally wounded with tiresome habits and irritating imperfections” (191). She thinks she knows exactly how her mother will go about doing this:

She would be quiet at first. Then she would say a word about something small, something she had noticed, and then another word, and another, each one flung out like a piece of sand, one from this direction, another from behind, more and more, until his looks his character, his soul would have eroded away. (191)

Waverly imagines that this will happen because the exact same thing happened with her first husband. “It wasn’t until after we separated... that I wondered if perhaps my mother had poisoned my marriage” (192).

When she finally confronts her mother with accusations of trying to poison her image of Rich, her mother responds, “So you think your mother is this bad. You think I have a secret meaning. But it is you who has this meaning” (201). Lindo is correct. For Waverly, life has always been about manipulating the pieces and second-guessing herself and those around her. Waverly has no “chuming” (Ho 332). According to Wendy Ho, chuming is “an inner knowledge of each other as women” (332). Tan also applies the term “chuming” to women in The Joy Luck Club. Tan’s meaning is “inside knowing of things” (282). In both cases, applied to Waverly, the term means that if Waverly had chuming, she would not see manipulation where there is none.
If Lindo displays too much pride in her daughter, quite the opposite is true of Suyuan Woo. As discussed in the previous chapter, Suyuan is the mother who lost twin daughters in China. In an effort to make her remaining daughter, June, the best of the three, she creates instead a stubborn woman determined to be no better than what she is. June learns from her mother that people communicate by talking in circles. The story that her mother passes on about the origins of the Joy Luck Club in Kweilin, she always believed to be "a Chinese fairy tale" (12) because "the endings always changed" (12). In one ending, Suyuan wins a "worthless thousand-yuan note" (12) playing mahjong at Joy Luck. She used it, she said, "to buy a half-cup of rice" (12). In other versions of the same story of the origin of Joy Luck, the rice became porridge, gruel, two feet from a pig, six eggs, or six chickens: "Over the years, she told me the same story, except for the ending, which grew darker, casting long shadows into her life, and eventually into mine" (7). The "long shadows" became Suyuan's lost twin daughters, the ones she spends the rest of her life searching for. Those same "long shadows" become June's "long shadows" as she tries over and over to become the prodigy that she thinks her mother wants. until one day, June stops trying:

I looked at my reflection, blinking so I could see more clearly. The girl staring back at me was angry, powerful. This girl and I were the same. I had new thoughts, willful thoughts, or rather thoughts filled with lots of won’ts. I won’t let her change me, I promised myself. I won’t be what I’m not. (144)

The story that always changes endings is a metaphor for Suyuan and June's relationship. Suyuan changes the ending to fit the situation. For instance, when she finally tells June the whole Kweilin story, it is because June wants a transistor radio. In an attempt to
illustrate for June that she really could not miss something she never had to begin with, she includes the loss of her twin daughters, the real ending to the story.

June learns to manipulate her own stories to fit her situations, just like her mother. When her mother tells her again that she should finish her college degree, she tells her mother what she wants to hear, rather than what is true: that she has no intention of going back. Instead, June tells her, "'You're right. I'll look into it'" (27). She realizes after her mother's death, when her Auntie Lin asks her about school, that her mother took what she said seriously:

I had always assumed we had an unspoken understanding about these things: that she didn’t really mean I was a failure, and I really meant I would try to respect her opinions more...We translated each other’s meanings and I seemed to hear less than what was said, while my mother heard more. (27)

Only after it is too late — Suyuan dies of a cerebral aneurysm — does June wish that she had listened to her mother. For instance, June wants to know:

What was that pork stuff she used to make that had the texture of sawdust? What were the names of the uncles who died in Shanghai? What had she dreamt all these years about her other daughters? All the times when she got mad to me, was she really thinking about them? Did she wish I were they? Did she regret that I wasn't? (320)

June remembers her mother telling her that she got her height from her grandfather, "a northerner" who "may have even had some Mongol blood" (312). Suyuan could tell her daughter no more than that because everyone she could have asked was dead. Perhaps this was Suyuan's way of telling June that she should listen and ask questions while she had the chance because it was impossible to say when the chance would be taken away from her. This is ironic, because June loses her chance to ask her mother answers to all the questions she never asked, but always needed answers to. She wanted to know why...
her mother “had hoped for something so large that failure was inevitable” (154), when she tried to make June a prodigy – either a Chinese Shirley Temple, a brilliant scholar who could rattle off “the capitals of all that states and even most of the European countries” (143), or someone who could predict the weather in cities all over the world. June also needed an answer to the question that frightened her the most: “Why had [her mother] given up hope?” (154).

Months before she dies, Suyuan holds a dinner party to celebrate the Chinese New Year. She serves crab and plans carefully enough so that the crab with the torn off leg (the man at the store made her take it) would be an extra. She had not taken all the people attending into consideration, and the damaged crab is one of two left when the bowl gets around to June and her mother. “I thought I was doing the right thing, taking the crab with the missing leg. But my mother cried, ’No! No! Big one, you eat it. I cannot finish’” (227). Later, June asks her mother why she insisted on taking the damaged crab for herself when she did not even eat it. Suyuan explains that the crab was already dead when she cooked it; already dead crabs are poisonous. June wants to know why she cooked it at all, and why she served it: “’What if someone else had picked that crab?’” (234). Suyuan explains to her that she knew June would be the only one who would take the crab. She said everyone else would want the best crab in the bowl. “’You thinking different.’ She said it in a way as if this were proof – proof of something good” (234). With those words, June’s mother gave her “a jade pendant on a gold chain” (221), her “‘life’s importance’” (221). The pendant was supposed to symbolize her mother’s meaning – what she means when she tells June that her thinking is different from everyone else’s, and what she means when she tries to push June to better herself. At the time, June did not appreciate
the gift — did not even particularly want it. Five months later, when her mother dies, in
her grief, she begins to think about her life’s importance. “I wonder what it means...And
she’s the only one I could have asked, to tell me about my life’s importance” (221). She
knows that she can ask any of her aunts the meaning of the jade pendant, but their
answers may be different than her mother’s meaning. Her aunts might tell her that the
carvings in the jade symbolize “fertility and posterity” (222), when her mother might
have meant to give her daughter “purity and honesty” (222) by giving her the pendant
with those particular carvings. Adrienne Rich calls the loss of the mother to the daughter
“the essential female tragedy” (quoted in Braendlin 121). Through June’s discovery that
she will never know her mother’s intentions, Tan demonstrates that Rich’s words are
ture.

An-mei Hsu, like June, loses her mother before she learns everything she can
from her. She does learn from her mother what it means to be a daughter, however. She
learns by observing her mother and grandmother. Though Popo has cast An-mei out of
her house and out of her life, An-mei returns when she learns that Popo is dying. She
returns to try to save the mother who cast her out because that is what daughters do. An-
mei admits that she came to love her mother when she saw how her mother loved her
grandmother. An-mei watched her mother cut a chunk of flesh from her arm to put in a
soup that she wanted Popo to drink. It was a last effort to prevent Popo’s death:

This is how a daughter honors her mother...The pain of flesh is nothing.
The pain you must forget. Because sometimes that is the only way to remember
what is in your bones. You must peel off your skin, and that of your mother, and
her mother before her. Until there is nothing. No scar, no skin, no flesh. (41)
An-mei is both amazed and humbled at her mother’s love for Popo and the strength she shows in cutting her own flesh so that Popo may live. This is the first time in the novel that Maglin’s third theme of the literature of matrilineage shows up, but it is not the last. The same theme occurs on An-mei’s deathbed, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Years later, An-mei demonstrates the same strength that she sees in her mother, and her daughter is amazed and humbled at An-mei’s strength in the same way that An-mei was amazed and humbled by her mother. An-mei’s strength reveals itself not as physical harm to her person, the way that her mother’s did, but as faith and determination, the will to try, and keep trying even in the face of failure. It happens on the day after her youngest son, Bing, drowns on a family trip to the ocean. On the day he drowns, An-mei puts her daughter, Rose, in charge of her three little brothers to teach her responsibility. While Rose is watching Bing and her other brothers, she finds herself worrying for the safety of her charges much the way she imagines that An-mei does with her superstitions about how children are predisposed to certain dangers on certain days, depending on when they were born. Each date of birth only corresponds to one danger; however, An-mei worries about all of them because she cannot translate the Chinese dates into American dates: “So by taking them all into account, she had absolute faith that she could prevent every one of them” (132). Rose remembers that as she was watching her brothers, “[t]he worry surrounded me, like the wall of the cove, and it made me feel everything had been considered and was now safe” (131). In these thoughts that parallel her mother’s, Rose recognizes that “her voice is not entirely her own,” thus drawing attention to yet another of Maglin’s five interconnecting themes of the literature of matrilineage (258). The passage in question is told from Rose’s point of view, thus it is
her *voice* relaying her recognition that her thoughts are not entirely hers, but are handed down to her from her mother. Like her mother would have, Rose follows her youngest brother down the beach and calls to him, warning him not to get too close to the water.

When her oldest brothers start a fight in the sand, An-mei tells Rose to stop them. In the process of doing so, Rose takes her eyes off Bing, who was climbing along some rocks to get to his father, fishing on the other side. Rose looks up in time to see Bing fall into the water: “I sank to my knees watching the spot where he disappeared, not moving, not saying anything” (134). Instead of the punishment she expects, An-mei tells her, “I told you to stop their fight. I told you to take your eyes off him...So now I am telling you, we must go and find him, quickly, tomorrow morning” (135). Rose is sure they will not find him. She sees having to go back to the beach with her mother as punishment for letting him drown. Rose does not recognize the kind of faith that her mother has. She does not believe that they will find Bing. She believes that Bing’s death is her fault and going back to the scene to dredge up the memory of watching him fall to his death is her punishment for not watching him closely enough. She believes that by taking her back to the beach, her mother is teaching her again to take all possibilities into consideration so that one will not sneak up and surprise her.

In the morning, An-mei drives a car for the first time in her life. She guides the car to the beach without a map, after having only been there once. Besides Rose, An-mei takes with her a thermos, a teacup, and a Bible. Rose witnesses her mother’s absolute faith in God that day. An-mei asks that He give Bing back to them. She talks to God at the beach, suggesting that He took her son from his family to teach them a lesson, “to be more careful with [His] gifts in the future” (136). She tells Him she has learned His
lesson and has come to take Bing home. She also tells God to forgive her family for Bing’s bad manners. “My daughter, this one standing here, will be sure to teach him better lessons of obedience before he visits you again” (137).

When God does not produce Bing for her, she tries another tactic. She tells Rose, “An ancestor once stole water from a sacred well. Now the water is trying to steal back. We must sweeten the temper of the Coiling Dragon who lives in the sea. And then we must make him loosen his coils from Bing by giving him another treasure he can hide” (137). Rose stands by silently and watches her mother pour sugar-sweetened tea into the sea. Then she watches her mother throw “a ring of watery blue sapphire, a gift from her mother, who had died many years before” (138) into the ocean. She tells Rose that the ring “drew coveting stares from women and made them inattentive to the children they guarded so jealously. This would make the Coiling Dragon forgetful of Bing” (138).

When the Coiling Dragon does not produce Bing, either, Rose sees the look on her mother’s face. It is one of “complete despair and horror, for losing Bing, for being so foolish as to think she could use faith to change fate” (139). Rose gets angry because on that occasion, everything failed her family. Coupled with her anger, however, is the same “amazement and humility,” as Maglin puts it, at her mother’s strength, the same feelings that An-mei once had for her mother (258). An-mei’s strength reveals itself in her faith that she can get Bing back from whoever took him. Additionally, her strength is revealed in simple ways such as the fact that before that morning, she had never driven a car, and the fact that she had only been to that particular beach once, yet did not take a map with her. Instead, she drove straight there as if she had driven the same route each day of her life.
After Bing's death, An-mei puts her Bible under a table leg. Its new function is to make the table stable. She pretends never to notice her Bible under the table leg. She all but gives up her faith in God, her faith that everything would turn out for the best when she loses Bing.

As her mother's daughter, Rose picks up on her mother's faithlessness. It carries over into Rose's adult life. She stands back and watches as her marriage falls apart with the same weak spirit that her grandmother passed on to her mother, who grew up hearing stories "which attempt[ed] to break the spirit of strong-willed girls, the disobedient types" (Ho 336), the same weak spirit that her mother, without meaning to, passes on to her. She knows that when she tells her mother that her marriage is over, her mother will say, "Then you must save it" (123). She knows that when she tells her mother that her situation is hopeless, her mother will still persuade her to try: "This is not hope. Not reason. This is your fate. This is your life, what you must do" (139). Rose has no faith that she can change her situation if she tries. She has no faith that if she speaks out, she can stop her marriage from crumbling or at least understand why it is failing so that she can come to terms with it. Rose's way of thinking is the opposite of what her mother and grandmother learn in their younger days. An-mei's mother discovers that she has a choice — that of life or death in order to give her daughter a better future. She "speaks" via her death, thus demonstrating for her daughter that she always has the power to choose. An-mei learns this lesson as well. It is that lesson which takes her back to the beach to try to get Bing back — first from God, and then from the Coiling Dragon, not to teach her daughter to watch more closely over the things she is responsible for. It is that lesson

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which forces her to dust off the Bible under the table leg, though she pretends not to see it.

In thinking about her own situation, and about hope and fate, Rose pulls the Bible out from under the table leg. She knows that there is a section called "'Deaths'" (140) on the page before the New Testament. Her mother has written "'Bing Hsu' lightly, in erasable pencil'" (140). This is why Rose knows that her mother will always persuade her to try. "And I think how fate is shaped half by expectation, half by inattention. But somehow, when you lose something you love, faith takes over. You have to pay attention to what you lost. You have to undo the expectation" (140). The half of fate shaped by expectation is the half that makes An-mei confident that nothing can go wrong in her family. This confidence, roughly translated from the Chinese word, "nengkan" (132), is what An-mei has prior to Bing's death. What An-mei fails to take into consideration is that by expecting everything in life to run smoothly, she does not pay as close attention as she should, thus inviting loss. Rose's point is that by "undoing" or eliminating the expectation that everything will run smoothly, then it is impossible not to give what is important in life the necessary attention.

In the case of her marriage, she learns that in expecting that her marriage would last forever, she overlooked something vital and her marriage crumbles. In condemning it as "over," she is also expecting that whatever is wrong in her marriage cannot be fixed, thus she misses vital signs that perhaps she can fix her marriage. Either way, eliminating expectation will force her to see whatever signs she needs to see to fight for her marriage or let it go.
Rose learns the difference between faith and expectation from her mother. Before Bing dies, her mother expects good fortune for their family. When she does not get what she expects, she gets angry and gives up the faith that took over when Bing first drowned. However, the bible under the table is proof that she cannot allow herself to give it up completely. Rose needs to regain her faith — that is all that her mother wants from her. When her marriage fails, she loses her faith, her hope, not for just her marriage, but for everything. She will not speak about what went wrong in her marriage; she will not speak about what she wants. Her mother tells her, “I am not telling you to save your marriage,” she protested. “I only say you should speak up” (216). When Rose does regain her faith and begins to understand about expectation versus inattention, she will find that her marriage is truly over. She will know why. She will get what she wants from her husband. Because she speaks, because she can.

An-mei remembers her mother telling her the story of the turtle who swallowed other people’s tears. The moral of the story was that she should “desire nothing” (241); she should swallow her own tears, her own misery and bitterness the way her mother did until the day she died. She had hoped to teach Rose the opposite, though she realizes that her daughter thinks exactly the same way she once thought. By insisting that her marriage is over without at least trying to make it right, she is not speaking out; not speaking is making a choice just the way that speaking is a choice.

As a child, Rose has nightmares about Mr. Chou, “the guardian of the door that opened into dreams” (207). In her dreams, Mr. Chou does not let Rose through the door. Instead, he slams the door and chases her because she does not listen to her mother. Rose remembers this dream when she remembers that she only listened to her mother.
occasionally. She also remembers learning to listen without really listening. She even admits, "I filled my mind with other people's thoughts — all in English — so that when she looked at me inside out, she would be confused by what she saw" (213-14). Yet An-mei tries unceasingly to teach Rose that all the wisdom she needs she can get from her mother if only she will listen. She tells Rose the consequences of not listening to her mother: "[her] ear would bend too easily to other people, all saying words that had no lasting meaning, because they came from the bottom of their hearts, where their own desires lived" (206). She also tells Rose that she can see her "inside out even when [she] was not in the room" (206). That is how strong a mother's connection to her daughter is, and the strong connection is the reason why it is so important for Rose to listen to her mother. An-mei only has Rose's interests at heart: "A mother is best. A mother knows what is inside you" (209). A mother will not make her "hulihudu" or make her see "heimongmong" (210). The direct translation of the words might be "confused" and "dark." Rose knows, however, that the words mean more than that:

Maybe...they refer to a sensation that only Chinese people have, as if you were falling headfirst through Old Mr. Chou's door, then trying to find your way back. But you're so scared you can't open your eyes, so you get on your hands and knees and grope in the dark, listening for voices to tell you which way to go. (210)

While An-mei, Lindo, and Suyuan — when she was alive — tell their daughters stories about their lives in China, Ying-ying never discusses her life in China: "My father said he saved her from a terrible life there, some tragedy she could not speak about" (107). Ying-ying's silence means that her daughter, Lena, does not gather the Chinese wisdom that the other mothers impart on their daughters. For instance, Lena does not learn Chinese character the way that Waverly does. She does not realize the value of what
her mother might have said to her the way that June does; Lena still has her mother. Finally, she does not learn never-ending faith the way that Rose does. Instead, Lena learns silence; and, she learns fear: "I knew my mother made up anything to warn me, to help me avoid some unknown danger" (108).

"As I remember it, the dark side of my mother sprang from our basement in our old house in Oakland. I was five and my mother tried to hide it from me" (105). Ying-ying locks the basement door and will not let anyone downstairs. Lena sneaks down one day to see what her mother’s fuss was about. Her mother yanks her out and tells her that a creepy man lives down there who “would have planted five babies in me and then eaten us all in a six-course meal, tossing our bones on the dirty floor” (106). Lena remembers that after that, she began to see terrible things through her Chinese eyes, “the part of me I got from my mother” (106). The part of Ying-ying that Lena gets is the terror of a “lone married woman migrating from the poor countryside to Shanghai, a city notorious for its foreign decadence and the murder, rape, kidnapping, and prostitution of Chinese women in the early to middle 1900’s” (Ho 337). The fear Ying-ying lives with in China accompanies her to America and she is unable to let go of it, instead giving her paranoia to her daughter so that Lena will know to be afraid and will protect herself from all possible dangers. In addition to memories of China, Ying-ying also has good reason to be fearful in America because of its “long history of racism and sexism” (Ho 337) directed toward Asians as a whole, and the Chinese, specifically.

Ying-ying passes her fear on to her daughter in other ways, too. Lena recalls her mother telling her a story about her great-grandfather who “sentenced a beggar to die in the worst possible way” (104). After, Lena decides that it is important to know the worst
possible thing that can happen because in knowing, it can be avoided. She spends her childhood searching for the “worst possible thing.”

Because even as a young child, I could sense the unspoken terrors that surrounded our house, the ones that chased my mother until she hid in a secret dark corner of her mind. And still they found her. I watched, over the years, as they devoured her, piece by piece, until she disappeared and became a ghost. (105)

Two important things happen in Lena’s life in the midst of looking out for the “worst possible thing.” First, Lena’s mother gets pregnant. Second, because the baby will share Lena’s room, her parents move her bed up against the wall. This move is significant because from her new position, she can hear, night after night, the mother and daughter in the apartment next door screaming and yelling, “scraping sounds, slamming, pushing and shouts and then whack! whack! whack!” (114). It is during this time that Lena decides not knowing when the fighting will end is the “worst possible thing.”

Lena also watches as her mother begins to bump into things, as if she forgot she was pregnant: “She did not speak of the joys of having a new baby; she talked about a heaviness around her, about things being out of balance, not in harmony with one another” (113). When her mother loses the baby, she claims that the loss is her fault—that she knew she would lose the baby, yet she did nothing to prevent it. Ying-ying blames the death of this child on her previous mistakes. When she put her first son to death out of hatred for its father, she had not thought twice about what she was doing; thus she did not deserve a healthy baby after having been so careless with the first.

It is when her mother loses her baby brother that Lena decides the “worst possible thing” that can happen is really just the feeling of fear. Her mother had feared. Period. She feared that something was out of balance or not right, and that fear had turned into
reality: “After the baby died, my mother fell apart, not all at once, but piece by piece, like plates falling off a shelf one by one. I never knew when it would happen, so I became nervous all the time, waiting” (117). Just like her mother, Lena begins to expect bad things to happen.

A change occurs in Lena’s thinking when she finds a ray of hope in the drama between the mother and daughter on the other side of the wall. When the mother kicks her daughter out of the house, the girl decides to play a trick on her mother. She uses Lena’s bedroom window to get into her own room without her mother knowing. She hopes that her disappearance (and safety in doing so) will scare her mother enough so that she will never again kick her daughter out. That night, Lena lies in bed waiting for the screaming and yelling and beating to begin. Instead she hears “laughing and crying, crying and laughing, shouting with love” (120) and Lena “was crying for joy with them, because [she] had been wrong” (120).

The neighbors’ drama, combined with her mother’s lost child, teaches Lena that fearing something will sometimes make it happen, but not always. The hope that she finds in her neighbors’ reconciliation guides her “day after day, night after night, year after year” (120) while she watches her mother lying in her bed, or “babbling to herself as she sat on the sofa” (120). Lena identifies this part of her mother as the “worst possible thing,” but knows that one day it will stop.

In order to stifle the fear in her mind about her mother, Lena constructs a story about rescuing her mother from the dark place she lives in. In her mind, a girl with a sharp sword tells her mother that the only way to save her is for her to “‘die the death of a thousand cuts’” (120). “And the mother screamed and shouted, cried out in terror and
pain. But when she opened her eyes, she saw no blood, no shredded flesh” (120). The sword-bearing daughter asks her mother if she understands. The mother answers that yes, she understands. “I have already experienced the worst. After this there is no worst possible thing’” (120). The daughter then grabs her mother’s hand and pulls her through the wall, back to the other side, back to life.

Lena’s daydreams of rescuing her mother from despair represent her need to have her mother in her life, full time. Ying-ying’s despair turns her into a kind of absent mother, which makes her similar to Bone’s mother and Rahel’s mother, as well as Mary’s mother. Bone’s mother leaves her and Rahel’s mother leaves her. Similarly, Mary’s mother leaves her, as noted in the previous chapter. Mary’s situation is a bit different than that of Bone or Rahel, however. Mary’s mother, Adelaide, leaves her under the open sky, having made no arrangements at all for Mary. Adelaide may have left on the good faith that Mary and her brother, Karl, would think to go to Argus to their Aunt Fritzie. However, she has no way of knowing if going to Fritzie will actually occur to them, let alone whether they will actually go. At least in Bone’s situation and in Rahel’s situation, they both had someone to step forward and take care of them. They did not have to fend for themselves.

Another difference in the daughters’ situations concerns the mothers leaving and where they go. Lena’s mother never leaves, physically. She only leaves her daughter mentally, but that proves to be just as upsetting as if she had left physically. In some ways, it may have been more upsetting for Lena to have her mother present and not be able to reach out to her. Ying-ying’s situation is different than the other mothers, too, because she leaves mentally as a result of the pain caused by the loss of a child. In
contrast, Bone’s mother may have left to save her daughter’s life; she may have left because she could not live without Glen. In either case, when Anne leaves Bone, she knows exactly where she is going and why. Similarly, when Ammu makes the decision to break the love laws of her society, she makes the decision to leave her children, even if only for a little while. She knows exactly where she is going and why. When Ammu leaves Rahel in Ayemenem, it is to find a job so that she can make enough money to reunite her little family. She leaves in good faith that she will be back. She leaves with a destination in mind.

Unlike Bone’s and Rahel’s mothers, when Mary’s mother leaves, Adelaide has no plan. Most likely, she only knows that she cannot support herself and her children. She climbs into an airplane with a stranger without saying goodbye to her children, without offering instructions or reassuring them that she will be back. She leaves her children to the unknown; she vanishes into the unknown.

Suyuan Woo is also an absent mother, in death. However, June is grown when her mother dies. June is like Bone, Rahel and Mary in that she does not gather all the knowledge that she can before her mother leaves. She is like Mary in that she has no warning, no time to prepare herself for her mother’s departure from her life. Death denies June all the privileges that come with having a mother.

Rose and Waverly are by far the most fortunate of the daughters in terms of having a mother active and present in their lives. They are also fortunate in that they are able to see parallels between themselves and their mothers. They are able to begin tracing their heritages through what they learn from their mothers. In tracing hers, Lena sees
similarities between herself and her mother in their thinking, but she does not like what
she finds — that she has the same kind of fear that her mother does.

One element that Tan's daughters do not share with Allison's, Roy's, or Erdrich's
is the capacity to feel hatred toward their mothers. Bone, Rahel and Mary share hatred for
their mothers. The difference between the three is that Mary's hatred lasts for her entire
life. Bone's hatred for Anne will always be accompanied by love. Rahel's hatred for
Ammu is replaced as she grows older and begins to understand the woman that her
mother was.

Bone's and Rahel's hatred being degrees different from Mary's may also have do
to with their understanding of the women that their mothers were. Understanding their
mothers involves, to some extent, understanding the relationships their mothers were
involved in outside of their relationships with their daughters. The next chapter focuses
on relationships outside of the mother-daughter relationships.
BEYOND THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS

It is important to note the workings of relationships outside of the mother-daughter relationships because in the case of many of the mother-daughter pairs discussed, the outside relationships become just as important, if not more so, than the relationships the daughters have with their mothers. Particularly important are relationships that both the mothers and daughters have with other women – either woman friends or sisters, aunts or cousins. Female community is an important theme in each text, and this chapter examines that particular theme. Additionally, as the chapter progresses into the discussion of *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *The God of Small Things*, the theme of women overcoming objectification in favor of subjectivity becomes important.

“Beyond the Mother-Daughter Relationships” includes the mothers’ relationships with friends, with relatives, and with men. As a consequence of her relationship with her mother, the daughter often inherits her mother’s relationships. A question central to this chapter is: “How do the mothers’ relationships affect their daughters?” This question is relevant particularly in *The Beet Queen*, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and *The God of Small Things*.

The only mother-daughter pair from *The Beet Queen* relevant to the question of how a mother’s relationships affect her daughter is the Celestine-Dot relationship. This is
the only relationship the reader actually sees from the beginning and sees quite clearly.

Mary’s mother, Adelaide, only has one relationship outside of her children: her relationship with Mr. Ober. That relationship only affects Mary in the sense that if Mr. Ober had not died, Adelaide would not have had reason to abandon her children. Fritzie’s case is much the same as Adelaide’s in that she is only seen with Pete, her husband, Sita, her daughter, and Mary, her niece. Fritzie’s relationship with Mary affects Sita only marginally, in that Sita is annoyed at having to share her room and many of her belongings with Mary through much of the cousins’ youth.

The only other noteworthy point to make concerning the Adelaide-Mary and Fritzie-Sita relationships is in terms of Mary and Sita’s attitudes toward each other. There is almost an element of disgust on the part of Mary and Sita toward each other for holding their respective mothers in such high esteem. In other words, Mary is disgusted with Sita for seeing Adelaide as someone worthy of admiration bordering on worship. Sita is just as disgusted by the way that Mary takes to Fritzie. Sita may grow out of her disgust for Mary and Fritzie’s relationship only because at the bottom of it all, she does love her mother. Mary never grows out of her disgust with Sita because she hates her mother.

Dot, on the other hand, neither hates Celestine nor is her personality different enough from Celestine’s that she has to hold her Aunt Mary in higher esteem than she holds her mother. The question of how a daughter is affected by her mother’s relationships is easily answered in terms of how Dot is affected by Celestine’s relationships. Celestine has a number of relationships that affect her daughter. The first is Celestine’s relationship with Karl, Dot’s father, Mary’s brother. Before Dot was born, the
two were lovers; however, Celestine did not love him, nor did he love her. Karl would have tried indefinitely to make the relationship work; however, Celestine knows from almost the beginning that it never will. In the time that she and Karl are together, he sponges off of her and expects her to take care of him, to mother him. He latches onto Celestine perhaps because he is searching for a mother figure to replace Adelaide. Ironically, Celestine kicks Karl out of her house on the very same day that she discovers she is pregnant.

Celestine does, as a matter of formality, marry Karl just after Dot is born. When Karl brings up the possibility of their living together as a family, Celestine replies, "Let's not get carried away" (320). At some point, she is so intent on having her daughter to herself and not being tied to marriage, she extracts a promise from Karl that he will stay away from Dot, away from her, away from their life in Argus.

How does being fatherless affect Dot? She has a very low self-esteem, which may be, if only in part, attributed to the absence of her father. Karl only exists in Dot's life from a distance. He periodically sends her presents, some of which are the products he is selling at the time. He sends Dot a wheel chair, which Celestine promptly makes her give to her Uncle Russell, Celestine's older brother, who is confined to a wheel chair as the result of a stroke. Karl also sends her matchbooks from all the places he visits. Yet, he never visits his daughter and never calls her. This must have been confusing to a young girl who would not have known that her mother asked her father to stay away, would not have understood it even if she had known.

While Celestine keeps her biological father from Dot, she does not deny her daughter a father figure. Wallace Pfeff, Dot's godfather and the man she is named for,
plays the father figure role in Dot's life. Celestine's friendship and subsequent naming of her daughter, "Willacette," happens by accident. On the night Dot is born, Celestine gets stuck in a horrible snowstorm and ends up on Wallace's couch, where he delivers Dot.

"Dot" is actually a nickname given to her by Mary. "Willacette Darlene" is the name on her birth certificate, the name that she is baptized under.

Along with his name, Dot also has Wallace's heart. He is drawn to Dot by her fearlessness: "She feared nothing" (233). He sees something in Dot that he has never known himself: "She was what I was not. She was not afraid to be different, and this awed me" (302). Wallace, on the other hand, is afraid to be different. Wallace is homosexual, but hides behind a picture of a woman he does not know. Everyone in the town of Argus assumes the picture, known as "Pfef's poor dead sweetheart" (159), is the reason that he has never married, or even dated.

As a surrogate father, "Uncle" Wallace is pleased that when Dot chooses to run away from home, she runs to him first, planning to run on to find her father after seeing Wallace. When she tells him that she is running to Karl, Wallace proceeds to tell her the truth about her father: "He's worse than a bum" (236). He keeps going, perhaps going too far by telling her that Karl hates children, stopping just short of adding, "especially you" (236), not only agreeing with Mary about her father, but also going much further than that. This may also serve to lower Dot's self esteem. What child wants to know that the father she dreams about running away to is a no-good scoundrel? Hurting one's children sometimes tends to make them stronger. Ammu, in *The God of Small Things*, hurts her twins to make them tougher, less susceptible to those who might be out to hurt them.
Wallace tries it by accident and learns that his love and hate for Dot's father is no reason to hurt Dot. He hurts her quite badly, though, before he learns this.

The one time he fails Dot as a parent, he does it because he sees Karl in Dot and it shocks him so completely that when Dot needs him, he has to cast her aside, out into the snow to face her sorrows by herself. Only too late does he realize that he learned the lesson that every parent learns: "You fail sometimes. No matter how much you love your children, there are times you slip. There are moments you stutter, can't give, lose your temper, or simply lose face with the world" (236).

The result of this one failure is that Dot stops speaking to him at all, unless Celestine forces her – like when she makes Dot thank Karl for the Christmas present he sent her. Like all good parents who have done the wrong thing, Wallace struggles to find a way to make it up to her. As she grows up, Wallace tries to make up for many of the world's oversights where Dot is concerned. He observes that Dot's anger at the world is consuming those who love her the most: "Mary observed that if Dot were not all she had in the world, she would have disowned her niece" (302). Wallace's theory is "that if those who really loved Dot could hardly stand her, what could she think of herself?" (302). He sets out to make Dot feel good about herself. He gives her a shot put in hopes that she will excel at track and field. It works until she makes the team and the coaches tell her she will be a good shot-putter because she is dense for her height (303), which successfully pushes her self-esteem right back to its bottomless pit.

Wallace tries one last time to find a way to make Dot "think well of herself, have a fantasy come true for once, be perfect, on top" (304). He invents a town-wide festival to support the town's biggest moneymaking crop, the beet. Wallace's Beet Festival will
have a Beet Queen. When he first conceived of the festival, his soul purpose was to make Dot Argus' first Beet Queen. He succeeds in his endeavors by rigging the vote. In doing so, he hurts Dot yet again when she finds out about Wallace's town-wide deception.

In addition to Karl and Wallace, Celestine's friendships with Mary and Sita affect her daughter. It is no wonder that the three women are drawn together in friendship: none of the three have any significant ties outside of each other. Sita and Mary only have Fritzie, Pete, and Karl. Fritzie and Pete leave Argus and Karl only passes through. Celestine has no one except her brother, Russell, half-brother Eli, and her Aunt Fleur, who live on the Indian reservation near Argus.

It is also not surprising that Mary and Celestine are the closest. When the three were girls, they were closer, but as they grew older, Sita cut herself off from them, much the way that Adelaide would have cut herself off from other women, much the way that Adelaide cut herself off from her sister. Sita tries to remain as distant from Mary and Celestine as she can, but does befriend Dot. Her motives are not pure, however. She only draws Dot into conversation one afternoon in The House of Meats because she knows it will irritate both Celestine and Mary. Sita tells Dot the story about Adelaide's running off: "I made it romantic, almost like a legend. Dot was riveted to me, demanded more...For an instant I had taken Dot away from them both" (288). It is Sita's recitation of Dot's matrilineage — Adelaide is, after all, Dot's grandmother — that Dot remembers when she too, jumps in a plane and flies away on a whim.

Unlike Sita, Mary is a constant figure in Dot's life, almost as constant as her mother. Because the two women work together and see each other socially, there is quite a bit of squabbling between them. Nearly constant companionship coupled with a thread
of jealousy on the parts of both women makes their company even worse, sometimes. According to Wallace, “Sometimes I thought the friction between the two women would grind Dot to dust, but instead, she hardened between them, grew tough” (233).

The jealousy stems from the connection that exists on some underlying level between aunt and niece: “Dot and I had a mental connection, I was sure of it. I understood things about the baby that her mother would not accept” (180). Instead of taking a step backward and looking at the history of the women on Dot’s father’s side of the family, specifically the connections between nieces and their aunts, Celestine attributes their closeness to Mary’s ability “to worm her way into [Dot’s] heart” (219). Celestine pictures Dot running away to live with Mary, being fired from her job at The House of Meats, and having to hire a lawyer to get her child back. These thoughts are triggered on one occasion when Dot tells Mary she has a crush on a boy and does not tell Celestine, her mother. From imagining Dot running away to live with Mary, Celestine turns to lamenting that she has to make Dot do her homework while Mary keeps her away from it, wanting to have fun, instead. Mary reads Dot’s palm and lies and tells Dot what she wants to hear and Celestine makes Dot “eat lima beans and wash her neck” (220). Celestine does not understand or does not see that Mary’s connection with Dot and vice versa is the same connection that Mary and Fritzie have as niece and aunt, that Adelaide and Sita have as aunt and niece.

In portraying Celestine as a single mother who insists that she be the primary caregiver and emotional support for her daughter, Erdrich is embodying “the Chippewa tradition” (Tanrisal 71) in which “the mother is not merely one’s biological parent; she’s all one’s relations (male and female, human and animal, individual and tribal,)”
according to Hertha Wong (quoted in Tanrisal 71). At the same time, because she set the novel up beginning with the flight of a white mother, Erdrich contrasts the
“Euroamerican concept of the nuclear family” (Tanrisal 73) with the “Native American notion of ‘family,’” which, according to Melden Tanrisal, “joins the individuals living together in one [community]” (72). The nuclear family of Adelaide, her children, and Mr. Ober breaks down completely with the death of Mr. Ober and the flight of Adelaide at the beginning of the novel. As the novel progresses, Erdrich creates a community of friends and relations who have no one but each other. At the center of the community is a “strong and loving” (Hansen 137) Native American mother. All the relationships in the novel center around Celestine – marriage to Karl, friendships with Mary, Sita, and Wallace, sister to Eli and Russell, niece to Fleur. Through Celestine, Erdrich is providing a kinship or clan-type environment (Tanrisal 73), which is an Ojibwa concept seen Love Medicine, Tracks, and The Bingo Palace, as well.

The Beet Queen was purposely omitted from any in-depth discussion in the previous chapter for a very good reason: with the exception of Dot, the daughters in the story do not learn anything from their mothers. They are closer to and more influenced by their aunts. Dot is the exception because, as noted above, both her mother and her aunt influence her in close to equal proportions.

Anything that Mary learns or observes from Adelaide besides the importance of being self-sufficient, as noted in Chapter Two, falls into two categories: the kind of person Mary does not want to be, ever; and, what needs to be squashed out, forgotten, and re-learned from her Aunt Fritzie. Mary molds herself like Fritzie. Fritzie is outspoken and down to earth. She does not understand the vanity she sees in her younger sister
Adelaide, nor does she understand it in her own daughter. She is sometimes tactless, bordering on abrasive, but she is always fair. Fritzie is strong and intelligent. Fritzie successfully runs Kozka’s Meats, which Mary later renames “The House of Meats.” Fritzie is happily married with a daughter whom she loves even if she does not understand her. Fritzie is a very stable character with a good heart. With the exception of marriage and children, Mary ends up just like Fritzie.

Sita’s connection with Adelaide is more one-sided than is Mary’s connection to Fritzie. Adelaide in the flesh is not a fixture in Sita’s life. Yet, neither is Sita’s own mother. Sita and Fritzie do not connect the way Mary connects with Fritzie. Instead, Sita sees her life paralleling Adelaide’s. Even Sita’s destructive behaviors parallel those of her aunt’s, as Nan Nowick points out in her interview with Louise Erdrich (72). Sita admires Adelaide’s lifestyle and sees her as a role model. Fritzie is never a role model for Sita. In molding her life like that of Adelaide, Sita is the one who keeps Adelaide’s jewelry box with the ticket from the pawnshop in Minneapolis where Adelaide sold her jewelry after Mr. Ober died. Twenty years later, Sita even goes so far as to get Adelaide’s favorite piece, a garnet necklace, back from the pawnshop. She was in Minneapolis anyway, to see Adelaide’s youngest son, the one who is taken from Mary’s arms the day that Adelaide disappears. His “mother” wrote to Fritzie and Pete about him and Sita gets the letter instead. Without telling Mary of the letter or the boy, she goes to Minneapolis herself to see how he turned out. It is almost as if she goes as Adelaide.

Unlike Adelaide, Sita is actually a respectable woman. Sita is not “kept” in the sense that she shares another woman’s husband. Sita marries, twice. Both marriages are
more for the benefit of the money and visibility that her husband brings her, but all the same, she is married.

Noteworthy is the fact that Sita is never privy to Adelaide’s relationship with Mr. Ober. Sita is never privy to anything that Adelaide does after leaving her children. Sita only has what she remembers about Adelaide to mold herself after. In this respect, Sita is at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to Mary, who has her aunt Fritzie in the flesh to refer to.

Dot is the most complex character in the novel because she has the best of both worlds in terms of relationships with both mother and aunt. Unlike Fritzie, Celestine does not just let Dot go the way that Fritzie let Sita go. Fritzie writes Sita off as some kind of soul mate to Adelaide. It is almost as though she gives up trying to form a deeper level connection with her own daughter.

Dot is also the most fortunate daughter in the novel because her mother does not leave her the way that Mary’s mother, Adelaide, did. The result is that Dot enjoys her relationship with both her mother and her aunt. While Dot may be inherently drawn to Mary, Celestine is around enough to counter that and Dot ends up with a good bond with both women.

All four of the people closest to Celestine – Mary, Sita, Karl, and Wallace – become the closest to Dot. All four, in partnership with her mother, do their best to love and support Dot in any way they can, regardless of the cruel ways that she treats them as a rebellious teenager who wears fishnet stockings and vinyl skirts, teases her hair and hangs out with “hoods, drinkers, smokers, motorcycle riders, and assorted deadbeats” (301).
Dot is lucky that she has loving people in her life, though she does not appreciate them as often or as much as she should. In *The God of Small Things*, Rahel is not so lucky. Like Dot, her mother’s relationships also become her relationships; but, unfortunately, some of the people in Rahel’s life do not always wish her well and are not always around to love and support her unconditionally.

Ammu has a number of relationships that affect her daughter, Rahel: her relationship with Velutha, her relationship with her brother, Chacko, and her relationship with Mammachi and Baby Kochamma. Each relationship has two phases, both of which affect Rahel. The first phase is the pre-affair phase. The second phase is the post-affair phase.

The pre-affair phase relationships are stable. With the exception of Mammachi and Baby Kochamma, Ammu’s relationships serve to make Rahel’s life more comfortable and secure. Chacko is four years older than Ammu and serves as a father figure to Rahel and Estha. Educated at Oxford, he is divorced and has a daughter of his own, Sophie Mol, who lived in England with her mother until she drowned while visiting Ayemenem. He also plays the role of Ammu’s only friend and supporter. He is the one person who does not let what she has done to the family name affect their status as brother and sister. No matter that they rarely agree on anything – politics, the way Chacko runs Mammachi’s business – they are still brother and sister, friends, partners in raising Ammu’s children.

Velutha is a Paravan, a member of the class of Untouchables in the society of India. He and Ammu grow up together, but separately. Paravans are not allowed in the Kochamma house: “They were not allowed to touch anything that Touchables touched”
(71). Velutha is three years younger than Ammu. When they were children, Velutha made “intricate toys” (71) with his hands and brought them for Ammu, “holding them out on his palm” (72) so that she could take them without touching him, as was custom between the Touchables and Untouchables.

It is Mammachi who first notices how good Velutha is with his hands, and it is this natural gift which enables him to work in Mammachi’s factory. He knows the workings of every machine in the factory. He is indispensable, even though he is a Paravan and technically, they have no place working among the Touchable society. Mammachi says that “if only he hadn’t been a Paravan, he might have become an engineer” (72).

Velutha’s talent with the factory machines carries over into other areas, as well. He is an excellent carpenter and is often around the Kochamma house doing repairs. Because he is around the house and factory so often, he becomes one of Rahel and Estha’s must trusted friends. The three have nicknames for each other, and the twins greet him with hugs and laughter whenever they see him. As children who do not yet understand the class distinctions between Touchables and Untouchables, the twins do not see Velutha as a Paravan. Velutha is their friend, and not even Ammu can not dissuade them from visiting his home, from treating him as a human being rather than an Untouchable.

Mammachi and Baby Kochamma both vehemently disapprove of the choices Ammu has made in her life, as noted in earlier chapters. Baby Kochamma resents what she sees as Ammu “quarreling” (44) with her fate as a “wretched Man-less woman” (45). She resents this primarily because she herself is a “wretched Man-less woman” as well,
only Baby Kochamma accepts her fate. Unlike Mammachi, who does not let her dismay toward her daughter affect her love for her two-egg twin grandchildren, Baby Kochamma's attitude toward Ammu includes her children, as well: “Baby Kochamma disliked the twins, for she considered them doomed, fatherless waifs” (44). She thinks they have no right to be living off their maternal grandmother in Ayemenem; she thinks they are “Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry” (44).

“It’s true. Things can change in a day” (183), and they do, when Baby Kochamma and Mammachi discover Ammu’s affair with Velutha. Perhaps if Mammachi and Baby Kochamma did not already disapprove of Ammu, they would not have reacted so strongly to the news of Ammu’s affair. If Ammu had not already brought shame to the family, they would have behaved more rationally, rather than locking Ammu in her room while they formulate a plan to minimize the damage Ammu once again does to the family’s reputation.

The discovery of Ammu’s affair sets off a chain reaction that changes the scope of every one of Ammu’s relationships, thus affecting every one of Rahel’s relationships, including her relationship with her mother. Rahel’s relationship with her mother begins deteriorating while Ammu is locked in her room when she yells through the door at her two-egg twins, “‘You’re the millstones around my neck!’” (240). Locking Ammu in her room is a most disastrous course of action because the hurtful words she yells take her twins out onto the river with Chacko’s visiting daughter, Sophie Mol. When Sophie Mol drowns, Chacko, in his grief, blames Ammu.
Meanwhile, Baby Kochamma makes her way to the police station where she tells an Inspector "of the events that had led to the sudden dismissal of a factory worker" (244). Baby Kochamma’s version of Ammu and Velutha’s relationship is the one in which Velutha attempts to force himself on Ammu. She gets so carried away in her story that she paints Velutha to look like a rebellious, disrespectful Paravan who shows no remorse for what he does to Ammu. The manhunt that follows leads to Velutha’s beating and eventual death.

Chacko might be justified in blaming Ammu at least partly for the death of his daughter, except that he does not think to blame her on his own. Baby Kochamma places the responsibility for Sophie Mol’s death on Ammu and her children. She is the one who suggests removing Ammu from the house and separating the twins. Overcome with grief, he plays into Baby Kochamma’s plan to protect herself from the Inspector she had deceived about the nature of Ammu’s relationship with Velutha, to protect herself from being discovered as the one who set the policemen on a trail to beat to death an innocent man.

Thus, Ammu’s relationships are both the foundation for Rahel’s relationships as a child, and Ammu’s actions are the destruction of those same relationships, both for herself and for her daughter. Ammu’s affair indirectly causes Velutha’s death, leaving Ammu without a lover, her daughter without a friend. The affair wreaks havoc on her relationship with her brother, and damages beyond all repair whatever relationship she had with her mother and great-aunt.

Rahel’s relationships with Chacko and Mammachi deteriorate, as well. After Ammu leaves and Estha is sent to his father, who has quit drinking, gotten a job, and
remarried, it becomes evident that Chacko and Mammachi’s attitude toward Rahel is changed for the worse: “In matters related to the raising of Rahel, Chacko and Mammachi tried, but couldn’t. They provided the care (food, clothes, fees), but withdrew the concern” (17).

The most important loss to one half of a two-egg twin relationship is the loss of a twin. Rahel and Estha might as well have been “a rare breed of Siamese twins, physically separate, but with joint identities” (5), they were so close. As an adult, Rahel remembers things that happened only to Estha as if they were her memories. She remembers the taste of the tomato sandwiches that Estha eats on the train that takes him to live with his father. Though twenty years have passed since the time Rahel and Ammu put Estha on the train, Rahel still feels what he does, she still has a connection to him. The loss of the physical being is all the more devastating because she can still feel him. When Estha gradually gets quieter and eventually stops speaking altogether, Rahel feels his quietness, except that it manifests itself in Rahel as emptiness.

As an architecture student, Rahel’s classmates are “intimidated by her waywardness and almost fierce lack of ambition” (19). She has few relationships, personal or professional. She is an architecture student when Mammachi dies and Chacko immigrates to Canada. This lack of ties simplifies Rahel’s meeting and marrying an American, Larry McCaslin. Rahel “drifted into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair in an airport lounge” (19). She goes back to the States with him when he is finished in Delhi where he is collecting information for his doctoral thesis.

Rahel’s husband is offended by something he sees in her eyes when they make love. Her eyes “behaved as though they belonged to someone else. Someone watching”
(20). When Larry tries to analyze the look in her eyes, he characterizes it as “somewhere between indifference and despair” (20). What it was, however, “was not despair at all, but a sort of enforced optimism. And a hollow where Estha’s words had been... the emptiness in one twin was only a version of the quietness in the other” (20-1).

The only constant, predictable relationship in Rahel’s life is her relationship with Baby Kochamma. Rahel is thirty-one, divorced, and jobless when she returns to Ayemenem. Never once in her thirty-one years of existence does her great aunt’s attitude toward her or her brother change. Baby Kochamma is just as suspicious of thirty-one-year-old Rahel as she was of five-year-old Rahel. When Rahel brings her insulin from the States, she catches herself suspecting that “they” might try to steal their present back. Then she stops herself. “She. She might steal her present back” (29). Even when they are grown adults who have not seen or spoken to each other since they were five, Baby Kochamma still views them as a unit, is still suspicious of them, deems the “Capable of Anything” (29). Just as she was when they were young, she is fiercely competitive with them. On Rahel’s first day back at the house in Ayemenem, Estha walks past Rahel as if he does not see her, “As he did with everyone else” (21). Baby Kochamma’s reaction is “…an air of barely concealed triumph. She was delighted that Estha had not spoken to Rahel (21). If Estha had spoken to Rahel after not having spoken to anyone in years, Rahel would have “won.” She is still in competition with them, particularly with Rahel, even though there never was and never will be anything to compete for.

Roy does not explore many relationships outside of familial ones in The God of Small Things. In this way, The God of Small Things is similar to The Joy Luck Club. Tan leaves relationships that are part of the daughter’s lifetimes, but outside of the mother-
daughter relationships, largely unexplored. Very little is seen of the daughters as girls or as women interacting with other women, or even with men. Only the relationships that the mothers can affect or have affected in one way or another are examined in any detail. June’s relationships outside of the one she has with her mother are not explored at all. They are not significant in the scope of the novel because her mother is dead. The only reason relationships other than the mother-daughter relationships get any attention in the other daughters’ stories is because their mothers have some kind of impact on each of the relationships in question. For instance, Waverly’s fiancé, Rich, has a place in the novel because part of what she loves about him is that he loves even her dark side, the side her mother passes to her, the side that makes Waverly manipulative. Lindo comes from the “Sun clan in Taiyun” (203) and one of the characteristics of these people is that they are “tricky” (203). Lindo tells Waverly that this is a trait she has inherited from her mother’s line.

According to Waverly, Rich “saw all those private aspects of me – and I mean not just sexual parts, but my darker side, my meanness, my pettiness, my self-loathing – all the things I kept hidden” (194), and loved her anyway. Waverly’s “meanness” and “pettiness” grows out of the one-sided arguments she had with her mother growing up. The argument that leads to Waverly losing her edge in the game of chess (discussed in Chapter Three) is a prime example of one of Waverly’s one-sided arguments. The one-sided arguments play out in her adult life when she imagines that everything her mother says about Rich has a hidden meaning, that her mother will “poison” her perception of Rich in the same manner that she “poisoned” (192) her perception of her first husband. Unlike her first marriage, Waverly does not allow her mother to “poison” her feelings for
Rich. She confronts her mother, claiming that Lindo said Rich had spots on his face “just to be mean, to hurt me” (201). Waverly’s willing confrontation with her mother reflects that she no longer wants to hide behind the games she imagines that others are playing with her. Waverly’s confrontation with her mother reflects that she has stopped hiding and will be a much better partner for Rich.

Like Waverly’s relationship with Rich, Tan’s examination of Lena’s marriage is fruitful in terms of how the daughter’s relationship with her mother affects other relationships in her life. In Lena’s case, her relationship with her mother affects her relationship with her husband. Her mother spends much of Lena’s childhood concerned with issues other than her daughter: “I raised a daughter, watching her from another shore. I accepted her American ways. With all these things, I did not care. I had no spirit” (286). The result of an uninvolved mother who does not communicate with her daughter, only watches her, is that Lena does not learn to be an active participant in her own life. She only learns to accept whatever situation is put before her, never trying to change it. Her mother spends much of Lena’s childhood resting in bed; rather than do something about it, Lena daydreams about rescuing her mother from the bad place she lives in. She never actually takes action.

Lena does not take action in her marriage, either. Her husband, Harold, is the one who controls their lives, as seen in the previous chapter. He is her boss at work. He is the one who insists on keeping their finances separate, despite the fact that they are married and have been for a number of years. Lena knows that she does not like the arrangement, yet she does nothing to change it. Ying-ying claims that her daughter is the daughter of a ghost. “She has no chi” (286). Because a ghost raised Lena, she is, in essence, a ghost.
herself. The ghost quality that both mother and daughter possess can be likened to passivity, or objectification. When Ying-ying was an eighteen-year-old girl, newly married, she allowed her husband to objectify her. He made her his wife and left her to care for his home while he took many “business trips” (280). When she found out that he was not faithful to her, she left him, but became passive, wandering the countryside, ghost-like. Lena is much the same way as her mother. Harold objectifies her. He makes her into an object by telling her how their life will be. She does nothing to contribute, to make herself an active participant in her own life.

The inability to take action is a characteristic not only of Lena, but of Rose, as well. Rose’s inability to take action is not the result of an absence of voice, like Lena. Instead, Rose cannot take action because she does not know which action to take. Rose is always confused. Her mother tells her she was born without wood, meaning that she always listens to too many people and bends easily. Rose reflects that her mother knows this “because once she had almost become this way” (213). In recognizing that she is like her mother, Rose is recognizing that “her voice is not entirely her own,” as Maglin points out (258). Instead, her voice is filtered through generations of women who fight the same battles. Chinese women were conditioned to be passive, to listen to the male heads of their households, not to listen to their mothers, particularly since their mothers were the same passive creatures as their daughters. In Rose’s state of being without wood, she listens to everyone around her and does not listen to her mother. She rebels against her mother’s Chinese opinions in favor of American opinions. There are many more American opinions to chose from, which, in the end, only confuses Rose. Such becomes the case in Rose’s marriage. She knows that her marriage is over, but cannot decide what
she wants to do about it. Does she want to continue to bend easily and follow Ted as she did for the first fifteen years of marriage, or does she want to take action, call a lawyer, make a choice? She says, "But as I started to dial, I became confused. I put the receiver down. What could I say? What did I want from divorce — when I never knew what I had wanted from marriage?" (215). Rose’s solution to her confusion is inaction. She goes to bed and does not get up for three days.

Much like the daughters’ relationships outside of their relationships with their mothers, the mother’s relationships in the daughter’s lifetimes that affect their daughters directly are unexplored. The only relationships outside of familial ones that are not part of the mothers’ histories are the mothers’ relationships with each other — those among the women of the Joy Luck Club.

The women of the Joy Luck Club are good friends. They know everything about one another. They know each other’s histories, and they know each other’s faults. Suyuan Woo knows that An-mei has no spine and bends to the wills of others without thinking for herself. She also knows that “Auntie Ying is not hard of hearing. She is hard of listening” (24), which explains why she talks so loudly, as if she is off in her own world where she is not quite in touch with those around her. Suyuan Woo knows these things about her friends, and does her best not to exploit her friends’ weaknesses.

Along with being friends, the women are fiercely competitive. When Auntie Lin makes red bean soup for Joy Luck, Suyuan must out do her: "I’m going to cook black sesame-seed soup” (5), while claiming that she is not showing off her cooking talents. Cooking is not the only area that the Joy Luck mothers are competitive in. They are also fiercely competitive about who has the brightest, most exceptional children. Tan
demonstrates this in Suyuan and Lindo’s lifetime of comparing their children. June and Waverly are only a month apart, and June knows of the competition between the two women over who had the best daughter:

From the time we were babies, our mothers compared the creases in our belly buttons, how shapely our earlobes were, how fast we healed when we scraped our knees, how thick and dark our hair, how many shoes we wore out in one year, and later, how smart Waverly was at playing chess. (27)

It is this competition that helps Suyuan down the path of making a prodigy out of June.

The competitive nature of the mothers is seen in the daughters, as well. At the same Chinese New Year’s feast when Suyuan makes the crabs, Waverly and June get into a squabble over some work that June did for Waverly’s company that June did not receive payment for. June approaches the subject, hoping to make Waverly look silly. She succeeds and is “pleased to see Waverly’s reaction. She was genuinely flustered, speechless” (230). Waverly suggests they not discuss the problem over dinner, but June pushes it. The tables turn when Waverly tells her she is not going to be paid because the work she did was unacceptable: “I was surprised at myself, how humiliated I felt. I had been outsmarted by Waverly once again” (232). This example illustrates that the daughters inherit their mothers’ competitiveness. Like their mothers, they are all friends: they grew up together and inherited their mothers’ relationships. In a sense, they are their mothers—competitive, yet supportive at the same time. When Rose tries to make sense out of her marriage by seeing a psychiatrist, she passes what she learns on to Lena; thus they are supporting each other. That the novel begins with June sitting in her mother’s place at the Mah Jong table with the remaining members of the Joy Luck Club is an indication that eventually, all the Joy Luck daughters will become the Joy Luck mothers.
The Joy Luck Women are known as “Auntie Lin,” “Auntie Su,” “Auntie An-mei,” and “Auntie Ying.” While the Chinese aunts are competitive, they are also supportive of each other and of their “nieces.” Shortly after Suyuan Woo dies, a letter comes from her lost twin daughters in China. Instead of writing off Suyuan’s dream of meeting her lost daughters as dead because Suyuan is dead, the three remaining members of the Joy Luck Club pull together $1200 to send June to China to fulfill her mother’s dream. The aunts make up a story about saving all their Joy Luck winnings for an end-of-the-year banquet, which June knows is a lie “to mask their generosity” (30) and is touched by it all the same. They tell June she must go to China to meet her sisters. They tell her, “you must tell them about her life. The mother they did not know, they must now know” (30).

June is not the only “niece” who benefits from her “Aunties.” All the daughters do in one way or another. For instance, Auntie Su helps Waverly to get her fiancé, Rich, an invitation to dinner at Lindo’s house. The way that the Chinese aunts form a supportive network for their nieces is similar to Fritzie and Mary as aunts in The Beet Queen. As noted earlier and in previous chapters, Fritzie is very supportive of Mary. She takes her in and treats her as another daughter. Mary becomes more of a conventional daughter than her own daughter, Sita. In turn, Mary is much the same kind of aunt to Dot as Fritzie is to her. Mary plays the role of “fun aunt” while Celestine, as Dot’s mother, has to be the police on occasion, insisting that Dot do her homework and eat her vegetables. Is that not what aunts are for, providing buffers when mothers and daughters have trouble?
The two sets of aunts seen in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Beet Queen* are very
different than Baby Kochamma in *The God of Small Things*. Baby Kochamma is the
opposite of supportive. As noted earlier, Baby Kochamma is a jealous aunt. She is also
manipulative. Instead of supporting her niece and making sure that she has everything she
needs to be happy, Baby Kochamma is instrumental in taking from Rahel everything that
is important to her: her brother, her mother, and her dear friend, Velutha. Baby
Kochamma makes an interesting point for comparison with Adelaide, as an aunt, in *The
Beet Queen*. While Sita models her life on Adelaide’s, there is no evidence in the text that
Adelaide knows of this borderline heroine-worship. Because Sita is so self-centered, it is
easy for her to believe that Adelaide sent her the sewing machine via Mary. Is it better to
be an uninvolved aunt, the way that Adelaide is, or a malicious aunt, the way that Baby
Kochamma is?

Unlike *The God of Small Things*, there are no uninvolved or malicious aunts in
*Bastard out of Carolina*. Instead, Bone’s aunts are involved in her life and her mother’s
life; they are caring and they are supportive. Family plays a large role in the poverty-level
society in which the Boatwrights exist. Everyone works hard to keep a roof over their
heads and food on their tables. They do not have time to make friends, nor are they
accepted into normal society because of their poverty. Hence, they only have each other.

The entire Boatwright clan, especially Anne’s sisters, Alma, Ruth and Raylene,
are part of the first of two important relationships in Anne’s life that affect Bone. In the
beginning, Bone has a relationship with the Boatwright family members by default, of
course. Family relationships are not “pick and choose” relationships the way that
friendship relationships and love relationships are. Throughout the course of Bone’s
childhood, however, their default relationship grows into a mutual familial love relationship. Bone helps her aunts around their houses, takes care of their children, and even takes care of her Aunt Ruth the summer before she dies. Bone's relationship with the Boatwrights, especially her aunts, is important because she will have them in her life long after her mother leaves her.

The second of Anne's relationships that profoundly affects Bone is her marriage to Glen. This relationship is dangerous to Bone physically as well as mentally, and destroys Bone's relationship with her mother. In the end, Anne's relationship with Glen causes her to sever her relationship with her daughter, leaving Bone with only an original copy of her birth certificate minus the "illegitimate" stamp.

Physically, Anne's relationship to Glen is dangerous to Bone because he molests her, "holding [her] body tight to his, his hands shaking as they moved restlessly, endlessly, over [her] belly, ass, and thighs" (108). He also beats her, frequently, but never when an aunt was visiting and rarely when Anne could see, "except for those times he could justify as discipline" (111). Glen never tells Bone not to tell Anne about all the beatings and the molestation. Bone cannot have told anyone, let alone her mother: "I did not know how to tell anyone what I felt, what scared me and shamed me and still made me stand, unmoving and desperate while he rubbed against me and ground his face into my neck" (109). The only reason that Anne occasionally finds out about the beatings is because they involve trips to the hospital. Once, Glen breaks Bone's collarbone and claims that it was accidental, "just like the first time" (113) when Bone fell off the porch. The intern on that trip to the hospital orders "lots of X-rays" (113), over which he asks Anne how Bone broke her coccyx. When Anne does not know what that is, the doctor
tells her, "'Her tailbone, lady, her ass. What have you been hitting this child with? Or have you just been throwing her up against the wall?"' (113). Bone had learned the art of remaining silent by then, and when the doctor asks her to tell him what happened, all she can do is whisper, "'Mama, take me home'" (114). The climax of Glen’s danger to Bone physically is also the last time he ever touches her. He rapes her and nearly strangles her to death on Alma’s kitchen floor. Just after he lands the first blow, he tells her that her mother will go back to him, “‘but if she wasn’t gonna come back to me, I’d kill you. You know that? I’d break your neck’” (283). He may have succeeded in strangling Bone if Anne had not interrupted and begun throwing things at Glen: “‘You monster!’” (286), Anne screamed. Because he rapes and almost strangles Bone to death, Glen puts her in the hospital overnight. Among her injuries are a bruised shoulder socket, a sprained wrist that had to be put in a cast, torn lips, bruises on her neck and thighs and miscellaneous cuts.

All of the physical injuries which Glen causes Bone, both on that last, terrible day and throughout her childhood, are accompanied by mental damage. She lives in almost constant fear of him: “I began to tremble whenever Daddy Glen turned his dark blue eyes to me, a deep hidden shaking I prayed he couldn’t see. No, I whispered in the night. No, I will not die. No” (205). Her self-esteem is a steady downward spiral: “When I saw myself in Daddy Glen’s eyes, I wanted to die. No, I wanted to be already dead, cold and gone. Everything felt hopeless” (209). She is often angry and withdrawn. Bone notices that she is getting older, but thinks the only major change is that she always feels “that raw boiling rage in my stomach” (207). When a church bus filled with children passes by, Bone notices “flat-faced children pressed against the windows staring at [her] hatefully”
(262). She glares back at them and tells Raylene she hates them for looking at her and her people as if they are “something nasty” (262). Raylene suggests that they look at Bone the way she looks at them. It is true. It is not until after Glen’s beatings begin that Bone gets angry at the world and everyone in it. everything, that is, that she considers to be better off than she is. Disguised as the desire for more money for clothes and as the resentment of the children at school who have pretty new shoes is the hatred of children who are not being beaten and molested every night, the hatred for children who have mothers who stop their husbands from hurting their children.

Anne’s relationship with the Boatwright clan can be broken down into Anne’s relationship with the women in her family, her sisters and mother; and Anne’s relationship with the men in her family, her brothers. The women in her family help each other. Granny keeps her daughter’s kids. Raylene’s house on the river serves as a hang out for nieces and nephews: “She let kids do pretty much whatever they wanted. With none of her own, Raylene was convinced that the best way to raise children was to give them their head” (178). Anne drops everything to go to Alma when she breaks down and starts destroying her own house after her husband tells her, “You old and ugly and fat as a cow, crazy as a cow eaten too much weed, and you smell like a cow been lying in spoiled milk,” and that he “wouldn’t touch [her] even if [she] took a bath in whiskey tonic and put a bag over [her] head” (272). Anne even lends Alma her oldest daughter when she feels that Alma is no longer dangerous. “You’ll like having Bone around,” (271) she tells Alma. Bone is surprised that her mother thinks she is reliable enough to help Alma, that Anne believes her daughter understands the ties between the Boatwright women and what it means to be able to help each other in times of need. Perhaps Anne
remembers Raylene telling her, “‘Ah, Anney, Bone’s the best you got, works like a dog, she does, just like you and me’” (188).

Anne often sends Bone and Reese to Alma’s or Ruth’s in an effort to protect them from Glen’s moods. She even sends Bone to care for Ruth the summer before she dies. Bone established a very strong relationship with Ruth that summer because she was “an audience, someone who would nod at appropriate moments and not interrupt” (121). On the day of Ruth’s funeral, Ruth’s daughter Deedee tells her, “‘She loved you, you know, hell of a sight more than she did me’” (236). Comments like Deedee’s and Raylene’s help to form Bone’s consciousness. She knows that she is resourceful and enjoys feeling useful when her aunts put her to work. She enjoys forming strong bonds with her aunts through spending time with them. In forming relationships with her aunts, Bone knows that she is part of a community of women who work hard and live only as a result of their hard work.

The Boatwright sisters have always and will always be around to support each other. Ruth practically raised Anne while Granny “‘was always running around after the boys’” (230), or Alma, who always seemed to be in trouble. On the night Ruth finally passes away, the sisters gather at her house to see her go. Even in death, the sisters look out for each other and try to help each other’s children do what is right. When Ruth’s daughter, Deedee, insists that she is not going to her mother’s funeral, Raylene slaps her and says, “‘I just an’t gonna have this. Tonight or tomorrow, I’ll talk to you about your mama. Then you can whine and bitch to your heart’s content, curse and scream and do any damn thing you want. But right now, you’re going to her funeral they way she would want’” (237).
Like the other Boatwright women, Anne understands that men can do anything they want, regardless of “how violent or mistaken” (22) they are. All men’s activities are “viewed with humor and understanding” (22). All three Boatwright brothers “had gone to jail for causing other men serious damage” (12) and the stories people tell about them are stories fit only to be “whispered over whiskey when women were not around” (12). Growing up, Anne watched as her sisters treated her brothers “like overgrown boys – rambunctious teenagers whose antics were more to be joked about than worried over” (22). She does as she has always seen her sisters and mother do, even when her husband beats her daughter, because among the Boatwright women, though it goes unspoken, every woman needs a man to take care of her.

Anne chooses her relationship with her husband over that with her daughter. Each time she lets him beat Bone, she chooses Glen. The first and perhaps the most obvious reason that she chooses her husband over her daughter is that Anne simply cannot live without Glen. She needs him to take care of her. She needs the attention and adoration that he gives her. She needs to feel loved by a man. This makes sense, considering she was the youngest child and that she grew up in an environment where every woman needs a man. Too, Anne may choose Glen because she is afraid he will harm himself without her, and she loves him too much to let that happen. As Anne prepares to drive Bone to the hospital after catching Glen raping and strangling her, Glen bangs his head on the side of her car door and chants, “’Kill me! Kill me!’” (290), and tells her that he cannot and will not live without her.

The second reason Anne may leave Bone is to save her daughter’s life. “’Just die and leave us alone. It if hadn’t been for you, I’d have been all right. Everything would
have been all right’” (284), Glen says to her as he rapes her. Anne may sense that if she leaves Glen for good, he will hold Bone responsible and one day actually kill Bone. If this is the case, leaving Bone with Raylene will insure her safety, and, Bone may end up leading a better life than the one Anne could give her if she actually leaves Glen. Also, there is no way to predict whether or not mother and daughter can live together ever again without resentment on both their parts. On Bone’s part, the resentment would be that her mother let Glen’s beating go on for so long. On Anne’s part, the resentment would be directed at Bone for having to leave Glen, along with the guilt that she let him beat her daughter in the first place.

Anne chooses the man in her life, unlike Ammu in *The God of Small Things*. When Ammu leaves her husband for beating her children, she knows what she is faced with. Yet, she does it anyway. Why does Ammu leave and Anne stay? Is it only because Ammu did not love or even like her husband to begin with? Perhaps.

All of the necessary pieces for noting the repetition of history are in place: the history of the mother was examined in the first chapter. Worthy of note is the fact that each mother has a history that affects her daughter in some way. In the second chapter, the daughters’ lifetimes were examined. Many of the daughters’ defining characteristics were passed to them from their mothers, either by observing their mothers in particular situations or by listening to their mothers relay lessons and stories to them. Chapter Four brought the rest of the world into the mothers’ and daughters’ relationships. How the mothers interact with others in the world is very important to the way that the daughters adjust to that same world. In each of the daughters’ cases, she has two choices: to follow the path of
her mother or to follow one opposite that of her mother. The next chapter deals with the paths that the daughters choose and what part their mothers play in their choices.
CONCLUSION

WILL HISTORY REPEAT ITSELF?

In each of the four novels under examination, cultural attitudes have been passed from mother to daughter for generations. The mother characters in *The Joy Luck Club* inherit hundreds of years of silence and inaction from their female ancestors. Their roles in China were similar to the roles that their mothers and grandmothers played before them, and their great grandmothers before them. In the novel, women had no voices in China. They were not permitted to make decisions for themselves. They could not support themselves. For at least part of their lives, Tan allows her mother characters to succumb to the roles their society places them in, thus perpetuating the cycle of objectification of women by men. Tan’s maternal figures’ histories of silence and objectification are embedded into their memories and they unconsciously pass voicelessness and inaction on to their daughters, especially in the case of Lena and Rose.

Tan’s mothers differ from their ancestors in that they have all learned to resist objectification by fathers, husbands, mothers, mothers-in-law, and other males and females who try to silence them. They break new ground and try to pass new traditions on to their daughters. Because the old traditions are so ingrained in their histories, this breaking with history takes a great deal of effort on the part of both the mothers and daughters. In the end, Tan breaks the cycle she has created by writing new paths for her
daughter characters. The daughters become like their mothers by changing their paths from those linked with their ancestors to those linked with their mothers and with their new country, America. While Tan’s mothers still feel the “anger and despair” Maglin writes of in connection with the silence they inherited from their mothers (258), their daughters feel the pain to a lesser extent, or not at all, because Tan, through her mother characters, has given them the power to speak and be heard.

The history that Tan frees her characters from is very similar to the history that Roy’s character, Ammu, fights against in The God of Small Things. By breaking rules such as not getting her parents’ approval before marrying, marrying a foreigner, and divorcing, Ammu is announcing that she is not going to become part of the history that keeps her mother with a man who beats her, and likely kept many more women in her line from living the lives that they dreamed of living. Ammu does not let her husband tell her what to do and what to think. She does not let her husband beat her the way her father beat her mother for very long. In a way, both Roy’s character and Tan’s characters are rule breakers. By breaking from the history that they were once a part of, they are breaking the accepted rules of their cultures so that their daughters will have a better chance to be subjects in life, as opposed to objects under someone else’s control.

Erdrich replicates the relationships between aunts and nieces in The Beet Queen from one generation to the next. Unlike the women in The Joy Luck Club and Ammu in The God of Small Things, the older generation of women in The Beet Queen embraces tradition by following in the paths of their aunts, as opposed to their mothers. This is seen in both Sita and Mary. Celestine, via Dot, is the one who deviates from tradition, but not
because it is a silencing tradition or a tradition of inaction or objectification of women. In fact, the aunt-niece spiritual connection that Erdrich creates between Mary and Dot is not dangerous to Dot in any way. Celestine simply cannot allow her daughter to develop a closer relationship with Mary, only an aunt, and not a mother. In this way, Celestine is a rule breaker just like Tan's silenced-no-longer women and like Roy's Ammu.

Allison’s novel has a rule breaker, as well. Anne breaks the rules that should not be broken, according to the poverty-level Southern family tradition of the Boatwrights. The fundamental difference between Anne as rule breaker and the other women as rule breakers is that the rules that Anne breaks are physically and mentally damaging to her daughter. Certainly, the rules that Ammu and the Joy Luck women break make their daughters’ lives more difficult at times, but ultimately, they wish to make their daughters’ lives better. The rules that Anne breaks do not make Bone’s life better; at least, most of them do not.

Like the cultures mentioned above, Allison’s fictional culture replicates itself generation after generation, as well. The characters that Allison places in her culture “reflect stereotypical white-trash images in many ways,” according to Kathlene McDonald (18). Characteristics of a white, Southern, poverty-level family like the Boatwrights include: large families with lots of children who work just as hard as the adults and drop out of school early to marry and raise families of their own, and very little interaction with people outside of the family circle. Specifically within the tradition of the Boatwright family is the fact that the Boatwright women seem to marry men who are like the Boatwright men.
The Boatwright male characters are strong and confident. They can and will do anything, regardless of the consequences. They are drinking men, able to hold their liquor and hold steady jobs at the same time. "'They think that a working man just naturally turns up in jail now and then, just like they believe they got a right to stay drunk from sunset on Friday to dawn on Monday morning'" (127). Additionally, the Boatwrights have a long-standing tradition of not hitting their children or their women. According to Granny, who tells stories of her grandfather and grandmother, "'Man never spanked a child in his life, never hit Grandma'" (27).

Allison breaks with the tradition she has created when she marries Anne to a man who does not fit the Boatwright pattern. Glen is from a middle-class family of successful men who look down on him for not being successful. Glen cannot hold his liquor. He has no self-confidence. In his anger at his family for disdaining him, he admires confident drinking men like Earl Boatwright, who "was everything Glen had ever wanted to be" (12). Kathlene McDonald also makes this connection between Glen and Earl and Glen’s anger at his family (19). In addition to his other shortcomings, Glen cannot hold a job for long. Finally and most importantly, he beats and molest his stepdaughter. In marrying this man, Anne becomes party to other breaches in the cyclic nature of the history of the Boatwright family. She keeps secrets and stops relying on her family to help her through tough times. She lets her husband move them away from her family so that she is virtually alone, thus destroying her support network (Sandell 220). She lets her husband beat her child and remains silent about it, not calling on her brothers or sisters to help her get out of her marriage and protect her daughter.
In creating Anne, Allison creates a character who deviates from the traditional Boatwright woman when she allows Glen to run the household, as opposed to being the efficient, strong-willed and strong-minded woman that her sisters and mother model for her. For instance, when Alma finds out that Wade is cheating on her, she takes her children and moves out of his house: "'Don’t know the value of what he had. Might as well take myself out of reach of his dirty ways’" (83) she says. Allison also demonstrates Granny’s strength in character as a woman, as seen through Earl’s eyes: "'Not that Mama needed much taking care of. Your granny is tougher than all her sons put together’” (125).

Anne breaks the most difficult rule of all when she chooses her lover over her child: "'Bone, no woman can stand to choose between her baby and her lover, between her child and her husband’” (300). Raylene tries to help Bone, and to help herself, to get through Anne’s betrayal of her daughter by telling Bone that Anne loves her no matter what. "'We do terrible things to the ones we love sometimes...We can’t explain it. We can’t excuse it. It eats us up, but we do them jus the same’” (301). She tells Bone she cannot explain her mother’s decision to her and tells her that Anne will never be able to forgive herself for what she has done to Bone, for "'what she allowed to happen’” (301). In the end, Allison gives Bone the responsibility for putting history back on its rightful track.

Bastard Out of Carolina is treated before the other three texts under examination because Bone is the one most likely to deviate from her mother’s history. Instead, Allison re-establishes Bone’s family connections when Anne leaves — especially with the
Boatwright aunts and with Granny. These are the relationships that become Bone’s matrilineage. She will find the “ritual” female community of Boatwright women and “get back there and preserve it,” in Maglin’s words (258). Even before her mother leaves, Bone is often happier, safer, better off with one of her aunts: “Sleeping over at one of my aunts’ houses as easily as at home...I always feel safe again. No place has ever seemed so sweet and quiet, no place ever felt so much like home” (22). Gwin Minrose notes that “‘home’ may not be grounded in place but in the replacement of the self elsewhere” (435). In Bone’s case, she locates her self among her aunts where she is safe.

In re-establishing tradition, Allison gives Bone a voice and the ability to take action as a strong Boatwright female: “I liked being one of the women with my aunts, liked feeling a part of something nasty and strong and separate from my big rough boy-cousins and the whole world of spitting, growling, overbearing males” (91). She learns to speak and take action from her aunts, particularly Raylene. It is Raylene who discovers that “‘That son of a bitch beat her bloody’” (245). It is Raylene who calls to her brothers: “‘Earle, come here. You and Beau, you come here’” (245). It is Raylene who is strong enough to stand up for Bone, the child who cannot stand up for herself. “‘I’d kill him’” (245) she tells her brothers. It is Raylene, rather than Anne, who tells Bone, “‘An’t nobody gonna hurt you. I swear to you, an’t nobody ever gonna hurt you again’” (245). Finally, it is Raylene whom Bone allows into her space in the last scene of the novel, the space she defends so many times against Glen, as Minrose observes (435): “I let her touch my shoulder, let my head tilt to lean against her, trusting her arm and her love” (309).
Bone first uses her voice to begin to assert herself as a subject rather than an object when she tells her mother, "I know you’ll go back, Mama, and maybe you should. I don’t know what’s right for you, just what I have to do. I can’t go back and live with Daddy Glen. I won’t” (276). The true test of freedom from objectification is in breaking free of Glen: "I’d rather die than go back to living with you” (282). That Glen tries to beat the action and voice out of Bone does not matter, however, because once she finds her voice, she will never lose it. By giving Bone a voice and the ability to fight for herself, Allison depicts Bone as a stronger version of her mother; thus, the chances that Bone will follow in her mother’s footsteps, that is, make the same mistakes her mother did, are not at all likely. Instead, Bone will carry on many of the Boatwright traditions: “I would be thirteen in a few weeks. I was already who I was going to be... I was who I was going to be, someone like her, like Mama, a Boatwright woman” (309), the woman her mother gives her the power to be when she gives Bone the freedom to get to know her aunts and gives Bone her life by leaving her.

Bone will derive her sense of self from her aunts and uncles, quite possibly turning out to be much the same, only better than her family, if Raylene has her way. “I’m counting on you to get out there and do things, girl. Make people nervous and make your old aunt glad” (182). While Allison restores history through Bone by steering her away from what Anne did to destroy the Boatwright family traditions, Roy’s daughter character, Rahel, follows in her mother’s footsteps to defy history and break cultural traditions. The God of Small Things is the bleakest of the novels because Rahel repeats many of the same mistakes that her mother made. If Roy had written Rahel the way
Allison wrote Bone, Rahel would have finished school and found an appropriate husband, had children, and lived happily ever after as a member of the bourgeoisie, just the way that her grandmother did and perhaps generations of women before that. Like Bone, she would have gone back to the rituals of her culture and preserved them with her life, according to Maglin’s fourth theme (258).

Rahel is not like Bone, but she could have been. Allison gives Bone benefits that Roy does not give Rahel. Firstly, Bone has a supportive family structure. Rahel has no one to guide her, no supportive relatives to lead her back to a more “acceptable” path — “acceptable” in terms of what the cultural norms are for women of Rahel’s class in India. Secondly, Bone does not have to fight against hundreds of years of tradition regarding the role of women as wives who are uneducated and have no voices, who support their husbands in the home, but do not work outside of it. Hence, Rahel almost has no choice but to do what she knows: be a rebel, like her mother. Her character breaks the rules because that is all she knows. Rahel probably does not consciously or unconsciously acknowledge that Ammu makes her life significantly more difficult than it should have been. If she had, perhaps she would have changed the course of her own life before following in her mother’s footsteps.

Just as her mother did as a young adult, Rahel rebels and moves away from the only family that she has left, Chacko and Baby Kochamma. Like her mother, Rahel, too, has no one to support her emotionally or financially. Chacko is too wrapped up in his own grief over the death of his daughter; Rahel can only count on Baby Kochamma to be malicious. She has no one to pay a dowry for her; hence, she is “without an obligatory
husband looming on her horizon” (18) during her school years. The way that Roy lays out Rahel’s life, it is very easy for her to marry similar to the way her mother did. She marries a foreigner and moves to America, an unfamiliar land. There is no evidence in the text that she is madly in love with Larry, or even that she loves him at all. It is he that takes to her, seeing her on the street and thinking, “There goes a jazz tune” (19) and then following her into a bookstore.

Roy diverges Rahel’s path from Ammu’s when Rahel divorces. There is no evidence of violence in Rahel’s marriage. She and Larry have no children together. Rahel is not compelled to return to Ayemenem after her divorce because she has only herself to support. By staying in America and working to support herself, Rahel may be living out the life that her mother would have liked for herself had she not had two children to take care of upon leaving her husband. Rahel is also living out the life Ammu would have liked for herself had she been able to work to support herself as a woman alone in her native country. However, that was not an option open to Ammu. She was not educated. Her father “insisted that a college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl” (38). Women of the bourgeoisie class were supposed to be married, belonged in their homes overseeing the household, servants, and children. A woman would never use her education because working outside of the home was unacceptable, something that lower classes did.

Rahel plays out history the way that her mother would have wanted, regardless of her failure to get a degree – “[s]he spent eight years in college without finishing the five-year undergraduate course and taking her degree” (19) – and her failed marriage. Rahel
ends up in America, out from under the constraints of family responsibility, out from
under the "public turmoil" (20) of her nation. Roy sets the novel in a time of massive
political upheaval. The Communist Party is gaining power; the bourgeoisie is scrambling
to maintain power.

Worse than the political strife in Rahel’s native country is the position of women
within that system. Rahel learns when she is only five that there are few advantages to
being a woman in India. She learns this by observing the interchange between Inspector
Thomas Matthew and her mother in the police station. She learns it when she sees him
touch her mother’s breasts with his baton. As an adult, she understands what she did not
as a child: “It was not a policeman’s spontaneous brutishness on his part. He knew
exactly what he was doing. It was a premeditated gesture, calculated to humiliate and
terrorize her. An attempt to instill order into a world gone wrong” (247). The “world gone
wrong” in question is the world Roy creates in which a woman has free will to take
lovers, a world in which a bourgeois woman takes a Paravan to be her lover. The sense of
powerlessness that the policeman tries to instill in Ammu rubs off on Rahel. That may
have been the beginning of Rahel’s powerlessness, which manifests itself in her
aimlessness in life. Roy sets Rahel up to be insignificant and unsuccessful in terms of
career and marriage. Rahel watched her mother self-destruct, and she, in turn, does
something very similar.

The fact that Rahel follows her mother’s path so closely may be the result of an
underlying fear of surpassing the achievements of her mother. According to Kim Chernin,
“there is a marked tendency among women to retreat, to experience a failure of nerve, a
debilitating inner conflict about accepting advantages and opportunities denied to their mothers" (43). Ammu did not have an opportunity to go to college; Rahel actually goes. She may have unconsciously set out to fail to get her degree simply because that would mean achievement above and beyond her mother’s. Additionally, she marries a man who is much more stable, unlike Ammu’s alcoholic, violent husband. Rahel fails at marriage, too, so that she does not achieve greater happiness than her mother does. When she finds herself in a free country where she can support herself and live only for herself, she finds herself facing “the daughter’s problem of surpassing the mother” (49) and returns to Ayemenem. She returns on the premise of seeing her twin again, when he returns to Ayemenem. Roy could just as easily have sent Estha to Rahel in America. She does not, perhaps because she is trying to depict Rahel as a character who unconsciously recognizes that she is living the life that her mother wanted to live, would have lived, had she not had her children to support.

The parallels Roy draws between Rahel’s life and Ammu’s life before Rahel returns to Ayemenem are minor. Both characters break minor rules for much of their lives. The climactic moment in Ammu’s life is when she breaks one of the “Love Laws” (33), “The laws that lay down who should be loved, and how. And how much” (33). Ammu’s whole life changes for the worse when she breaks the Love Law, the unwritten law that states that bourgeois women cannot take Paravans as lovers.

The same is true when Rahel commits a “crime” similar to her mother’s. Rahel breaks a Love Law as well. She commits her “crime” with her twin. In her “crime,” “no watcher watched through Rahel’s eyes. No one stared out of a window at the sea. Or a
boat in the river. Or a passerby in the mist in a hat” (310). In other words, Rahel is no longer detached, no longer feeling Estha’s silence and his pain from another shore.

Ammu is not locked in her room looking out her window, and the twins are no longer in a boat, running from the woman who called them “millstones.” No one watches Rahel and her brother repeat history by breaking the Love Laws. “What they shared that night was not happiness, but hideous grief” (311), and the difference between the law they break and the law Ammu breaks is that they will likely not get caught. As Brinda Rose points out:

...the fact that the Rahel-Estha incest is conducted in the (social) invisibility of a family home, and indeed involves a partner who has ceased to speak and to be noticed in/by society at large, the sexual experience here may evade the punishment it apparently would deserve within the same set of social codes. (67)

Roy does not allow her characters to go unpunished, however. She punishes them all their lives for this one moment: “They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much. The laws that make grandmothers grandmothers, uncles uncles, mothers mothers, cousins cousins, jam jam, and jelly jelly” (31).

Unlike Allison and Roy, Erdrich does not write a history or a tradition for her daughter character, Dot, to follow. Dot is the product of Celestine and Karl. Erdrich places the tradition of the aunt-niece relationship on Karl’s side of the family as seen in his sister, Mary, and Aunt Fritzie; and, his cousin, Sita, and mother, Adelaide. Erdrich never examines Celestine’s family in enough detail to establish any kind of generational history. The aunt-niece cycle established by Adelaide and Sita, Fritzie and Mary has the
potential for replication when Mary notices the spiritual connection between herself and her niece: “[E]very time I looked at that baby I’d feel a piercing shock” (180), the connection was that strong. Celestine is outraged at any attempt on Mary’s part to point out similarities between herself and her niece. As noted in Chapter Two, Celestine is quick to point out that Mary is only Dot’s aunt and not her mother.

Celestine grows up with Mary and Sita. She sees the invisible threads between the nieces and their aunts. Erdrich may have situated her characters’ community in this way so that her character, Celestine, might unconsciously have known that the same sort of connection could and did happen between her daughter and Mary. She saw the way that Sita idolized her aunt Adelaide, and how Mary became the “daughter” to Fritzie that Sita would never have been. She saw how Sita and her mother drifted apart when Mary entered their household. She saw that Fritzie let her daughter go as opposed to fighting to keep their relationship a close one. This is an option that Celestine has with Dot: letting Dot and Mary establish a surrogate mother-daughter relationship, thus relinquishing her primary position in Dot’s life. Celestine even pictures Dot running away to live with her aunt. However, Celestine is not about to give up her daughter. By creating Celestine as a motherless character, Erdrich sets Celestine up to become an overbearing, doting mother to her own child. She cannot bear to see anyone else connect with her daughter on a deeper level than she does. She is often jealous of Mary because Mary gets to play the role of fun companion, keeping Dot up late at night and away from her homework while Celestine has to be the responsible policing figure who knows that Dot has school the next morning.
Erdrich creates a small community of people for Dot — people who love and support her. This is directly opposite of the non-supportive environment that Roy places Rahel in. Erdrich’s character, Dot, is similar to Bone in *Bastard Out of Carolina* in this way. She is also different from Bone, however, because she will not follow in the footsteps of her mother or any of the people who support her. Instead, she will draw the best and sometimes the worst from each character to create her own person.

Dot narrates the last chapter of the novel. After watching her grow up through the eyes of Celestine, Mary and even Wallace, Dot is finally heard unfiltered. In narrating her own story, she comes to a personal revelation that allows her to begin her journey toward merging the best of both her aunt and her mother, a luxury that Allison and Roy do not give their daughter characters — that is, Rahel and Bone do not have the luxury of merging the best of both their aunts and their mothers.

On her journey, Dot finds one of her matrilineal lines: “There is a thread beginning with my grandmother Adelaide and traveling through my father and arriving at me. That thread is flight” (335). Literally, she reenacts her grandmother’s flight by climbing into the plane that Wallace hired to paint “Queen Wallacette” (327) in the sky before the entire town of Argus at the Sugar Beet Festival. Elaine Tuttle Hansen points out that Dot’s flight scene might be read as a typical “white mother-daughter plot” (138) similar to Adelaide’s flight scene. This reading, however, Tuttle writes, is “blocked” (138) when Dot, the Native American daughter, returns, thus redirecting the matrilineal line that connects her to her paternal grandmother: “All the time that I was in the plane, I imagined that they gasped, cried out, covered their eyes and prayed. I was sure that they
would wait forever, or until the plane came back down” (337). She is surprised when she
lands and finds no one waiting for her – not the other princesses, not Wallace, and not her
Aunt Mary. Dot’s expectations that the world will stop while she is not immediately in it
are the same kinds of feelings that her Aunt Sita had when she was Dot’s age. Erdrich
writes Sita as a self-centered character and gives that same trait to Dot to illustrate the
ways that certain characteristics are passed from one generation to the next.

Erdrich combines in Dot the worst characteristics of those who love her most. Dot
is self-centered and spoiled, and that does come from Sita. However, Celestine and Mary
are her enablers. Along with being self-centered and spoiled, Dot is a bully, as shown in
previous chapters. She is used to getting what she wants, when she wants it – especially
attention – that she has to have it all the time. Because she scared the children in her
classes as a youth, she often had to bully them to get their attention. Mary describes her
on her first day of school as “a wolf ready to descend on the fold” (182). She did not want
to hurt the other children, as a wolf would be intent on harming the fold, but she did want
the other children’s affection. She was used to bullying her mother and aunt at home to
get what she wanted; therefore, she carried over that attitude into her life at school. As
she gets older, this bullying turns against her and she becomes bitter and sulky toward the
world and the people in it who hurt her. She “started to collect things that worked against
her, and she took a morose satisfaction is telling them” (303) to Wallace. This bullying,
bitter attitude is a trait that she inherits from Mary. Erdrich characterizes Mary, too, was a
bully. She still is. No matter that Celestine tries her best to sever any real, deep
connection between niece and aunt, some connection cannot be avoided. The fact that
Mary and Dot have both been hurt in life by people around them makes them kindred spirits in a way that Celestine may never understand.

Erdrich plots the relationship between Celestine, Dot, and Mary so that Celestine does not have to understand her daughter’s connection with Mary because she is Dot’s mother. As Dot’s mother, she is the person on whom Dot can count the most. She is the one person whose life revolves around Dot: “I look closer into the grandstand and see that there is someone waiting. It is my mother, and all at once I cannot stop seeing her” (337). Dot’s revelation is fleeting, but occurs nonetheless. Finally she sees her mother not as someone to rebel against, to blame, even if only partly, for her unhappiness, but as someone who has done her best to be a mother to her daughter, someone who has always and will always be there for her daughter. Unlike the other characters in the story, Dot is all Celestine has, and this is Dot’s moment of realization. In Dot’s revelation, Erdrich is joining the literature of matrilineage by allowing Dot to “really see [her] mother in spite of or beyond the blindness and skewed vision that growing up together causes,” in Maglin’s words (258). Before this moment, Celestine was only someone who would give Dot exactly what she wanted — someone whom Dot could bully – an enabler.

Dot’s character has evolved from one who once might have demanded some compensation for Wallace’s rigging the vote and making her feel even more awful about herself. Instead, Erdrich settles Dot into an awareness of her mother. Dot begins to let her mother into her life instead of battling her every step of the way: “I touch my mother’s arm for balance as we walk” (338). When the pair get home, Celestine makes her daughter dinner, and Dot realizes, “I want to lean into her the way wheat leans into
wood” (338). In the last scene of The Beet Queen, Celestine and Dot are in their separate rooms and Dot thinks of her mother, “her covers thrown back, eyes wide open, waiting” (338). According to Hansen, this final scene suggests “a sense of beginning, anticipation, and going forward together rather than ending” (138). Dot wants to share in her mother’s life, and her mother to share in hers, a luxury that no other character in the novel has.

Writing a new path for Dot, allowing her to become closer to her mother, is what separates Erdrich from Allison and Roy, but brings her in closer alignment with Amy Tan. The Joy Luck Club ends with some kind of resolution between each mother-daughter pair. Tan’s daughter characters first make mistakes similar to those their mothers made or adopt the same characteristics that their mothers once had and tried not to pass to their daughters; but, Tan manages to transform her daughter and mother characters’ experiences into positive ones by showing female characters who learn from each other, thus making themselves stronger. In each case, Tan’s daughter characters, like Erdrich’s Dot, are capable of finding their own paths, with the help and guidance of their mothers.

In the case of Waverly and Lindo, both characters come to understand one another. When Waverly confronts her mother about Rich, she is reenacting a scene from the past – not literally, because Lindo did not confront her own mother in such a way, but figuratively, because like Lindo once did when she manipulated her way out of her own marriage, Waverly takes on the role of subject instead of object. Instead of letting her perception of her mother turn her into an object to be acted upon, she is taking action and letting Lindo know that she cannot ruin her relationship with Rich. In China, Lindo found
a voice and discovered the person that she was. In confronting her mother, Waverly is
doing something similar: discovering her voice, and discovering who she is and how her
life intersects with that of her mother. It is this confrontation that begins the reconciliation
of Lindo, the horse, “born in 1918, destined to be obstinate and frank to the point of
tactlessness” (183) and her daughter, the a rabbit, “born in 1951, supposedly sensitive,
with tendencies toward being thin-skinned and skittery at the first sign of criticism”
(183).

Tan gives Waverly a voice on the day she confronts her mother about Rich:
Waverly accuses her of trying to poison her feelings for her fiancé. Waverly comes to an
understanding of both herself and her mother during this confrontation:

I saw what I had been fighting for: It was for me, a scared child, who had run away a long time ago to what I had imagined was a safer place. And hiding in this place, behind my invisible barriers, I knew what lay on the other side: Her side attacks. Her secret weapons. Her uncanny ability to find my weakest spots. But in the brief instant that I had peered over the barriers I could finally see what was really there: an old woman, a wok for her armor, a knitting needle for her sword, getting a little crabby as she waited patiently for her daughter to invite her in. (204)

Others of Maglin’s themes of the literature of matrilineage can be seen in Waverly’s
revelation about her mother. Firstly, Waverly sees her mother, as if for the first time,
undistorted by having grown up with her. Secondly, Waverly is awed by her mother’s
strength – the old woman that houses the safe place in which Waverly can live happily.

By confronting her mother, Waverly demonstrates to her mother that her
relationship with Rich is very important to her. By speaking out in the way she does not
when her mother attacks her first husband, Waverly may be preventing a second attack,
this time on her soon-to-be husband. By not speaking out the first time, she may have been demonstrating that her marriage was not the best circumstance for her. By not speaking out, she enabled her mother to poison her marriage, as noted in the previous chapter. In protecting Rich, Waverly shows her mother that her relationship with Rich is the right one for her.

In letting her mother into her life, Waverly can finally learn about her mother’s intentions. Lindo wants Waverly to have everything that is better in life than she herself had. Lindo wants Waverly to have the best circumstances and the best character, which means the best of both China and America. Along the way, though, Lindo realizes that her face has changed: her nose became crooked where it was once straight. A straight, smooth nose is a good sign. "’A girl with a crooked nose is bound for misfortune. She is always following the wrong things, the wrong people, the worst luck’" (292), Lindo’s mother once told her. Yet, none of these are true of Lindo, whose nose was twisted in a bus accident. None of these are true of Waverly, either. Tan makes a point of showing the reader that Waverly has her mother’s same crooked nose when Lindo says to Waverly as an adult, "’Ai-ya! What happened to your nose?’” (292). When Waverly tells her that nothing happened to it, that she likes her nose, that it is her mother’s nose, Lindo begins to question what she gained and lost in trying to be both Chinese and American. Trying to be both Chinese and American entails being “two-faced” (304). One face, the American face, is the one with the best circumstances: freedom for women to take action and have voices, to be chess champions and single mothers, to have careers, and best of all, to pass on wisdom to daughters. The other face, the Chinese face, is the one with the best
character – Chinese character. In the novel, a woman with Chinese character has *chuming*, the “inside knowing of things” (281), and *shou*, respect and honor for her mother. A woman with Chinese character also knows the power of the wind and possesses invisible strength. Lindo decides, “I will ask my daughter what she thinks” (305) and this is the final reconciliation between mother and daughter: the moment when Lindo trusts her daughter’s counsel enough to ask her a question regarding the intersection of China and America in her character.

Tan does not allow Lena’s and Ying-ying’s story to end as agreeably as Waverly’s and Lindo’s story. Lena has already become the woman that her mother is: a woman with no spirit, a woman who stands by and lets her life happen around her. She has no voice. History repeats itself until her mother’s visit in terms of the way that Lena approaches her life and her marriage. When her husband insists that they keep their money a separate issue from their marriage, just as they had when they were dating, Lena wants to protest that she is “‘really into giving freely’” (171), but she does not.

Lena begins to change when she finds her voice and tries to tell her husband how unhappy she is with the arrangement they have made concerning food and work and their marriage in general. She does not know what she wants, however. This, her husband brings to the forefront immediately. Defensive, Harold tells her that she needs to decide what else she wants before she goes trying to change things. Through Harold, Tan is reinforcing Lena’s passivity. Harold might as well be telling her that it is his way or no way at all, she has to accept things the way they are without compromise and without stopping to at least examine the other alternatives. Lena does not answer him, does not
know what to say. Tan keeps her silent, demonstrating the ease with which Lena falls back into her objectified role. She wants to speak, but relates, "I didn’t know where to begin" (271).

When ends their story, Lena has no knowledge of the spirit that her mother once had. She only knows "a small old lady" (281). "She has no chuming, no inside knowing of things. If she had chuming, she would see a tiger lady" (281). In order to right her daughter’s life, to give her the spirit she needs, Ying-ying has to find her own spirit. She does this by looking into her past:

I will see a thing that has already happened. The pain that cut my spirit loose. I will hold that pain in my hand until it becomes hard and shiny, more clear. And then my fierceness can come back, my golden side, my black side. I will use this sharp pain to penetrate my daughter’s tough skin and cut her tiger spirit loose. She will fight me, because this is the nature of two tigers. But I will win and give her my spirit, because this is the way a mother loves her daughter. (286)

Ying-ying disturbs the couple’s heavy silence after their argument that starts because Lena does not feel she should have to pay for ice cream, launching her attack on her daughter’s missing spirit at the same time. She knocks over the table in the guest bedroom where she is staying. The table is a metaphor for the couple’s marriage: "'You put something else on top, everything fall down'" (178). By bringing up the subject of the balance-sheet marriage, Lena is placing something else on top of the already large pile of troubles. The action of knocking over the table is the external manifestation of Ying-ying’s decision to find her tiger spirit and tell her daughter of her past. This decision is the key that will enable both mother and daughter to become people again and not merely
ghosts. As the two women grow together, they will create a new tradition for women in their line.

Tan does not give Lena a spirit and she depicts Rose as a woman who is without wood: Rose is bending toward everyone else, especially her husband. She is confused, and she is not listening to her own heart; she is not listening to her mother. She has no voice and does not know what to say once she finds it. Tan transforms Rose, however, after Rose’s husband, Ted, tells her that he wants her to sign the divorce papers as soon as possible. He wants the house and he wants to get remarried to someone else. In the space of a pause, her transformation begins. She invites him to the house and lets him think that she is giving him his divorce papers, though when she issues the invitation, she does not know what to do: “I had no plan. I didn’t know what I would say to him later. I knew only that I wanted Ted to see me one more time before the divorce” (218).

Sees her, he does; he hears her, too, maybe for the first time. She takes him to the garden, gives him his papers and tells him she is going to stay right where she is: in their house. As had worked in the past, he tried to bully her by asking, “‘Who says?’” (219) with an expression that “used to terrify [Rose] into stammers” (219). Instead of backing down, Rose speaks up, telling Ted that she says she is staying, and her lawyer will, too. “‘You can’t just pull me out of your life and throw me away,’” she tells him, referring to weeds, which keep growing and growing, causing trouble no matter how many times they are pulled out. She is proud when she sees that he is “hulihudu” (219), the closest translation of which is “confused.” She is proud when she realizes that the power of her
words was that strong, a lesson that An-mei learned early in her life and tried unsuccessfully to teach Rose – unsuccessfully, until that moment in the garden with Ted. Rose and An-mei’s story ends with history repeating itself, literally, in the form of a dream. Rose dreams, as she did when she was young, of Mr. Chou, the guardian of dreams. In this dream, however, instead of locking her out and admonishing her for not listening to her mother, Mr. Chou greets her with a smile and a wave. He is helping her mother tend to weeds she planted for herself and her daughter that morning. They are “already spilling out over the edges, running wild in every direction” (220). By placing An-mei in Rose’s dreams, Tan is demonstrating “just how much [daughters] are dependent upon their mothers in their journey to voice,” according to Booth Foster (211). The friendly greeting from Mr. Chou and An-mei’s planting of weeds which can never be kept from growing are the acknowledgments that Rose has finally learned her mother’s lesson.

Waverly, Lena, and Rose have a distinct advantage over June in that they are characters who have their mothers to help guide them. They have their mothers to learn from and reconcile with, and they can note parallels and contrasts in the ways that they carry on the traditions that their mothers started. June does not have the same luxury. She only has memories, and regrets that she did not ask the questions of her mother that were important. Her mother died, leaving her to guide herself, leaving her to fulfill her mother’s one wish.

In becoming her mother, June finds her purpose. It is not to be a concert pianist or a Shirley Temple, or any kind of prodigy the way that Waverly Jong was, but to gather
everything she could about her mother so as to become her mother. Her purpose, according to her aunts: "'You must tell them about her life. The mother they did not know, they must now know'" (30). If Suyuan Woo had lived to see June with her sisters, she would have been prouder than if June had been able to multiply numbers or predict daily temperatures in London (143), or, if she had gotten her doctorate. When her mother told her she never rose to expectations, June would be able to prove her wrong. She rises to the occasion when her aunts tell her she must go to China in her mother's place.

On her journey toward her sisters, June becomes more and more like her mother. When she enters China, June notes, "'My mother was right. I am becoming Chinese'" (306). As if she is her mother, or, as if she is looking at China through her mother's eyes, she cannot help but be misty-eyed "'as if [she] had seen this a long, long time ago, and had almost forgotten'" (307). She is bringing her mother home, to China, to her daughters. She realizes that she never really knew what it meant to be Chinese, not while her mother was alive, not while she was in America. She never knew, because like Lena and Rose and Waverly, she was too busy making herself American to listen to her mother. Only upon entering China, knowing that she would have to share the woman her mother was with her sisters, so that they would know the woman they called "Mother" all the years they were apart from her: "'What will I say? What can I tell them about my mother? I don't know anything. She was my mother'" (31).

June once told her mother that a friend had said she and Suyuan "'were alike, that we had the same wispy hand gestures, the same girlish laugh and sideways look'" (15). In June's mind, Suyuan seemed insulted by this and told her daughter, "'You don't even
know little percent of me! How can you be me?" Perhaps what her mother said to her when she was young was what she remembered when she told her aunts that she could not tell her sisters anything about her mother because she did not know anything (15).

What June said about not knowing anything about her mother frightened the Joy Luck aunts:

In me, they see their own daughters, just as ignorant, just as unmindful of all the truths and hopes they have brought to America. They see daughters who grow impatient when their mothers talk in Chinese, who think they are stupid when they explain things in fractured English. They see that joy and luck do not mean the same to their daughters, that to these closed American-born minds ‘joy luck’ is not a word, it does not exist. They see daughters who will bear grandchildren born without any connecting hope passed from generation to generation. (31)

So as not to make what June said true, her mother’s life-long friends give her suggestions about all the things she could tell her sisters, as if they were reminding June of all she already knew: ‘‘Tell them stories she told you, lessons she taught, what you know about her mind that has become your mind’’ (31). They remind June that her mother had been smart, kind, and dutiful to her family. June could tell her sisters of ‘‘the excellent dishes she cooked’’ (31) and how her mother became a success in America. In creating a character who preserves the ritual of storytelling that she began, Tan is placing her novel in the literature of matrilineage (Maglin 258).

In the time June has between Joy Luck and meeting her sisters, she gathers up all that her mother left her. She undergoes moments of self doubt, ‘‘I lay awake thinking about my mother’s story, realizing how much I have never known about her, grieving that my sisters and I had both lost her’’ (330), and never stops wishing that her mother could
be the one walking off the plane toward her sisters. However, once she finally sees her sisters, her fears evaporate. She realizes that the part of her that is Chinese is her family, and that China is in her blood. This gives her confidence that she can give her mother to her sisters: “I know we all see it: Together we look like our mother. Her same eyes, her same mouth, open in surprise to see, at last, her long-cherished wish” (332).

At the end of the novel, each of Tan’s surviving mother figures can be less afraid that what June said was true – that she did not know her mother, thus implying that their daughters did not know them. Lindo and Waverly finally connect. Ying-ying is ready to fight for Lena’s spirit to insure that Lena will have a spirit to pass on if she has children. Even if she does not have children, she will at least have a spirit that will guide her through life. Rose begins listening to her mother, and to herself, and An-mei can take pride in the first step of Rose’s journey toward understanding what it means to be Chinese and all the wisdom that her mother has to pass on to her. Finally, in telling her sisters of the mother they never knew, June knows her mother, perhaps for the first time. What Suyuan once said about June not knowing her mother at all forever becomes untrue.

Each of the four novels under examination falls into the category of the “literature of matrilineage,” as defined by Nan Bauer Maglin’s five interconnecting themes (258). Tan’s character, Rose, embodies Maglin’s first theme: “the recognition by the daughter that her voice in not entirely her own” (258). Roy’s character, Rahel, and Tan’s character, Waverly, as adults, and Erdrich’s character, Dot, as a young adult, see their mothers clearly “in spite of or beyond the blindness and skewed vision that growing up together causes,” and therefore exemplify the second of Maglin’s themes (258). Tan’s character,
An-mei, is amazed and humbled by her mother’s strength when she watches her mother cut a chunk of her own skin from her arm in an effort to save her mother, An-mei’s grandmother, Popo, thus embodying another of Maglin’s themes. Waverly, too, is amazed at the strength of her mother when she realizes that her mother has been fighting to give her the best circumstances and character with only “a wok” and a “knitting needle” (204) as weapons. Exemplifying another of Maglin’s themes, Allison’s character, Bone, finds the ritual in the history of the Boatwright women and recognizes the need to get back to that ritual and preserve it after her mother breaks from the ritual (258). Finally, each of Tan’s characters, along with Roy’s and Allison’s daughter figures, feels “anger and despair about the pain and silence borne and handed on from mother and daughter,” as reads Maglin’s fifth and final theme (258).

There is no absolute answer to the question, “Will history repeat itself?” In Bastard Out of Carolina, Bone does not replicate her mother’s choices. Instead, she links herself with the other members of her female line so that she becomes more like her aunts and Granny than her mother. Anne deviates from the established tradition of the Boatwright family, while Bone reconnects the matrilineal line between herself and generations of Boatwright women who came before her mother. In the case of Roy’s characters, Ammu and Rahel, both mother and daughter break with their matrilineal lines by breaking the accepted rules for women in their country and class. In a sense, Ammu paved the way for Rahel; however, haunted by the image of her mother’s unfulfilled dreams, Rahel gets no further in life than her mother did, thus making The God of Small Things the bleakest of the novels in terms of the daughter character repeating the patterns
of her mother. In *The Beet Queen*, Erdrich breaks daughters Celestine, Mary, and Sita from the histories of their mothers. Mary and Sita go so far as to become like their aunts as opposed to their mothers. Celestine, in a sense, is the first of her line because her mother dies when she is very young. The daughter with the most potential to follow in her mother’s footsteps is Celestine’s daughter, Dot, because unlike Mary’s mother, Adelaide, Sita’s mother, Fritzie, and Celestine’s mother, Celestine is a permanent fixture in her daughter’s life. Competing with her mother, however, is history on the side of her father, Karl: that is, the women on Karl’s side have a history of forming close bonds with their aunts, as opposed to their mothers. Instead of writing Dot as a character who replicates her mother’s life, or follows in the footsteps of the women on her father’s side, Erdrich depicts Dot as a character who takes the best of both her mother and her aunts to become different, and the same, together. Finally, Tan’s daughters and their mothers have the closest linked histories. The mothers have their Chinese history of silence and inaction, their history as objects instead of subjects to overcome, which they do. However, in the process of raising their daughters, they pass on the characteristics of inaction and silence to their daughters. By giving her daughter characters the same characteristics their mothers struggled with, Tan is continuing the matrilineal line that started in China with grandmothers, great-grandmothers, and ever further back than that. In an effort to give their daughters both the best Chinese character and the best American circumstances, the mothers fight their daughters, helping them to become active participants in their own lives. In the most positive of the novels, *The Joy Luck Club*, the mother-daughter relationships all end in some kind of reconciliation.
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