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**OTHER FRONTIERS: Female Vagrants and Mother Outlaws
in American Literature and Film of the 1980s**

by

Jacqui Marie Smyth

Department of English

**Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario
August 1995**

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ABSTRACT

The thesis examines female vagrant and outlaw figures in a selection of fictional texts produced in the 1980s. Using the idea of vagrancy in their characterizations of female protagonists, these texts revise persisting assumptions about women that are inherent in American culture. Beginning with a discussion of the reasons why women have been excluded, at least theoretically and ideologically, from a culture based on mobility, the thesis then considers two dominant and interrelated discourses in the American imagination--those of the frontier and of the myth of home--which are inescapable in any discussion of the American female outlaw and/or vagrant. This chapter is supplemented by readings of historical and fictional outlaw/vagrant figures: Anne Hutchinson, Nathaniel Hawthorne's Hester Prynne, Stephen Crane's Maggie, Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier, and Edith Wharton's Lily Bart.

Chapters two and three view the conflicted characterization and literary space of the mother outlaw/vagrant in Mona Simpson's Anywhere But Here and Louise Erdrich's Tracks, Love Medicine and The Beet Queen. By emphasizing a specific historical context, I view these novels in terms of the changing formulation of the female subject in theoretical and cultural texts: for instance, the abandoned mother of conventional psychoanalysis is displaced by the as yet untheorized abandoning mother.

In chapters four and five, my emphasis shifts from the mother outlaw to the female vagrant. In examining the formal aspects of Ridley Scott's film Thelma & Louise and Edward Zwick's Leaving Normal, I suggest that the female vagrant,

whether rendered as "outlaw" or "vagrant," is depicted in ambivalent terms. For the outlaw/vagrant is narrativized not only by the script, which tends to radicalize such a figure, but also by a set of technical devices, which tend to keep her as a passive object of the male gaze. The thesis then concludes with a reading of Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping, which offers the most direct treatment of female vagrancy. The moment the vagrant becomes a palpable presence as protagonist and narrator, instead of an othered object of discourse, is the precisely the point when the structures defining the vagrant are most profoundly shaken.

In Memoriam
Ford Mercury Comet
(1972-1989)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to

Kristin Brady and Tom Carmichael for clarifying many of my ideas, and for offering the right balance of freedom and guidance;

Kristin Brady, Elizabeth Harvey, and Miglena Nikolchena, three wonderful women, who provided a support system that helped me cope with production and reproduction; Tom Carmichael who gave generously of his time to read through the "canon" of American literature with me; David Burr, Anthony Campbell, and Pieter Pereboom who contributed, each in his own way, to my film chapter;

the many friends who have accepted my vagrancies, especially Harold Heft who reminded me--and helped me live with the fact--that you can take the girl out of Transcona but you can't take the Transcona out of the girl; and Anthony Campbell whose friendship and shared enthusiasm for pool, blues, and beer has sustained me through the thesis process;

my mother Fay McCowan for telling me I could quit any time; my sister Sandra Stordeur for her personal support; Jacob McGuirk and Frances Smyth, who often took me away from the computer and the dishes but always for the right reasons;

and finally, to Kevin McGuirk, whose enthusiasm and support kept me going; and who has made possible a life that is sheltered, but mobile.

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Other Frontiers: Female Vagrants and Mother
Outlaws in American Literature and Film

Around 1980, scholarship in American studies began to generate a wide range of re-interpretations of American literature. This fact is reflected in the growing inclusiveness of the Norton Anthology of American Literature, as well as in alternative anthologies that purport to offer a more complete representation of American literature.¹ Feminist scholarship played a central role in initiating these re-interpretations by questioning the criteria of the canon, recuperating buried female texts, and connecting the production of women's texts with existing cultural conditions.² Although the following chapters in this study, which examine a relatively small selection of texts produced in the eighties, are not involved in the revival or canonization of previously ignored women's texts, they are indebted to the many feminist scholars working in American literature whose ground work has resulted in a broadening of the field.

The following chapters examine the changing representation in American literature and film of what were

once marginal female characters, the female vagrant and the female outlaw. These characters have generally occupied a dual position, often present on the periphery of the fictional text but outlawed from the critic's text. What follows could be understood as simply a study of marginal others, but I hope that the larger context of their transgressions will also place my analysis in relationship to the centre. For to explicate vagrants or outlaws is to consider not only questions of subjectivity but also the socio-economic conditions affecting their mobilization. My intention is not to find unified characteristics in the figure of the transgressive female character, nor is it to argue for an American tradition of female outlaws; rather, it is to address the ways in which a second generation of feminist texts uses transgressive female characters to interrogate, indirectly or directly, systems of discourse that have contributed to the immobility of women. The fictional texts are Mona Simpson's Anywhere But Here (1988); Louise Erdrich's Tracks (1988), Love Medicine (1984) and The Beet Queen (1986); and Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping (1980). The films are Ridley Scott's Thelma & Louise (1991) and Edward Zwick's Leaving Normal (1992). In these texts vagrancy, no longer written into the sub-text, becomes the focus of the narrative. Using vagrancy and transgression in their characterization of female protagonists, these texts

attempt to revise persisting assumptions inherent in American culture and in existing representations of women.

Before I introduce my primary texts, I will discuss briefly a few dominant discourses which, often intertwined, are inescapable in any discussion of the American female outlaw and/or vagrant: the discourses of the frontier, of domesticity, and, by extension, of gender roles and shelter. Because scholarship often treats the female vagrant indirectly or negatively--for example, she is often emblemized as witch, mad woman, or abandoned/fallen woman--my strategy in this initial chapter will be to reveal the vagrant figure within fictional and critical discourses which marginalize or obscure her. What follows, therefore, might be thought of as a series of synecdochic moments that constitute a counter-history of female marginalization and its peculiar relationship to domesticity in American culture. Following this discussion, I will then return to a detailed preparation for the ensuing chapters by clarifying the relationship between the primary texts, all written in and around the 1980s, and the historical tradition of female vagrancy.

In 1960 Leslie Fiedler wrote that "the typical male protagonist of our fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down the river or into combat--anywhere to avoid 'civilization,' which is to

say, the confrontation of a man and woman which leads to the fall to sex, marriage, and responsibility" (xx). As Fiedler's theories suggest, the subversion and mobility of the ever-changing American frontier are typically identified with male characters: Leatherstocking, Huck Finn, the "hipster" from Beat literature, to name only a few. In Fiedler's scenario of American literature the white male hero serves as the boundary between wilderness and civilization, between "natural man" and white middle-class woman, "which is to say, the margin where the theory of original goodness and the fact of original sin come face to face" (xxii). Emerging from a rather lengthy tradition of frontier narratives that attempt to formulate a particular American identity by excluding not only female participants, but also indigenous peoples and Afro-Americans, among others, Fiedler's ideas do not exist in isolation. Theories that equate the frontier with masculinity and civilization/progress with the feminine are as diverse as Frederick Turner Jackson's "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," Bill Cody's (Buffalo Bill) Wild West Show, and Charlie Russell's frontier paintings.³

The exclusiveness of these historical representations is now, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, being challenged. Alternative narratives that testify to women's participation in the settling of the frontier, for instance, have now been uncovered.⁴ Similarly, changing

formulations of the frontier include, rather than exclude, gender and race. Frontier rhetoric is changing in ways which reflect the desire to hold on to the centrality of the American frontier myth while revisioning its Euro-centric male bias. Annette Kolodny's article, "Letting Go Our Grand Obsessions: Notes Toward a New Literary History of the American Frontiers," exemplifies how recent theorists see borders changing to accommodate multiple aspects of any one confrontation/adaption:

the term 'frontier' comes to mean what we in the Southwest call la frontera, or the borderlands, that liminal landscape of changing meanings on which distinct human cultures first encounter one another's 'otherness' and appropriate, accommodate, or domesticate it through language. By concentrating on frontier as an inherently unstable locus of (generally unacknowledged-- at least at the outset) environmental transitions and cultural interpretations, however, I have purposefully dropped two features which previously were assumed: population scarcity and either primitive technology or a site where a more developed or superior technology overwhelms an inferior

one. Both are willfully ahistorical. (10)

Despite the work of revisionist scholars like Kolodny, however, the frontier as a place of primarily masculine mobility and confrontation still dominates the American imagination.⁵ Although socio-literary investigations are rewriting the historical narratives by investigating the frontier as a place of adaptation, as well as confrontation --where the supposed secondary "characters" adapt to each other while the white male hero is still out wandering--the myth is not so easily dispelled. The continuing predominance of the white male hero is evident in the resurgence of the Western in North American cinema--and in Star Trek and its off-shoots on television. As figured by Fiedler and those before him, the frontier mentality is very much alive in the popular culture of the late twentieth century.

One reason why female characters have been seemingly absent from the frontier myth lies in their lack of mobility and their confinement during the nineteenth century (and again in the McCarthy era) to the domestic realm as custodians of the social order. A related reason emerges when the social constraints--the "civilization"--the male protagonist is escaping from are figured as feminine, and paradoxically, the promised land he is escaping to is also further figured as feminine: she is encroaching civilization and she is virgin land.⁶ A third reason is illustrated by the practice of writing and reading female characters as

either idealized or fallen representations of motherhood. Even Walt Whitman, who in "Democratic Vistas" urges Americans to cease recognizing "a theory of character grown of feudal aristocracies, or form'd by merely literary standards" (402), continues to insist on "insuring to the States a strong and sweet Female race, a race of perfect Mothers" (372).

Yet another reason why female vagrants are not represented in fiction is that fiction depends upon social codes for its own codes of plausibility, and those codes do not as yet comprise female vagrancy. Until very recently, female vagrancy has been virtually excluded from works in sociological studies and literary criticism. Without this validating attention, female vagrants have often been invisible or constructed as scapegoats. Because they violated assumptions which were understood as "natural"--for instance, "a woman's place is in the home"--their vagrancy, and as a consequence, their imperceptible presence were either glossed over or understood only in terms of the myth of domesticity. Conversely, because male vagrants occupy a longstanding historical tradition, they have often been constructed as cultural heroes; this is related to many moments in American social history as diverse as frontier settlement, the depression years, or even the 1980s, when male yuppies took to the rails for the ultimate vacation. Nonetheless, it is my contention that, if not a typical,

then at least a familiar female protagonist in American fiction is she who has the urge to flee from the domestic sphere. Ever since Anne Hutchinson, fictional and historical women of American letters have been on the run, literally and figuratively, from proper etiquette, proper attire, and proper marriage--patriarchal constraints that situate a woman as the moral and nourishing centre of the nuclear family and, by extension, the community, the city, and the nation.

Although the following chapters are not an historical recuperation of female vagrants and mother outlaws through American frontier literature, their content is unavoidably related to the ways through which that history has been mythologized. First, because the American frontier is a major component in the American "identity," any discussion of the characterization of the cutlaw figure, whether male or female, is comprehended in part through a mythologized version of the West.⁷ Second, any anomaly in a female character may be seen to reflect a social reality: she is invisible in the social order and invisible in literary history. Thus, there is no literary convention, apart from that of the fallen woman/abandoned woman or of the masculinized dime novel heroine, in which to view these contemporary female characters; similarly, there is no sociological tradition in which to comprehend the current social realities surrounding homeless women. What interests

me here is not so much the literal history or place of the frontier, but how the governing assumptions related to the frontier have persisted in our understanding of, for example, gender roles and mobility. Writing in and against the myth of the frontier is one among many strategies that these texts, written in the eighties, utilize to discover ways to leave or to revise the sanctum of home and/or motherhood.

What is significant for this introduction and the following chapters is thus not how moments of expansion in American history are accompanied by frontier rhetoric, but, more importantly, how this rhetoric is underscored by the urge to keep woman confined in a reproductive role. The flip side of frontier ideology is domestic ideology, and both are gendered. Supposedly, woman wields a certain amount of power in the home, but this power is always indirect and confined. When a male character strikes out for the frontier he is free from domestic restraints, and thus empowered; when a female character strikes out she is thought of as abandoned by society, and thus disempowered. For instance, one general assumption underlying the American bildungsroman is that if a male character is to reach self-realization, this will happen only outside of the realm of home; to "light out for the territory" has become particular to male initiation in American fiction. In contrast, female characters discover the "self" in relation to their "proper" place inside the

home, and without the larger structure of the family, the female "self" dissolves. I propose that, in order for women to discover ways to be empowered by their departure, the boundary between the home and the frontier must first be problematized to allow for alternative refigurations of this opposition. Home is not necessarily confinement, and the frontier is not necessarily freedom. In the contemporary texts I explicate, there are slippages between the literal homes and the social ideologies that construct them.

One strategy for problematizing the boundary between the frontier and the domestic focuses on gender. Howard I. Kushner asserts that because growing urban centres produced a blurring of gender roles throughout the nineteenth century, the frontier was viewed as a place where patriarchal authority could be reestablished through domination. Although Kushner is primarily concerned with the consequences following upon the formulation of the frontier narrative, he also explores how history predating the frontier narrative is recuperated by the frontier paradigm (61-63). In a similar manoeuvre I will begin my study of female outlaws and vagrants by situating Anne Hutchinson as the first female outlaw of American letters. From there I will read Nathaniel Hawthorne's characterization of Hester Prynne in The Scarlet Letter as an ambivalent extension of John Winthrop's "characterization" of Anne Hutchinson. I will conclude this look at synecdochic moments of American

history with a reading of Stephen Crane's fictional treatment of woman in his naturalist novel Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. Although these representations of woman are diverse, they have in common the unfortunate but perhaps unavoidable tendency to view woman through a master narrative--whether it be puritanism, expansionism/democracy or naturalism--which posits woman as either demonic or unrealistically virtuous. My intention in all these cases is not to offer a full explication of any of these complex texts, but to provide some historical and literary background for the chapters to follow.

Anne Hutchinson's disempowerment and her position in American letters might best be summed up by Governor John Winthrop:

Mrs. Hutchinson, being removed to the Isle of Aquiday, in the Naragansett Bay, after her time was fulfilled, that she expected deliverance of a child, was delivered of a monstrous birth . . . [which was] declared by Mr. Cotton to be twenty-seven lumps of man's seed, without any alteration or mixture of anything from the woman, and thereupon gathered that it might signify her error in denying inherent righteousness, but that all was Christ in us, and nothing of ours in our faith, love, etc. (Norton 30)

On record, Hutchinson is not only the first transgressive woman in the American colonies, she is also the first to be outlawed from her community. Not surprisingly, Hutchinson also represents one of the first appropriated "texts" in the American canon. Because Hutchinson left no written record, her story is appropriated and retold by others. Despite the absence of a written text, traces of Anne Hutchinson remain:⁸ her "errors" are recorded in private diaries and public documents, and her voice is transcribed in the records of legal religious examinations which surrounded the Antinomian (or Familial) Controversy of 1636.⁹

During the three years of the Controversy, the church of Boston became split on the issue of free grace versus "legall" works. By her "covenant of grace" and her meetings with other women, Hutchinson, whom Winthrop identifies as "the breeder and nouricher of all these distempers" (262), initially gives "birth" to a divided community.¹⁰ The extent of Hutchinson's threat to the law-abiding settlement committed to a "covenant of works" is reflected in the records of her examination at Newtown Court. Echoing Winthrop's opinion, Thomas Dudley, the deputy governor, believed that

About three years ago we were all in peace.
Mrs. Hutchinson from that time she came hath
made a disturbance. . . . Mrs. Hutchinson is
she that hath depraved all the ministers and

hath been the cause of what is fallen out,
 why we must take away the foundation and the
 building will fall. (317-18)

Winthrop and Dudley's comments give the impression that Hutchinson is a powerful person, powerful enough to split the community in two. She is the individualistic heretic who radically undermines Winthrop's Model of Christian Charity. Her revelations call into question the very ideology upon which the Puritans have built their community. And, undoubtedly, her ability to organize--according to Winthrop, she "kept open house for all commers, and set up two Lecture dayes in the week, when they usually met at her house, threescore or fourscore persons" (264)--proves as severe a threat as her heretical beliefs.

Initially, at least, Hutchinson's influence over the women of the settlement is most apparent in her roles as midwife and as healer, for in the examination records her roles as spiritual guide and as teacher are associated with secrecy. Viewed in the context of her role as spiritual guide and as teacher, the monstrous birth Winthrop describes becomes an emblem of her heretical ideas, not the dead fetus of a miscarriage. It is thus fitting that Winthrop's narrative documents another monstrous birth, that of Mary Dyer, a follower of Hutchinson:

the women who were present at the womans
 travaile, were suddenly taken ill with such

violent vomiting, and purging, without eating or drinking or anything, as they were forced to goe home, others had their children taken with convulsion, (which they had not before, nor since) and so were sent for home, so as none were left at the time of the birth, but the Midwife and two others, where one fell asleep. (281)

Earlier in the narrative, Winthrop identifies the midwife as Hawkins, who, being "notorious for familiarity with the devill, and now a prime Familist" (281), is clearly another follower of Hutchinson's. The description of the labour is tactical because it involves other women, and the lesson seems to be that not only they but their families were harmed because of their association with Anne Hutchinson. The account also reflects the assumption that families were neglected due to the women's involvement with Hutchinson's lectures. This record is strategically located, moreover, in Winthrop's A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists and Libertines. Like much of Puritan literature, the story of Anne Hutchinson thus becomes emblematic--ironically so, since the emblem was a narrative device that she preaches against. For Hutchinson it is immediate revelations, not external signs, that lead to redemption.

In the passage I initially quoted from Winthrop on Anne

Hutchinson's monstrous birth, the trope of birth as a heretical idea overwhelms the observation of a literal miscarriage. Amy Schrager Lang astutely points out that the monstrous birth trope serves two purposes:

It clearly associated the crime with the female heretic and, at the same time, elevated the fathers as interpreters of God's will. Hutchinson was an Eve misled by the serpent. Not wholly responsible for her crimes, her offspring were hers and not hers. Revealed by the heavenly Father and interpreted by the earthly ones, the monsters, paradoxically, both signified Hutchinson's errors and denied her power.

(57)

According to Winthrop's narrative, Hutchinson's heresy unsexes her, making her incapable of altering the "twenty-seven several lumps of man's seed." Ironically, without this "mixture of anything from woman," the result is a "monstrous birth." Monsters beget monsters. Winthrop uses the emblematic narrative and the trope of birth to disempower Hutchinson. It is the hand of God, not Hutchinson, that is responsible for birthing.¹¹

The absent text of Anne Hutchinson is also inscribed in Nathaniel Hawthorne's canonical romance, The Scarlet Letter. On the "threshold" (48, 52) of his narrative, Hester Prynne

steps through the same "inauspicious portal" (48) Anne Hutchinson once entered. Like Anne, Hester is an independent spirit; but unlike Hutchinson--and the figure of the fallen woman Hawthorne's narrative evokes--Hester is banished only to the fringes of the community, not cast off to wander. Hester refuses to wander, in fact, and her narrative of the fallen woman is revised: she begins as the fallen woman, but ultimately is elevated by her guilt, as the scarlet "A" becomes as much an emblem of "Angel" as of "Adulteress." Dimmesdale, the unnamed father of Hester's illegitimate child, seems to replace her as the guilty figure, dying -- like the fallen woman--for his transgressions. But while she does not become a literal vagrant, Hester does enact a moral vagrancy:

But Hester Prynne, with a mind of native courage and activity, and for so long a period not merely estranged, but outlawed, from society, had habituated herself to such latitude of speculation as was altogether foreign to the clergyman. She had wandered, without rule or guidance, in a moral wilderness; as vast, as intricate and shadowy, as the untamed forest. . . . Her intellect and heart had their home, as it were, in desert places, where she roamed as freely as the wild Indian in his woods. For

years past she had looked from the estranged point of view at human institutions, and whatever priests or legislators had established; criticizing all with hardly more reverence than the Indian would feel for the clerical band, the judicial robe, the pillory, the gallows, the fireside, or the church. (199)

Socially shunned from the Puritan community, Hester is paradoxically given a "passport into regions where other women dared not tread" (199).

However, despite Hester's "passport," the regions she treads and the interiority of her character are more or less absent from the text. Thus, while Hawthorne's characterization of Hester seems a mirror-image of Hutchinson--he evokes Hutchinson entering the same prison which Hester leaves--The Scarlet Letter complicates the mirror effect, creating a reverse situation to that of Winthrop's. Hutchinson's heretical ideas are troped by monstrous births, whereas Hester's are eclipsed by the image of her "Divine Maternity" (56). At the same time, however, Hester's child, Pearl, by no means a "monstrous birth," is nonetheless described as follows: Pearl's "nature had something wrong in it, which continually betokened that she had been born amiss,--the effluence of her mother's lawless passion" (165). While Hutchinson's heresy unsexes her,

Hester's crimes--and by extension, her "reformed" character --do the same; we are told that "some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman" (163). Thus, when Hester's life turns from "feeling" to "thought" she is described in negative terms: there is "no longer any thing in Hester's face for Love to dwell upon; nothing in Hester's form, though majestic and statue-like, that Passion would ever dream of clasping in its embrace; nothing in Hester's bosom, to make it ever again the pillow of Affection" (163, italics mine). In Hawthorne's narrative the meaning of the scarlet letter vacillates between *adulteress* and "Able" (161); however, inserted between these two oppositions one might rightly read *Absence*. Hester as outlaw is quickly contained in a narrative that characterizes her as saint: "the scarlet letter had the effect of the cross on a nun's bosom" (163). Similarly, her motherhood is characterized as either illegitimate or "the image of Divine Maternity" (56). Her internal vagrancy is domesticated and neutralized by "good works"; and near the conclusion of her life she believes in "the impossibility of any mission of divine and mysterious truth [being] confided to a woman stained with sin" (263). In other words, Hawthorne's Hester is refused any immediate revelations and instead must embrace the "covenant of works," a theological premise which Hutchinson opposed. Whether from the seventeenth or the nineteenth century,

whether "history" or fiction, between "adulthood" and "able" there is only absence: the unwritten narrative of female vagrancy.

The historical continuation of these opposing images of woman, as well as their eclipsing of the real position of women, is also evident in the nationalistic rhetoric of Walt Whitman. The influence of the rhetorical over the actual should not be passed over here. As Jane Tompkins so aptly reminds us, "rhetoric makes history by shaping reality to the dictates of its political design; it makes history by convincing the people of the world that its description of the world is the true one" (Sensational 141). In the nineteenth century, America worked towards birthing a democratic nation. In this renewed period of manifest destiny, woman's job was basically to give birth, a biological act disguised by the rhetoric of motherhood as a sacred calling. In Whitman's 1871 essay, "Democratic Vistas," he calls on Americans to forge a new cultural order based on democracy and individualism. Woman's role in the production of an American democratic culture is reproductive: "I promulge new races of Teachers, and of perfect Women, indispensable to endow the birth-stock of a New World" (364).

In essence, as Ann Douglas points out, "the cult of motherhood was nearly as sacred in mid-nineteenth-century America as the belief in some version of democracy" (87). It

is not surprising, therefore, that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century abortion was illegal and birth-control information banned from the U.S. mail (Smith-Rosenberg, 24). Although writing forty years earlier and from a very different political perspective, another nineteenth-century writer who attempts to define American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville, also unrealistically focuses on the female as the (passive) ideal responsible for a democratic America. In Democracy in America, he proclaims that,

although the women of the United States are confined within a narrow circle of domestic life, and their situation is in some respects one of extreme dependence, I have nowhere seen woman occupying a loftier position; and if I were asked, now that I am drawing to the close of this work, in which I have spoken of so many important things done by Americans, to what the singular prosperity and growing strength of that people ought mainly to be attributed, I should reply--to the superiority of their women. (qtd. in Tompkins, Sensational 172)

Whitman's essay picks up this thread and takes it much further by inscribing the biology of women as the sole reason for their superiority and as their single

contribution, or so it seems, to the democracy of America: they are the cause of, not participants in, this democratic race.¹²

Not surprisingly, one way Whitman rhetorically inscribes this biological power of women is by putting them on a pedestal, just as, in a similar manoeuvre, Hawthorne transforms into a pedestal the "scaffold [which] constituted a portion of a penal machine" (55), where Hester stands upon her release from prison (63, 69). Whitman celebrates women as "greater than man, we may admit, through their divine maternity, always their towering, emblematic attribute" (389). He continues to say that woman is as "great, at any rate, as man, in all departments," but quickly qualifies this statement by adding that they are not as great in actuality, only in capability; that is, as "capable of being so, soon as they realize it and can bring themselves to give up toys and fictions, and launch forth, as men do, amid real, independent, stormy life" (389). Whitman's attempts to include women in the democratic life of the nation are few and tend always to be overshadowed by the glorification of their reproductive systems. When, for example, he demands that a program of culture make "reference to the perfect equality of women," he immediately cancels this egalitarian sentiment with the strong language he uses in the phrase which follows: "and of a grand and powerful motherhood" (396).¹³

While Winthrop's emblematic narrative controls woman's subjectivity, Whitman's democratic rhetoric limits woman's participation in the future cultural life of the United States. Stephen Crane, writing the fictional narrative Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, invokes opposing traditions of the naturalistic novel (characterized by biological or socioeconomic determinism) and of the abandoned woman (characterized by either one of two, generally melodramatic, possibilities: "to waste away and die or to retaliate with savage, terrifying vengeance" [Lipking 9]). The result is a generically conflicted novel.

Before Maggie is abandoned by her lover, she is first abandoned by her mother: "Yeh've gone teh deh devil, Mag Johnson, yehs knows yehs have gone teh deh devil. . . . An' now git out. . . . Go teh hell an' se how yeh likes it" (32). In Crane's narrative it is not necessarily the deterministic environment of the Bowery that destroys individuals but the middle-class value system that they invoke to interpret their lives. Maggie's mother chooses to read her daughter's acts through the plot of the abandoned woman, one of the few narrative options offered to women in the Bowery, and thus Maggie's story is written before her fall:

When arrested for drunkenness she used the story of her daughter's downfall with telling effect upon the police-justices. Finally one

of them said to her, peering down over his spectacles: 'Mary, the records of this and other courts show that you are the mother of forty-five daughters who have been ruined.'

(44)

While Mrs. Johnson projects a melodramatic narrative of the abandoned woman onto her daughter, Crane inscribes the tradition of the abandoned woman onto a naturalistic novel. Maggie falls because her mother casts her as fallen and leaves her no alternative. While other prostitutes financially prosper, Maggie commits suicide. Although Maggie is one of the first female vagrant characters in American fiction, her doom is determined not simply by the socio-economic forces typically addressed by the naturalistic novel but by the legacy of female characters that Crane evokes: she is little Eva spurned by her lover and left to her own resources--hence cast into the role of the abandoned woman.

What all these narratives reveal, then, is that when a female character leaves the domestic sphere her fate is limited, and she can become one of three possible figures, all rhetorically constructed as passive: the demonic, the ideal, or the abandoned woman. But if one reads these narratives differently by filling in the gaps, these same figures might have the capacity to become disruptive agents. I propose that one approach to re-visioning these figures is

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through a trope of vagrancy that moves in and between oppositions. This vagrancy is one that evokes and extends Margaret Fuller's movement between the sexes as an attempt to ungender human relations:

[m]ale and female represent the two sides of the great radical dualism. But, in fact, they are perpetually passing into one and another. Fluid hardens to solid, solid rushes to fluid. There is no wholly masculine man, no purely feminine woman. (115-16)

Fuller's vagrancy is one that "pitch[es] [its] tents amid the fixed and ornamental habitations of men" (97) in order to create a "sphere" that is not conditional upon the "opening" of "marriage" (96) and domesticity. One such vagrant figure who attempts to discover a sphere that is not conditional upon (though not necessarily outside of) the domestic is Kate Chopin's Edna Pontellier in The Awakening. Chopin's narrative suggests that Edna's "awakening" is contingent upon a practice involving vagrancy and domesticity equally; "there was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual" (93). Edna's departure from the domestic is enacted in degrees. She does not leave so much as she changes, scales down, her domesticity. As her social obligations lessen, her "expansion as individual" strengthens (93). Momentarily stepping outside of

conventions--in terms both of Edna's characterization and of the narrative which contains it--enables innumerable awakenings.

Another vagrant figure who attempts to discover an alternative sphere, but who is eventually without any domestic affiliations, is Lily Bart in Edith Wharton's The House of Mirth. Because Lily refuses to view a mirror-image of outside life "from the depths of an impenetrable domesticity" (32) and risks her social reputation and the possibility of a secure marriage for "the rare joys of mental vagrancy" (54), she is refused "any other habitable region" (204); because she cannot make "a pact with her rebellious impulses, and [achieve] a uniform system of self-government, under which all vagrant tendencies [are] either held captive or forced into the service of the state" (150), she, like the abandoned woman, wastes away and dies. But unlike the narrative of the abandoned woman, Lily's death is a matter of economics, not emotion. Having rejected her "training" (234) as a commodity in the upper-class marriage market, but having been thoroughly conditioned to "adorn and delight," Lily has no practical "idea how to earn a dollar" (211). Because Lily is without an immediate family and without an economic means for survival, her rare occasions of "mental vagrancy" evolve into a literal vagrancy which, in turn, leads to an early death.

Female vagrancy, as my counter-history suggests,

occupies not only a metaphorical space but also a literal place in American letters that is largely unrecognized in sociological and critical texts. Because vagrancy erupts in specific cultural moments--the eighties are one such moment--my thesis proposes to consider the contemporary manifestations of this phenomenon by studying a selection of representative texts written in and around the eighties.

The thematic discourse of vagrancy in women's fiction of the eighties reflects a socio-historical moment in America when homelessness could no longer be ignored. Female vagrancy in the eighties is not solely the consequence of the Reagan years but is further connected to various policies instigated during the previous two decades. For instance, the "deinstitutionalization" of thousands of patients--mostly female--from psychiatric hospitals in the late 1960s, coupled with the destruction of large numbers of SROs--single room occupancies--in the 1970s resulted in an unprecedented visibility of vagrant females. Furthermore, because the numbers of women's shelters were few, and because vagrancy was no longer a crime, this "new" group of homeless women emerged as a pressing social concern.¹⁴ By the eighties, as in the depression years, homeless people included entire families.

Although the social reality behind female vagrancy should not be glossed over, the thematic discourse of vagrancy in women's fiction in America may be further

contextualized as characteristic of the second wave of feminist writing. I propose that much of women's fiction in the eighties moves beyond gaining control of "power" in the domestic sphere to a revisioning of familial and male/female relationships. Informed by theoretical constructs, these fictions are not satisfied with simply removing the obstacles, but of questioning the "fictions" that have created these obstacles. For instance, in the first wave of feminism there is an acceptance of the Freudian family romance; consequently, the female subject gains agency by positing the mother as an obstacle; in other words, to gain agency is to reject the mother. Conversely, in the fictions of the eighties, the mother is often a source that allows for, and therefore does not obstruct, the departure from a domestic sphere upholding the patriarchal symbolic order. Although the vagrancy in these texts is not utopian nor particularly successful in terms of changing the social order, it does call into question how representation is connected to the larger ideologies and cultural practices surrounding the ideas of womanhood, motherhood, and home. To leave the home and the family is initially to disrupt their foundations and to act against the social order.

Before beginning an analysis of these characters and their attempts to confront unknown and undefined places, it is important to consider a topic that can be dealt with more straightforwardly: the patriarchal domesticity from which

they are trying to escape. As Baym indicates,

the term 'domestic' is not a fixed or neutral word in critical analysis. For many critics, domesticity is equated with entrapment--in an earlier critical generation, of men by women and, more recently, of women by a pernicious ideal promulgated (so the worm turns!) by men. (Women's Fiction 26)

Similarly, Sophie Watson suggests that houses "do not simply represent a form of shelter: in addition they embody the dominant ideology of a society and reflect the way in which that society is organized" (3). The existence of shelters built out of ideologies that hierarchize the sexes makes it necessary for women to be defined solely by and through their domestic environment. Obviously, this shelter extends beyond what Henry David Thoreau felt necessary for basic survival. Although Thoreau does not write of woman's place in the home, the same economy he describes in Walden, which causes "the mass of men [to] lead lives of quiet desperation" (5), creates a domestic maze for women, one that is often without a clue. With each constriction a woman is placed further away from the doorway: the more elaborate the home the more difficult it is to make an exit.

Nonetheless, there are female characters who manage to step outside the maze, who cross borders and from a new vantage point either transform or annihilate the "home" as

we know it. Since, as Gaston Bachelard points out, a house only "constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability" (17), to destroy the house is one way of disrupting the philosophical foundation of society. The German feminist, Christina Thurmer-Rohr, has theorized vagabonding as "the symbol for a way of life which does not latch onto the familiar, which sees the familiar only as an occasion to leave false homes again, which is not in search of 'identity,' that *idee fixe*" (xvii). For woman to remain in the house as it is ideologically constructed is to be complicit in a social order that contains and defines her subjectivity. The woman in the home is like a beam holding up the very structure that imprisons her. In much contemporary fiction the house burns down, the beam collapses, and the woman (often with children at her side) walks away. Whether or not this departure effects a full escape from patriarchal restrictions, however, is often left an open question.

The impossibility of escaping patriarchal structures completely is an important assumption in the work of the feminist theorist, Luce Irigaray; at the same time, however, she also writes about the importance of the margin. Irigaray's strategy for challenging "phallographic" discourse is "to make an effort--for one cannot simply leap outside that discourse--to situate myself at its borders and to move continuously from the inside to the outside" (This Sex 122).

Irigaray's strategy is a kind of vagabonding, a thinking that refuses to be housed in false homes. She theorizes that women will find "security in mobility, their jouissance in movement," and that by leaving "the property in which they have been legally confined, [they will] find their own place(s)" ("The Poverty of Psychoanalysis" 91). For Irigaray a strategic position for critiquing the social order is the place of mimicry: to utilize the discourse of the center while maintaining an awareness of an elsewhere. Irigaray is useful for this discussion primarily as a critic of the social order, for implicit in the character of the female vagabond of contemporary fiction is a challenge to traditional domestic discourse and, by extension, to representations of woman. For example, one strategy of the female vagrants and outlaws wandering through much of contemporary fiction and film is to abandon, or mimic, or transform the sacred truth of motherhood. Though I do not aim to participate in Irigaray's central project of recovering difference, her theories will thus be useful for me in exploring fictions that house female vagrants and outlaws, characters who find their center in Irigaray's margins, characters who are always leaving the familiar and refusing in Thurmer-Rohr's terms to "get hooked" (xvii).

As mentioned earlier, I am primarily concerned with texts produced in the ten-year period between 1980 and 1990; however, the cultural background of these texts reaches back

much further. Perhaps the best example of how these fictions are built on historical situations is the case of Thelma & Louise: on the run from the law, these two characters of a 1991 film are written in terms of the traditional Western. Geographically, they are driving towards Mexico, and although they attempt to avoid Texas, and by extension the "Wild West," they are firmly written, however twistedly, into a frontier/Western narrative with all of its rules. They are, therefore, attempting to avoid not only the law, but also the trappings of the Western, a genre originating with the frontier theory of Bill Cody and the dime novels of the late nineteenth century and enacting history as performance. When Buffalo Bill scalps Yellow Hand for urban audiences, he performs what he had once done "for real." The players on the historical frontier, like Buffalo Bill himself, later became players on the stage, representing themselves; and some subsequently resumed real roles on the frontier.¹⁵ Questions of representation, a primary concern in the following chapters, are written into the very narratives these texts evoke.

This study does not deal with "experimental" writing by women, but instead deals with texts which are defined by the tradition of "realism." Unlike the modernist texts of, for example, Djuna Barnes, these narratives are at home in both the popular culture and the academy. For instance, Mona Simpson's Anywhere But Here was abridged in the women's

magazine, Cosmopolitan. The chapter on film and the Western includes a reading of the Hollywood film, Thelma & Louise, against a lesser known work, Leaving Normal, both of which still include many of the elements of classical Hollywood cinema. The novels by Erdrich were featured in such places as Book of the Month Club and reviewed in widely disparate places. Housekeeping is probably the most "experimental" novel in this study, but it too has been recuperated by the popular imagination, although unsuccessfully, in the form of Bill Forsythe's movie version, Housekeeping. At the same time, all of these texts (with the exception of Leaving Normal) have been recuperated by the Academy and have been used most specifically and most often in the context of Women's Studies and American studies. Duplicitous by their very nature, they offer a double focus for viewing the character of the female vagrant and outlaw.

Because there exists no previous scholarship on the female vagrant and mother outlaw figure in American letters, I have attempted to consider the primary texts in terms of other systems of discourse. The first half of my study looks most specifically at the mother outlaw figure in relation to the mother/daughter relationship and to the opposition between vagrancy and domesticity. The narratives I consider in this section may be thought of as replies to the divine maternity espoused in the nineteenth century. Mona Simpson's mother-character, Adele Diamond, is an example of how the

"bad mother" can be written into the narrative, whereas Louise Erdrich's mother-characters complicate the patriarchal representation of the mother by serving as parodies of the virgin, fertility goddess, saint, and female demon. The second half of my study explicates the vagrant/outlaw figure in relation to conventional narratives and genres featuring both the outlaw and the vagrant. In these cases, I analyze feminist narratives that revise narratives traditionally considered male. As in Kate Chopin's The Awakening, these primary texts feature female protagonists--in some instances more than one--and are often narrated by a female. Male/ female relationships in these works are generally absent or secondary to relationships between women, which appear after the configuration of generations of mother/daughter relationships.

I begin my study of the primary texts with a reading of Mona Simpson's, Anywhere But Here, briefly supplemented by Barbara Kingsolver's, The Bean Trees. Although one of the more recently published novels, Simpson's text is symptomatic of the conflicts that accompany various transitions taking place in American women's fiction, for the characterization of its mother makes her a complex subject outside--but still uncomfortably contained within--the Freudian family romance. Its mother/daughter relationship, further contained in the American narrative of upward mobility, problematizes Betty Friedan's "feminine

mystique" by characterizing the mother as unconsciously privileging her role as consumer, despite her enthusiastic desire to uphold her role as commodity in the social order. The notable gap between these two roles offers a space from which to view the mother. By reading Simpson's narrative in the context of postwar United States, I attempt to consider how the mother outlaw is contained and conflicted due to socio-economic and psycho-sexual factors. Simpson's narrative might enact the road-trip of Kerouac, but without feminine codes of mobility to draw from, Adele and Ann's mobility often leaves them stranded.

My reading of the first three novels of Louise Erdrich's tetralogy extends my discussion of the mother outlaw figure by situating the mother, at least partially, outside of Euro-American configurations of motherhood and domesticity. Through Erdrich's characterization of the mother-outlaw/vagrant, Fleur Nanapush Pillager, I hope to establish how vagrancy as absence is not without agency, however indirect this agency might be. In Erdrich's narratives, vagrancy is treated as a political act, as are acts of abandonment by the mother.

Having established female vagrancy and mother outlaws within narratives that unsettle domesticity and traditional female representation, I redirect the discussion in my fourth chapter to a reading of the outlaw as figured by popular culture. I read Thelma & Louise, a story which

quickly departs from the domestic realm and enters the Western, as screening a conflicted space for the female outlaw. Although the script attempts to dismantle female subjectivity, this subjectivity is encoded further by the cinematic form. Leaving Normal attempts vaguely to unsettle the cinematic form and narrative through revisioning the female protagonist's place in the fairy tale; however, the conventional morality embedded in the fairy tale is continuously upheld. Only when the protagonists embrace domesticity are they rewarded with the stability they so desperately seek.

I conclude with Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping as an example of a text which unsettles female subjectivity and the discourses that contain her. Robinson's text advances my discussion by its inherent questioning of the primacy of the subject in the world. Ironically, while Robinson's realist text gives the most direct treatment of the vagrant figure, it simultaneously privileges the role of absence in the imagination. Consequently, the moment when female vagrancy as absence becomes presence is also the moment when the dichotomy of these terms is rigorously breached.

I hope that the following study will contribute to a greater understanding of the discourse of vagrancy in American culture and to a breaching of the dichotomies that simplistically construct the female vagrant as absence and the mother outlaw as personal development gone wrong.

NOTES

1. For a more complete analysis of the re-evaluation of American literary studies see Cecilia Tichi. Two recent anthologies of American literature which demonstrate the decentering of the canonical process are James E. Miller Jr.'s two-volume anthology, Heritage of American Literature, and Prentice Hall's two-volume anthology American Literature. In the preface to Prentice Hall's anthology, Emory Elliot explains that the most "significant advance" in American studies

has been the discovery and rediscovery of important works that had received little critical attention in the past. For the most part, these newly valued texts are written by women writers and members of ethnic and racial minority groups whose works have been misunderstood, overlooked, or consciously rejected by the professors who were in positions to make such decisions, most of whom were themselves male and primarily interested in the English heritage of American literature. (1: xxi)

In a like manner, the preface by Baym and her co-editors to the third edition (1989) of the shorter Norton Anthology of American Literature states that they "not only confirm, but substantially increase, [their] commitment to women writers and to the black literary tradition" (xxix).

2. A few major titles that have done much ground work in this area are Nina Baym's Women's Fiction: A Guide to Novels By and About Women in America 1820-70 (1978) and, more recently, Feminism and American Literary History: Essays (1992); Ann Douglas's The Feminization of American Culture (1977); Annette Kolodny's The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters (1975) and, more recently, The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860 (1984); and Jane P. Tompkins's Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860 (1985).

3. See Richard White's essay, 47-50, which investigates how these master narratives were largely created through exclusion.

4. See L. L. Lee and Merrill Lewis for a wide selection of essays that recover and analyse the frontier experience from a woman's perspective.

5. Other revisionist scholars include Carolyn Merchant, Tzvetan Todorov, and Richard Slotkin.

6. In a discussion of the frontier myth, Nina Baym questions whether there is anything about it that "puts it outside women's reach" (11):

It is true, of course, that, in order to represent some kind of believable flight into the wilderness, one must select a protagonist with a certain believable mobility, and mobility has until recently been a male prerogative in our society. Nevertheless, relatively few men are

actually mobile enough to the extent demanded by the story, and hence the story is really not much more vicarious, in this regard, for women than for men. The problem is thus not to be located in the protagonist or his gender per se; the problem is with the other participants in the story--the entrammeling society and the promising landscape. For both of these are depicted in unmistakably feminine terms, and this gives a sexual character to the protagonist's story which does, indeed, limit its applicability to women. And this sexual definition has melodramatic, misogynist implications. (Feminism 12)

Fiedler's canonization and formulation of the frontier myth in American literature is certainly guilty of perpetuating the status quo as defined by Baym.

7. In his three-volume study, Richard Slotkin provides an exhaustive account of the historical development of the myth of the frontier in literary, popular, and political culture from the colonial period to the present.

8. For one source of Anne Hutchinson's voice see David D. Hall's collection of historical documents, which includes the court transcripts of Hutchinson's trial. Her "errors" are recorded in Winthrop's Journals: "History of New England," 1630-1649.

9. In Hall's introduction to the collection of historical documents, he identifies three meanings of the term "antinomianism":

its root sense means "against or opposed to the law." In theology it is the opinion that "the moral law is not binding upon Christians, who are under the law of grace." In New England it denoted the opposition between man's obedience to the law, or his works, and the saving grace communicated by the Holy Spirit. (3)

10. I have used David D. Hall's collection of documents as the source for the quotations which follow, unless otherwise indicated.

11. Emery Battis, writing in the latter half of the twentieth century, continues in the line of Winthrop. His strategy situates Hutchinson as a pathetic hysteric rather than as a mystic. Perhaps if Governor Winthrop were writing after Freud, he too would have defined Hutchinson as hysterical. Battis explains Hutchinson's revelations to be a result of her reproductive history, arguing that due to her repeated pregnancies "aspects of the delusional system which Mrs. Hutchinson may hitherto have entertained inwardly could have been forced into open expression" (346). I mention Battis simply to place the historical situation of Anne Hutchinson in a transhistorical context. Whether the rhetoric be theological or scientific, its effect is to erase and disempower the woman.

12. Whitman formulates a concept of motherhood which for Adrienne Rich upholds it as a patriarchal institution. Writing in the later half of the twentieth century, Rich attempts to distinguish between two meanings of motherhood, one superimposed on the other: the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that potential--and all women--shall remain under male control. (31)

13. While woman's reproductive faculty has always been invoked in any critique of her role in production, in Whitman's agenda, women's reproductive function clearly cancels any role in production. In a footnote, Whitman claims to believe that the sole avenue and means of a reconstructed sociology depended, primarily, on a new birth, elevation, expansion, invigoration of woman, affording, for races to come (as the conditions that antedate birth are indispensable) a perfect motherhood. (372)

This statement positions women as responsible for a society in which they are powerless. It is also a reflection of Whitman's interest in the study of eugenics. Linda Gordon identifies early eugenic thought as assuming "that reproduction was not just a function but the purpose, in some teleological sense, of a woman's life" (quoted in Killingsworth 32-33). As Whitman asserts, "parentage must consider itself in advance" (397).

Eugenics is a practice that not only contributes to the idealization of women but also acts as another form of controlling them. Promoting a life lived with maternity as its goal, eugenics reads like an early version of Margaret Atwood's novel, The Handmaid's Tale.

14. My information on the historical aspects of female vagrancy is taken from Stephanie Golden's study, The Women Outside (150-162). Although I am focusing on the postwar period, Golden also includes an informative survey of homeless American women during the depression.

15. See Henry Nash Smith (102-11) and Richard White (29-35) for a fuller exploration of the Yellow Hand incident.

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Get-Away Cars and Broken Homes: Searching
for the American Dream Anywhere But Here

I woke up as the sun was reddening; and that was the one distinct time in my life, the strangest moment of all, when I didn't know who I was--I was far away from home, haunted and tired with travel, in a cheap hotel room I'd never seen, hearing the hiss of steam outside, and the creak of the old wood of the hotel, and footsteps upstairs, and all the sad sounds, and I looked at the cracked high ceiling and really didn't know who I was for about fifteen strange seconds. I wasn't scared; I was just somebody else, some stranger, and my whole life was a haunted life, the life of a ghost. I was halfway across America, at the dividing line between the East of my youth and the West of my future, and maybe that's why it happened right there and then, that strange red afternoon.

Jack Kerouac, On the Road, 1955

The road was our school. It gave us a sense of survival; it taught us everything we know and out of respect, we don't want to drive it into the ground . . . or maybe it's just superstition but the road has taken a lot of the great ones. It's a goddam impossible way of life.

Robbie Robertson, The Last Waltz, 1976

As the above passages suggest, the male tradition of the road is often used as a vehicle for discovering the self. If the journey to adulthood is successful, transcendent moments of self-discovery occur: Kerouac's "it" or Emerson's "transparent eyeball." In American culture the

quintessential last fling before manhood--the fling that, in fact, transports one to manhood--is the road trip. To conjure images of the road is to conjure the "great ones": Walt Whitman, Huck Finn, Dean Moriarty, Bob Dylan, Captain America, to name only a few. The actual and the fictional merge into one great male wanderer; the road transforms into the "home" of man. The road, the great outdoors, is not frightening but a place where ideals and expectations are grounded in familiarity. In Jack Kerouac's novel On the Road, Dean Moriarty relaxes with the knowledge that "we know America, we're at home; I can go anywhere in America and get what I want" (120). For a brief time, then, these wanderers must leave the domestic to find the true home of brotherhood. Their quest is singular and usually not governed by any real economic necessity; when he is really stuck, Sal Paradise, the narrator of On the Road and Moriarty's sidekick, can always wire his aunt to send the standard fifty bucks.

Conversely, the female quest, as figured in the cultural texts of the eighties, is often a matter of economics. Because the female road trip does not imply simply a reversal of genders, the terrain these women travel is unmapped. The road female wanderers follow is not Route 6, Route 61, or Route 66; the female wanderer has no "mother road." Just as the woman is not the poet but the muse of literary tradition, so the woman is not the wanderer but the

road itself. She acts as a birth trope, birthing male identities, identities that are supposedly not contingent upon relationships with women. For the male wanderer must leave the woman and the domestic behind to discover, as Sal Paradise does, "that everything I had ever known and would ever know was One" (147). Despite the lack of a tried and true route, however, female characters are taking to the road. Yet the reasons for their departure, the routes they traverse, and the places they arrive at are remarkably different from those of the male wanderer. Using primarily Mona Simpson's novel, Anywhere But Here, and Barbara Kingsolver's The Bean Trees as a means to comment on the social specifics of Simpson's novel, I want to begin to situate the female wanderer in the eighties.

Anywhere But Here is the story of Adele Diamond and her daughter Ann August. Fuelled by the American dream of upward mobility, they drive from Wisconsin to Los Angeles in a stolen--because Adele quits making payments--Lincoln. But the American dream that fuels Adele is also the contemporary--post World War II--dream of creating an ideal self through consumption.¹ Characterized by tensions between mobility and stability, between small town life in the mid-west and 'lighting out' for the promised land of California, the novel thrives on contradictions. On the surface, it is a story about Ann and Adele "running away from family" (3), with hopes of child-stardom for Ann and a rich husband for

Adele. But these rather conservative dreams of success are constantly thwarted by Adele's stronger unconscious urge to keep moving. Paradoxically, Adele desires a place in the very institutions she constantly rejects by her refusal to stay put; her urge to create the ideal home is consistently undermined by a stronger urge to destroy the domestic as it is currently represented. Ironically, it is only when Adele is mobile that she is able momentarily to escape the consumerism and the inherent commodification that drives her impossible search for the "ideal self."

In the novels by Simpson and Kingsolver, the automobile acts as the central symbol of female mobility. In both novels the car is the vehicle out of a dead-end situation and a means to escape conventional domesticity. As the narratives progress, however, the opposition between the road and the domestic is problematized. In contrast, the distinction between the inside and the outside for Dean Moriarty--the voice of the Beats, who announces to his lover that he "must dress, put on [his] pants, go back to life, that is to outside life, streets and what not" (44)--is clear-cut. One significant difference between, on the one hand, the male wanderer as figured by the Beats and, on the other hand, the female wanderer is connected with the attempt to leave the domestic entirely. While Paradise and Moriarty encounter the road stripped of family, this is not the case for female characters on the road. To go on the

road is often for women to remain in the role of mother, as in the case of Simpson, or to become a mother, as in the case of Kingsolver. Because identity in these novels is contingent upon relationships with others,² the *raison d'etre* of their road trip is not to find a transcendental self, but simply to discover a situated representation. Without a Cartesian self to fall back on, these questers work with representations of the self that are forever provisional upon the place where they happen to be, and on the immediate relationship they happen to be in. Unlike the male wanderer, the female wanderer is burdened but also "liberated" by these contingencies.

It is, then, not pure wanderlust that drives these female characters onto the road, but socio-economic realities. While Simpson writes about middle-class America and the American dream of "chang[ing] social classes" (531), Kingsolver offers a parallel westward journey, but with very different results. While Adele Diamond, the mother driving the car out of Wisconsin, desires a move from lower-middle to upper-class America, Marietta "Taylor" Greer, the female character who becomes a mother on the road, wants to avoid pregnancy and "be the one to get away" (2). Before Taylor can effect a departure she must get through high school without becoming "barefoot and pregnant" (3). Given the socio-economic realities of Pittman, Kentucky this is no easy task. As Taylor explains, "in those days the girls were

dropping by the wayside like seeds off a poppyseed bun and you learned to look at every day as a prize" (3). Escaping the others' fate is necessarily the first requirement for Taylor's mobility; the second is financial. Eventually, she owns and drives "a '55 Volkswagon bug, with no windows to speak of, and no back seat and no starter" (10).

Whereas Adele, in her desire for a better economic station, is constantly attempting to cover up her actual financial situation, Taylor faces it head on: "Do you think being busted is a joke?" (16). The class and social specifics of Kingsolver's narrative, which includes a parallel narrative involving Central American refugees, challenge Euro-centric theories of individuation. In these two different narrative circumstances--the first firmly situated in the American mainstream, the second soundly placed in the American subaltern of a refugee sanctuary and a Cherokee reserve--alternative representations, especially in relation to the "psychoanalytic" roles of mother and daughter, are introduced.

When I come to reading Anywhere But Here I will consider female vagrancy primarily in relation to the mother outlaw. For my purposes the term "mother outlaw" refers to the character who is positioned outside legal and/or social sanctions. This formulation of the mother is socio-economic as well as psycho-sexual, since postwar motherhood is shaped by the culture of consumption. At this historical moment,

the place of the mother in the home is renewed: for economic reasons related to her role as primary consumer, for social reasons related to her civic role as upholder of traditional family values, and for psycho-sexual reasons related to her maternal role as nurturer of the family and as "fully sexual woman."³ In my reading of this moment, the mother outlaw would occupy a potentially duplicitous position: in the paradoxically active role as consumer--of the American dream, but also of the appliances and commodities that embellish and substantiate that dream--but also in the passive role as commodity in the larger patriarchal social structure. A mother outlaw, moreover, would enact a further duplicitousness in occupying the passive role as the abandoned mother of psychoanalysis--abandoned in order for the daughter's individuation to take place--and the active role as the abandoning mother--who unconsciously permits her own desires to override her social position in the phallogocratic order. In order to exemplify how a potentially disruptive space is created within this duplicitousness, I will later invoke Irigaray's idea of strategic mimicry, specifically in terms of "assum[ing] the feminine role deliberately" (This Sex 76). However, as we will see, even as Adele manipulates the codes of the postwar ideology of motherhood with some sophistication--playing the commodity, as it were--her potential for subversion is limited because those codes constitute the entire range of meanings she can

ascribe to her experience. While Adele Diamond lives a kind of "beat" restlessness, there is nothing in her character that allows her to realize her duplicitousness; therefore, her ability to give meaning to her mobility is repeatedly circumscribed by fifties' domestic ideology. Before turning to the novels, however, I want briefly to situate the figure of the mother in theoretical and cultural texts in order to set up a larger framework for the critique which follows in this chapter.

In the literary, cinematic, and theoretical texts of the eighties, the social position of the mother is generally uncomfortable and conflicted. If the initial texts of the "second wave" of feminism, those produced in the mid-sixties and early seventies, reveal the "reality" behind postwar America in scenes of domestic madness, neurosis, and promiscuity, this uncovering often occurs at the expense of the mother. This initial stage may be viewed as the daughter's story; it is a tale of "sisterhood." Related to this "feminist family romance" (Hirsch 135) is the social and historical revisioning of Freud's psychoanalytic formulation of the mother-daughter relationship by Juliet Mitchell and by Nancy Chodorow, among others. The shift from Freud's castration and Oedipal complex to the ungendered pre-Oedipal relationship to the mother--who, significantly, exists in symbiosis with the fe-male child--unsettled the phallogentrism of discourses of psycho-sexual development.

But, as Marianne Hirsch explains,

[t]he feminist family romance of the 1970s is based on the separation not from parents or the past, but from patriarchy and from men in favor of female alliances. Yet, inasmuch as this romance is centered almost entirely on the experience of daughters, with mothers no more than objects supporting and underlying their daughters' process of individuation, this very rejection, this very isolation of a female realm creates an uncomfortable position for mothers themselves. It is the woman as daughter who occupies the global reconstruction of subjectivity and subject-object relation. The woman as mother remains in the position of other, and the emergence of feminine-daughterly subjectivity rests and depends on that continued and repeated process of othering the mother. (135-36)

In many fictional texts of the seventies, the mother is absent or done away with rather quickly; in theoretical texts she is viewed as complicit with patriarchy. This rejection has been explained as a necessary step towards liberation. In the cultural texts of the eighties, the mother, no longer absent, occupies a more complicated subject position. She has become an active agent; at the

same time her representation, speaking generally, has been further complicated by cultural factors such as race and class, as is made evident, for example, in the novels of Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Maxine Hong Kingston.⁴

Nonetheless, when writing about the mother it is difficult to avoid, at least partially, a psychoanalytic framework; and, as Hirsch points out, in the psychoanalytic narrative the mother is always the abandoned, never the abandoner, because

[t]he repression of the initial fusion with the mother is the condition of the construction of the subject. And although the mother herself can desire fulfilment only through her child, if she is a good, or even a good-enough mother . . . she does not resist, but accepts, without visible hostility, an abandonment psychoanalytic writings present as inevitable. (168)

Hirsch adds that if Freudian psychoanalysis founds the individual's development "on a process of separation from the mother, then the mother's own part in that process remains absent, erased from theoretical and narrative representation" (169). In the eighties, however, theoretical and fictional texts have begun to include the mother's point of view, but this is never unproblematic.⁵ Understandably, the few articles written on Simpson's text--a novel which

includes the initial abandonment by Adele's first husband and Ann's father--focus on the mother/daughter relationship.

Dana Heller explains that Anywhere But Here

centers on a paradoxical situation in the developmental processes of the female child: her only solution to the lack of a symbolic vehicle requires that she set up rigorous boundaries which allow her to abandon the mother to search out a symbol of her own desire. (107)

Similarly, Deborah Denenholz Morse suggests that Ann "needs to separate from her creator in order to discover her own identity, her own self" (73).

I would contend, however, that if contemporary criticism is to reflect recent fiction, critics too must acknowledge the shift from the daughter to the mother, a shift which is not to be found in the criticism on Anywhere But Here. "Feminist writing and scholarship," argues Hirsch, which continues "to adopt the daughterly perspective, can be said to collude with patriarchy in placing mothers into the position of object--thereby keeping mothering outside of representation and maternal discourse a theoretical impossibility" (163). Following the daughterly perspective, both Heller and Morse develop their arguments by reading the characterization of Ann. Yet, although Ann is the controlling narrator, the narrative revolves around

Adele. A similar narrative strategy is employed in Louise Erdrich's novel, Love Medicine. Here the novel begins with the death of June Kashpaw, but it is her absence which generates the narratives that follow. It is through memory that she is recreated and allowed to exist in all of her ambivalence. So it is the puzzle of Adele Diamond, both the driver of the car and the driving force behind the narrative, that serves as the focus for Simpson's novel.

What makes Anywhere But Here different from the mother/daughter novels of the seventies, moreover, is that Adele is given an opportunity, however briefly, to say what is on her mind. Unlike previous mothers, Adele, the not "good-enough" mother, is not metaphorically nor literally killed off; she is incorporated into the other voices. As in other recent novels, the mother motivates the narratives. In some instances, even when the mother is absent, that absence is questioned, not taken for granted. Admittedly, this questioning is often used as a narrative strategy which enables the daughter to understand her own situation more fully; nonetheless, the mother is written in to, not out of, the family romance. More than abandoning the mother (a story we are all too familiar with), Anywhere But Here is important because the destructive mother/daughter relationship as figured by Freud is abandoned to make room for other relationships. Because Simpson includes three generations of mothers and daughters, there are many

possibilities for identification outside of the immediate mother/daughter dyad, possibilities that do not begin with, or fall back to, the father. Furthermore, because these generations are situated not only socially, but also historically, the "reproduction of mothering" is potentially disrupted. In addition to Chodorow's genealogical account of mothering, one might also add Irigaray's specular approach: "to be 'like' her mother but not in the same 'place'. . . . to be able to 'play' her role of mother without being totally assimilated by it" (Speculum 76). I would contend, however, that if the mother is to participate as a subject in fiction, it is always as a conflicted mother.

In one of the early post-World War II efforts to theorize the female subject, Simone de Beauvoir argues that the "body is not enough to define [the female] as woman" (40). The Second Sex also theorizes the conflicted space of pregnancy, asserting that

the fundamental difference between male and female mammals lies in this: the sperm, through which the life of the male is transcended in another, at the same instant becomes a stranger to him and separates from his body; so that the male recovers his individuality intact at the moment when he transcends it. The egg, on the contrary, begins to separate from the female body when,

fully matured, it emerges from the follicle and falls into the oviduct; but if fertilized by a gamete from outside, it becomes attached again through implantation in the uterus. First violated, the female is then alienated--she becomes, in part, another than herself. . . . the female is at once herself and other than herself. (22)

According to de Beauvoir the ambivalence of motherhood begins with pregnancy, "often associated in the first months with loss of appetite and vomiting, which are not observed in any female domesticated animal and which signalize the revolt of the organism against the invading species" (31). The "ambivalence" in Simpson's text is read by Heller and Morse as symptomatic of the daughter's relationship to the mother. Without disputing Ann's ambivalence, I would suggest further that the mother is characterized as equally "ambivalent" in her relation to maternity and motherhood. Ann's grandmother tells her that when Adele was pregnant, she went "down to nothing, eighty or ninety pounds," and that "she couldn't keep [food] down" (162). Adele's revolt is extended in the premature birth of Ann who had to be "in an incubator" (162). The ambivalence evident in Adele's pregnancy continues throughout the narrative in the forms both of repeated acts of abandonment and of an almost hysterical need to possess her daughter.

The conflicted mother of the eighties arises, moreover, as a consequence of occupying a cultural position that situates her as the upholder of "family values" in the face of abuse and oppression. But this conflicted social mother is also connected to an economy which creates an identity for the female through consumption. Betty Friedan recognized in 1963 that "American housewives can be given the sense of identity, purpose, creativity, the self-realization, even the sexual joy they lack--by the buying of things" (208). It is the socio-economic connection that I propose to foreground in this chapter.

Although the narrative of Anywhere But Here begins in the late seventies, the character Adele Diamond was born in 1929, and thus came to marriage and motherhood in the fifties, a decade characterized by the American dream of affluence. The postwar American dream, as discussed by Clifford E. Clark, idealizes the family and the dream home, primarily through consumption:

as part of [businesses'] massive public campaign to sell products for the family and the home, they presented a new model of middle-class family life. At the center of this model was the image of the family as the focus of fun and recreation. Happiness came from raising happy, independent kids, decorating the home to one's own tastes, and

sitting back in the evening with the other family members and relaxing in front of the new TV set. . . . Happiness came also from working together to improve the home, taking family vacations together, and enjoying the outdoor 'patio' and backyard barbeque. (172)⁶

As this passage implies, socio-economic processes underlie the larger issues of representation and of female mobility. Elaine Tyler May identifies the buying of commodities as reinforcing particular gender roles and family values: "The goods purchased by middle-class consumers, like a modern refrigerator or a house in the suburbs, were intended to foster traditional values" (Homeward 166). Further, the complicity of the female with an economy which is based on her exploitation cannot be separated from the conflicted position of the mother's role as guarantor of the social order.

Because Simpson does not limit Adele's conflictedness to maternity and motherhood, but further situates it in the socio-economic sphere, she suggests that the mother's ambivalence is not limited to the psychoanalytic formation but is always already connected to larger issues of domestic-patriarchal ideology and representation. Because Kingsolver's novel links the woman with the child after the oedipal phase has taken place, it too supports this

position. Before I turn to Mona Simpson I want briefly to read a scene from The Bean Trees in order to indicate this connection. By presenting a mother who is conflicted about her own self-representation as mother, and not about the actual relationship with her foster daughter, Kingsolver suggests how closely psychic division is connected to the social order.

Kingsolver presents this phenomenon in the midst of Taylor's westward journey. Outside of a restaurant on a Cherokee reserve, a woman approaches Taylor and tells her to "take this baby" (17), the three-year-old Turtle. Kingsolver connects Taylor's symbolic birthing to a legal process, not any sort of biological or psychoanalytical confusion: "'Look,' I said, 'even if you wanted to, you can't just give somebody a kid. You got to have the papers and stuff. Even a car has papers, to prove you didn't steal it'" (18). Although Taylor feels, at the time, that she is not "arguing the right point" (18), at the conclusion of the novel it is the legal adoption papers, attained illegally, that solidify the mother/daughter relationship. Showing Turtle the papers, Taylor explains, "That means you're my kid . . . and I'm your mother, and nobody can say it isn't so" (232). The legality of the mother/daughter relationship is undermined by the illegality of the adoption process--two Central American refugees pose as Turtle's "sworn natural parents" (215)--but also by the understanding that, like

"identity" itself, the mother/daughter relationship is always provisional; at best "everything you ever get is really just on loan" (231).

Similarly, Anywhere But Here displaces the primary relationship of the mother and daughter with a practice of multiple mothering: Ann is mothered by the many female relatives who attempt to describe her mother. Ann is the primary narrator, but five brief sections of the novel are narrated by other women--her grandmother, aunt, and, finally, Adele herself. These women address narratives, which dwell chiefly on Adele, to Ann herself, who then uses the memories of her female relatives not only to understand the past but also to create a make-shift shelter for the present. Out of keeping with the first wave of feminist narratives, the mother in Anywher But Here is not abandoned but rather stands as one among many influences in the daughter's life.

Conversely, Adele, as daughter, attempts to abandon the past, and, in consequence, to live against her mother. But the position of the narrator as daughter, granddaughter, and niece to the other female characters creates a narrative from which no one is excluded. In other words, although the mother as daughter abandons the past, her daughter recuperates a version of that past. Anywhere But Here may be viewed as a crossroads where the story of the mother--who is also daughter--and the daughter herself intersect; while the

mother drives towards the frontier of Hollywood, the daughter doubles back to forge a domestic space through narrative, recuperating the secondary female characters the mother has left behind. But, significantly, it is the mother's forward movement, geographically and socially, which allows for the daughter's return. In a similar manner, replaying the mother's story by way of the daughter, sister, and mother creates an effect much like that of Irigaray's genealogical speculum: Adele is and is not identified with her mother or as a mother, just as she is and is not identified with her daughter or as a daughter. In Simpson's text the temporal mobility of the narrative is finally as important as the geographical mobility of the characters.

Although Ann and Adele's geographical mobility is seemingly triggered by a desire for upward mobility-- California is the land of promise and opportunity--it is in their failures to achieve an idealized socio-economic position, with all its trappings, that they discover the freedoms of a kind of vagrancy. In other words, because Ann and Adele "read the magazines, [they know] where [they want] to go" (4), but when they are mobile they are nowhere: "for miles, there was absolutely nothing. It seemed [they] didn't have anything" (5). Under these conditions, Adele "[doesn't] care what [Ann] look[s] like" because they are "nowhere" (6). Similarly, when mobile and "nowhere," the mother is freed from anxiety about her own imminent abandonment by the

teen-aged Ann and becomes the abandoner herself: "'Get out, then,' she'd say, pushing me" (3).

Here the emotions of the daughter are conflicted because an abandonment that should lead to despair instead opens up into an Emersonian/Whitman-like transcendental moment:

I got out. It was always a shock the first minute because nothing outside was bad. The fields were bright. It never happened on a bad day. The western sky went on forever, there were a few clouds. A warm breeze came up and tangled around my legs. The road was dull as a nickel. I stood there at first amazed that there was nothing horrible in the landscape.

But then the wheels of the familiar white Continental turned, a spit of gravel hit my shoes and my mother's car drove away. When it was nothing but a dot in the distance, I started to cry. (3)

Losing track of time, Ann sees "small things. The blades of grass. Their rough side, their smooth waxy side" (3-4). But because Ann imagines a conflict at work within her mother, this moment is more aptly defined negatively--that is, by a fluidity that removes the Freudian dynamic from the mother/daughter relationship--than as a moment out of

Whitman or Kerouac:

It did something for my mother, every time she let me off on the highway and then came back and I was there. She was proving something to herself. When she drove back, she'd be nodding, grateful-looking, as if we had another chance, as if something had been washed out of her. (19)

Adele's repeated acts of abandonment might be read as an hysteria that revolts against the strict family dynamic figured by what Friedan terms as the "predigested Freud" of the fifties; but they might be better read as symbolic actions which release the tensions of a woman shaped by this dynamic who experiences a contrary, and unconscious, drive to resist it.

Socially disruptive moments like these are continuously contained in Anywhere But Here by the larger social structure of consumption. When the two women stop, for example, in Scottsdale, Arizona, their immobility is partially motivated by the memory of a good hotel listed in Town and Country. While their car is repaired, they re-enter the world of glossy representation: they work at "improving [them]selves" (10). These surface improvements include "lying sprawled out on the reclining chairs, rubbed with coconut suntan oil, turning the pages of new-bought magazines." As Ann remembers,

We'd each take showers and wash our hair, squeezing lemons on it before the cream rinse. We touched up our fingernails and toenails with polish. That was only the beginning. Then came the body cream and face cream, our curlers and hairsprays and makeup.

(10-11)

Adele's desire for an ideal self is informed by a consumerism of impossibility.

As a consumer Adele recognizes the commodity only as it is advertised, that is, as offering an unconditional transcendence; she does not recognize the economic basis of the commodity. Her conflictedness emerges from the confusion between the actual commodity and the transcendence it promises. This configuration of consumption keeps Adele Diamond forever on the move because the promised fulfillment always exists beyond the commodity itself; it is a lifestyle built around an assemblage of commodities that Adele and Ann cannot afford to buy. The ultimate act of consumption, like the fulfillment of desire, is always deferred.

During their first extended stop in Scottsdale, Ann and Adele stay in a hotel they cannot afford, because it is not covered by Ted's Mobil credit card, order a small batch of custom-made perfumes for Adele, and using the hotel as a cover arrange to be courted by a real estate agent who shows them an expensive house and takes them out for an "elegant"

lunch where they have all the "extras" (16). These shams give them brief access to a higher economic class. The rationale for their actions is that this is an investment of sorts. Adele attempts to commodify herself because it is she "who has to catch a man in this family" and it is she "who has to find [Ann] a father" (18). But in order to commodify herself she must consume beyond her economic means. Thus the extravagance of their socially fraudulent behaviour is justified as an investment in the future. Adele's goal is simply "a husband," but the fact that she has recently chosen to leave a husband--Ted Diamond, her second--suggests that a husband is just another, if crucial, consumer item--crucial because he will provide the cash for all the other items she so strongly desires. Adele desires the commodities--the moment of consumption--more than she does the man that they are to attract. It is as if Simpson is parodying the Beats' search for the self by having Adele's road trip motivated by a search for the ideal representation of the self, which for Adele means the commodification of the self. Perhaps the only possibility for the female quest as mapped out on the terrain of the American dream is one based on representation and commodification of the self.

Although Adele ultimately fails, she attempts to use the commodification of the female as a strategy to get what she wants. She teaches Ann how to exploit the patriarchal representation of women as depicted in magazines,

television, and the cinema, among other places: "Just be real cute and make him want to help you. You've got to learn to make men want to do favors" (77). Adele uses a common advertising technique: the creation of needs. However, while Adele can teach Ann to exploit the system, such exploitation is designed merely to perpetuate the system it exploits. Although Adele moves comfortably between her roles as consumer--as subject--and commodity--as object--potentially creating a space for various disruptive and empowering activities--mimicry, for example--this space, in Simpson's narrative, is encoded within a capitalistic system whereby consumers themselves are objects of a larger economic process. It is in this manner that Simpson reveals how woman is complicit with an economic order that is based upon her exploitation. Only by distancing herself from her mother's practice of commodification, will Ann be able momentarily to disrupt this space.

Before I show how Ann is able to deconstruct the commodification or, in a larger sense, representation of woman passed on by her mother, it would be useful to look at a few instances in the novel when this slippage between consumption and the commodification of the female self takes place. Luce Irigaray's notion of mimicry as outlined in This Sex Which Is Not One will be helpful in explaining how disrupting representation has the potential for disrupting the phallographic order. One of Irigaray's main disruptive

strategies is the deliberate mimicking of the feminine by the female subject. This mimicry resubmits the subject to "ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make 'visible,' by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible; the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language" (76). Crucial to Irigaray's idea is that the mimicking woman must "also remain elsewhere" (76). Simpson's title, Anywhere But Here, like Irigaray's title, This Sex Which Is Not One, is itself suggestive of this double position. I want briefly to look at three incidents from Simpson's novel in order to show a form of mimicry at work. The first two scenes, which take place on Adele and Ann's first day in Los Angeles, make visible what is later covered-up; representation is stripped down and then reconstructed.

En route to California, Adele and Ann are in legal terms outlaws. Driving a stolen car, they stop only at places which will take the Mobil credit card stolen from Adele's second husband, Ted, and, as Ann remembers, "We stole vegetables all across America, anything we could eat without cooking. My mother spotted the trucks" (25). When they finally arrive in Los Angeles, instead of driving directly to their reserved room at the Bel Air Hotel, they stop at a Hamburger Hamlet to make themselves presentable. What follows--an elaborate ritual of stripping down and

making-up--transforms transients into travellers. While looking at her mirror image, Adele washes and shaves her underarms, curls her hair, touches up her nails, and applies fresh make-up. When she finally notices that Ann is embarrassed, she tells her, "[l]isten. Nobody cares, do you hear? They don't give a hoot. They can think we wanted to wash up before we eat. They can see we've been travelling. They don't want you to stay dirty" (28). Significantly, the nobodies are the "other women [who] disciplined their eyes to look away from [Ann and Adele], [who] cut a hole in the air and avoided falling into it again" (27). In this compact community of women, the act of constructing themselves as suitable representations is supposed to remain invisible. The other women "look away," to see only "a hole in the air." Meanwhile Adele makes constant reference to the flat wall mirror, and Ann begins to understand "how someone could become a long story" (28). Here Ann becomes the mirror-image of her mother when Adele applies blush and lipstick to Ann's pale face. It is as if the other women cannot look because there is nothing to see--that is, only two homeless females--without representation. This ritual is revealed as social strategy when viewed in relation to the scenes which follow.

Once Adele and Ann arrive at the Bel Air Hotel, Adele's representation reaches another level, that of commodification. After Adele complains about walking in high-heels, Ann asks why she wears them. Her answer--

maybe I'll meet someone tonight, you never know. And I'd hate to meet the right man when I had on the wrong shoe. (33)

--shows how Simpson characterizes Adele as deliberately enacting the role of commodity in the marriage market. In Irigaray's words, this feminine role playing is a means of "[converting] a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus [of beginning] to thwart it" (76). When they enter the hotel's expensive cafe the shoes double as a form of security: Ann is "glad to have her in those shoes" (33). In a sense the shoes cover up their lack of funds and the fact that they are not travellers but drifters. Temporarily outside of the socio-economic order, Adele mimics a feminine representation which is rendered acceptable, even desirable, by that order. By succinctly covering up her economic and social situation, she is able to occupy a duplicitous position. The scenes in the women's washroom and in their hotel room remain, in Irigaray's terms, invisible to the phallographic order. However, because Adele's "elsewhere" is without a concrete political position, she ultimately falls short of Irigaray's strategy for disrupting the phallographic order.

Although Ann does not understand her mother's behaviour as a form of mimicry, she does come to the realization that she herself has "mimicked people all [her] life" (437). This realization comes to her shortly after her first audition in

Hollywood, when, although the imitation is not acknowledged, she draws on the resource of her mother's gift:

And I don't know what happened, I went dark. Pigeon-toed and knock-kneed, I bent down and started pulling things out of my bags. 'A dress, a ladies' room, please. Just because I want to clean up a little doesn't mean I don't. I have Dignity, with a capital D. I may not have money, but class.' I was tripping leg over leg, and it went on a long time, I put on makeup without a hand mirror, I changed without a bathroom, pulling my dress over my head, I faked those air machines that blow your hands dry. 'There,' I said, landing on the floor, my stuff a strewn pile, my makeup smeared, hair two panels in front of my face. 'Don't you feel better clean? Yes, I do, much, much better. You can seat us now, please.' (436-37)

At this point of conscious mimicry of her mother, Ann makes her mother "visible," realizing her own difference, and begins to achieve autonomy. Another way of understanding this scene, and the fact that Ann is able to mimic Adele for the "first time" (437), is to view Ann as enacting a version of Kristeva's matricide.⁷ She kills off the maternal body, but simultaneously is able to enter into a symbolic

relationship with her mother. In other words, at one level, the audition scene is meant to mock Adele, but at another level her "act" acknowledges a gift from Adele, the gift of mimicry that enables the female to critique, however subtly, the social order.

Simpson repeats this mimicry of female representation in the domestic realm. Like her conflicted "identity," the "homes" Adele creates are presented as conflicted spaces. During the course of Simpson's novel, Ann and Adele are housed in no less than six "homes." Further, one of the prominent symbols is the car, and it is significant that Adele goes through almost as many cars as she does domestic situations. It is not only the mobility between homes but also how these spaces are lived in--the mimicry involved--that contributes to an unsettling of the domestic.

Since the houses and the immediate families that Adele constructs are always set against her childhood home, I want to begin this discussion with the house on Lime Kiln road in Wisconsin. Situated on the edge of town, on a dead end road, the house's geographical location is nowhere, neither urban, suburban, nor country. What this place represents as a limitation on opportunity and upward mobility is what Adele is so bent on escaping from. Yet this house, when contrasted to the homes Adele and Ann later take up, is also a place of memory and stability. In a chapter entitled "Home," Ann remembers that "once, a long time ago, we had a home, too.

It was a plain white house in the country" (10). In her grandmother's house, "the china was scratched from knives and some of the plates were chipped" (50), but the deterioration of the china is a result of its being "used for every day" (50). Looking at her mother's car through her grandmother's screen door, Ann thinks that it looks "like a lit cage" (51). But this "home" is also a place where one might not want to be. Anywhere But Here, like the other novels in this study, makes use of orphans and homelessness to question the stability of the nuclear family and the ideology of home. This strategy, by its very opposition, critiques conventional sociological studies which choose to situate female transients as failed members of the stable nuclear family. For example, amidst the Christmas festivities and feuds on Lime Kiln Road and the uncomfortable relationship between Adele and Ann, Ann thinks of the seasonal--because they become part of the family only at Christmas--orphans upstairs and the austerity of not "belong[ing] to anyone" (345). Similarly, the "stray" mute girl whom Ann's grandmother finds and whose family decides to "adopt" her, chooses to leave the more stable family and to join her disfigured father to travel with the circus. Alternatives to the nuclear family are thus seen as preferable. Yet while the security of the dominant domestic ideology is put on trial, Simpson does not offer any utopian solutions.

It is as if the alienation Ann experiences in childhood allows her to see that the outside is sometimes less alienating than the inside. For instance, because the homes Adele constructs are so alienating, Ann begins to view the outside as an extension of the inside, but preferable to it: the outside begins to feel like "another room" (85) or a "house" with "warm spots and long cool corridors" (105). The car also begins to resonate with security, while the stability normally associated with home collapses. When Ann first encounters the '65 Cadillac Ted buys for Adele, she thinks "the inside looked safe and closed and tended like a home" (71). The night she attempts to sleep in the car she feels "safe there with the snow falling in one bank on the slanted back windshield" (72).

Ann's feelings here are a rejection of what Simone de Beauvoir has described as "the ideal of happiness" which has always taken material form in the house, whether cottage or castle; it stands for permanence and separation from the world. Within its walls the family is established as a discrete cell or a unit group and maintains its identity as generations come and go; the past, preserved in the form of furnishings and ancestral portraits, gives the promise of a secure future. (448)

In Anywhere But Here, in contrast, there is a progression

whereby the idea, or at times the experience, of security is displaced from the family home to the family car and finally to the memories of Ann. The notion of home moves from the materialism of the family house to the memory of the women speaking their stories, so that finally Ann, who is searching for security, finds her home in the narratives that shelter her, while Adele finds her home in a dream home, or the not yet.

There are three domestic sites which I will examine in order to show how Adele's conflicting desires keep her from being confined and, despite the fact that she never achieves her "own place," how the impossibility of home carries the potential for a partial escape from the social system. The first site is the Carriage Court house in Bay City, a home that is temporally situated between the grandmother's house on Lime Kiln Road and the string of apartments/houses Adele and Ann take up once in Los Angeles.

Ann and Adele move into this house, "a shoe box" (38), after Adele's marriage to Ted Diamond, a skating instructor. During the three-year marriage, the new family has no furniture, aside from beds, televisions, and a radio. Significantly, the radio plays in the middle of the communal living room, while the members of the family watch television separately and persistently in their bedrooms. The only exception to this state of having no furniture occurs when they provisionally fill the house with rented

furniture to entertain Adele's family at Thanksgiving. Every other moment suggests that Adele is acting as if she does not live there. The housekeeping, as rigorous as it is constant, keeps the house from being lived in. Ann is taught by her mother how to open the fridge door without touching the handle; taps are wiped after every use and on the weekend the entire house is vacuumed. Few dishes are ever dirtied because the family eats standing up, the fridge door open, as they pick cold chateaubriand directly off the plate. Having read that Gaylord Hauser "kept movie stars looking fresh at four in the afternoon by serving them health food protein snacks" (38), Adele believes in protein diets. At the same time the actual marriage between Adele and Ted is a failure, with Adele having a brief affair with a real estate agent. The house on Carriage Court is thus a mimicry of home. It is a place of well-kept emptiness: there are no family meals on Sunday and no evenings spent around the television set; housekeeping itself represents an empty ritual. It is not until the family breaks up that the house becomes a home: Ann recalls that the "days we'd stay around the house, though, cleaning and painting and fixing things, were when Ted and my mother and I got along best, most like a family" (119). It is not until the home becomes a commodity in actuality--when it is put up for sale--that they can find a comfortable level of interaction. Adele becomes most content when she is destroying or escaping a

home, not creating a home.

Adele and Ann's domestic situation in L.A. is not altogether different from that in the Carriage Court house. Ted might be absent, but like the Carriage Court house, their first apartment remains unfurnished for the three months they live there. When they are finally housed in a furnished apartment, moreover, it is still not a "home." In fact, it is something to be escaped from, not to be lived in:

We used to drive around at night, we didn't have anything else to do. We didn't like to be in our apartment. There weren't places we could sit and do things. If I read my homework on the bed, there wasn't anywhere for my mother to go. (234)

Again the car acts as a secondary but more comfortable home: it is a mobile dwelling which they park in front of the more luxurious houses in Beverly Hills to dream of the impossible future home Adele hopes to marry into. The physical discomfort of their home is also enacted on a psychological level. In L.A., Ann recalls, "our work was simple, but it hung over us so constantly that we lost track of what exactly it was we hadn't done" (190).

In Bay City, the automobile becomes a symbol of the unrealized future. As the narrative progresses the stolen white Lincoln takes on several dimensions: it is both a

ticket out and a ticket in. Before they leave Bay City Adele tells Ann,

This way, we won't have the house, but we'll have a car to let people know who we are a little. . . . Maybe out there [in L.A.] where everyone's in apartments, it goes a little more by the car. Because we won't have a house or anything, but maybe this will help.

They can see we came out of something. (122)

The get-away car thus encompasses Adele's desire for both mobility and stability. She escapes domesticity while maintaining an acceptable exterior. Although the automobile is a sign of their mobility, in Adele's understanding it also acts as a sign of the stability they don't have. The car acts as her cover-up.

Inherent in the character of Adele are the contradictions shared by the over-all narrative, contradictions that are revealed by her paradoxical relationship to "home" and, in a more complicated manner, by her relationship with Ann. On the surface, Adele desires the perfect home. Over the years she collects valuable items "for the house" (476). The house she desires is described in transcendent terms. She tells Ann that it will have a view of "the mountains and the ocean. The whole wide scope of things" (476). This impossible dream house both mirrors and resolves her paradoxical desire for stability and mobility.

Adele romanticizes dream homes, beautiful cars, and real estate agents. So she befriends real estate agents: Don Sklar in Bay City; Gail Letterfine in Scottsdale, Arizona; and Julie Edison in L.A. A source of recreation for Adele is to drive around Beverly Hills and be "amazed" (234) by the houses. Yet despite this constant desire for home, mobility is always the stronger pull in Adele. Near the conclusion of the narrative, she receives a large sum of money from Ann that is to act as a down payment; however, as Ann later discovers, her mother "bought the car instead of a house" (499). Then, after buying her new car with the down payment money, she puts the old white Lincoln on cinderblocks in hopes that Ann will claim it: "Do you want it Ann? I've had them keep it for you. He says it'll only cost two hundred to spiff it up and it might still run for a long time" (502). While imagining Ann in a traditional domestic scene, she undercuts the inherent domestic ideology by ruminating that "now I've got my station wagon ready for my grandchildren" (534). Mobility and mimicry are the gifts that Adele will finally bestow upon her daughter.

The third and final image of domesticity in the narrative takes the form of a house near the ocean, borrowed for Ann's visit home from college. Like the others, this house, too, acts as a form of mimicry. In appearance, it is perfect, but the "rows of unopened Dior stockings" (493) and the sweaters "stacked according to color, each in its own

clear plastic zipper bag" (493) are perfect only until the order is disturbed. The illusion of perfection--Ann feels as if it is like "living the way people live inside movies" (493)--is like the carrot cake Ann later finds in the garage, "untouched, perfect," until she notices that "[r]ibbon-thick bands of ants surround the base, tunnelling into its sides. The frosting is dotted with dead ones" (497). Adele's capacity for escaping the ordinary is not pragmatic. The veal burns and the noodles cooked in a beautiful but too small copper pot turn to mush.

The house on the ocean takes the narrative full circle back to the furnished Carriage Court house where everything is "rented and temporary" (91). But in the world of postwar America, even the grandmother's house on Lime Kiln Road becomes a temporary construction, like the crayon city Ann constructs as a young girl (317). On a visit back to Wisconsin Ann realizes that in her Grandmother's rented house, there were "people we wouldn't recognize, strangers would touch the land after us, pack down the same earth, without ever knowing how beautiful we found it, how troubling" (334). Although the physical house still stands, "all [their] thoughts were gone, lost on air" (334). The actual homes diminish, while the shelter of the narrative offers a revised domesticity from which Ann can derive life.

The concluding section in Anywhere But Here is Adele's; it is the first and only time she speaks directly to the

reader. Here, Simpson exemplifies how fully commodification rules Adele's life. The moment she escapes from buying into the American dream of affluence based on "the man and the house" (531) is also the moment commodities--and interestingly these objects are infused with the signs of tradition and authenticity--flow into her life. Although Adele is seemingly happy because she has discovered new age religion, the spiritual rewards are the commodities she finally acquires:

But I've learned to be at one with the world and to forgive. And since I've let go of my fear, lots of good things have just flowed into my life--all this furniture, the Tiffany, the Seth Thomas--it's all just meant to be. (533)

Although Simpson does not foreground a maternal perspective in Anywhere But Here, she does emphatically suggest why it is so difficult for the mother-outlaw to break free from the phallogocentric order. Like the enclosure of the family car, which simultaneously acts as a vehicle for Adele's mobility and as a sign of her stability, the narrative space of the mother outlaw in Anywhere But Here is riddled with ambivalence and full of contradictions.

Anywhere But Here should be read as a transitional novel which examines female representation within the culture of consumption. Adele Diamond, although

characterized as mobile, at times even vagrant and/or outside the law, is repeatedly checked by the larger domestic ideology of postwar United States. Thus, the signs of her mobility are displaced by the signs of stability she so eagerly desires. Through the character of Adele Diamond, Simpson suggests that any slippages in a female "identity," specifically in terms of capitalism, can occur only negatively or in a conflicted moment.

Through the relationship between Adele and Ann, however, Simpson proposes constructions of female "identity" which, although not unproblematic, offer alternatives to those rendered by psychoanalytical formulations, specifically the mother/daughter relationship. Because generations of mothers and daughters replay their relationships with each other within one larger narrative, Anywhere But Here suggests, Kristeva's matricide is a recurring moment. The longing for the maternal body is a longing for the "not yet" which in turn keeps women mobile, whether by going forward, going backward, or staying in one place.

NOTES

1. The historical roots of the postwar relationship between consumption and self-realization in the United States are discussed in T.J. Jackson Lears's article.

2. For instance, in 1978 Nancy Chodorow writes,

Feminine personality comes to be based less on repression of inner objects, and fixed and firm splits in the ego, and more on retention and continuity of external relationships.

From the retention of pre-oedipal attachments to the mother, growing girls come to define themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible and permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of ego boundaries and differentiations. The base feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate. (169)

Although Chodorow's premise can be applied to many of the female vagrant figures in contemporary fiction, I am reading her specifically in relation to the narratives by Simpson and Kingsolver. For instance, my later interpretation of Louise Erdrich's novels and the film Thelma and Louise reads against the "base feminine sense of self [as] connected to the world." Although the psychoanalytic formulation is

applicable in this instance, I want to stress the socio-cultural aspects inherent in her premise.

3. In The Feminine Mystique Betty Friedan recognizes how the business of America is, at least partially, supported by an economy that creates women as consumers: "by keeping American women housewives--the reservoir that their lack of identity, lack of purpose, creates, to be manipulated into dollars at the point of purchase" (208). For a more complete discussion of the paradoxical implications of the housewife's purchasing power, see Friedan, Chapter 9, 206-32. For a discussion of how Freudian psychoanalysis has been filtered through the American media see Friedan, Chapter 5, 103-25. Here, Friedan argues that "predigested Freud" could be found in the "new departments of 'Marriage and Family Life Education'. . . [which] taught American college girls how to 'play the role' of woman--the old role became a new science" (124). More recently, Elaine Tyler May discusses the many connections among sexual roles, the cold war and the resurgence of a family ideology. May is especially insightful in her analysis of "domestic cold war ideology" and of how "stable family life not only seemed necessary to national security, civil defense, and the struggle for supremacy over the Soviet Union, it also promised to connect the traditions of the past with the uncertainties of the present and the future" ("Explosive Issues" 167).

4. Because my study is primarily concerned with issues of female mobility and vagrancy, I have chosen to work with fictional texts which foreground issues of representation over those which emphasize race. For example, The Bean Trees is useful not because of the Cherokee subplot but because of the subversive mothering strategies of Taylor and the parallel between the abandoned Turtle and the refugees. Nonetheless, as is evident in novels such as Toni Morrison's Beloved or Sula, Euro-centric configurations of the mother are challenged in important ways when situated against Afro-American, Asian-American, Hispanic, or Native American configurations/representations.

Alice Walker's short story "Everyday Use" (1973), narrated by the mother, is exemplary in foregrounding the complexities of class and race that can inform the mother/daughter relationship. In many ways it may be read as a transitional moment between the feminism of the seventies characterized by "sisterhood" and the feminism of the eighties characterized, in part, by the attempt to create a critical discourse of the mother. A certain irony is evident when the daughter, who has changed her name from Dee to Wangero Leewanika Kemanjo, chooses a heritage that rejects her immediate descent as figured by her mother. But within the same narrative space is the other, younger daughter Maggie, who, although for the most part silent, has chosen her immediate heritage as passed down from her grandmother

and mother. See Hirsch (186-191) for a reading of "Everyday Use" as an example of maternal discourse.

5. Donna Stanton's article, "Difference on Trial," and Kaja Silverman, chapters 3 (72-100), and 4 (101-40) in The Acoustic Mirror, are two sources which explore these complications.

6. Elaine Tyler May argues that the consumerism fostered during the cold war era acted as another form of containment. Using the 1959 debate between Nixon and Krushchev at the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, May identifies how the commodity gap momentarily eclipsed the missile gap:

In Nixon's vision, the suburban ideal of home ownership would diffuse two potentially disruptive forces: women and workers. In appliance-laden houses across the country, working-class as well as business-class breadwinners could fulfill the new American work-to-consume ethic. Home ownership would lessen class consciousness among workers, who would set their sights toward the middle-class ideal. The family home would be the place where a man could display his success through the accumulation of consumer goods. Women, in turn, would reap rewards for domesticity by surrounding themselves with

commodities. Presumably, they would remain content as housewives because appliances would ease their burden. For both men and women, home ownership would reinforce aspirations for upward mobility and diffuse the potential for social unrest. (Homeward 164)

The notable gap between the roles of the woman as commodity and of the woman as consumer offers a space from which to view Simpson's ambivalent characterization of Adele Diamond.

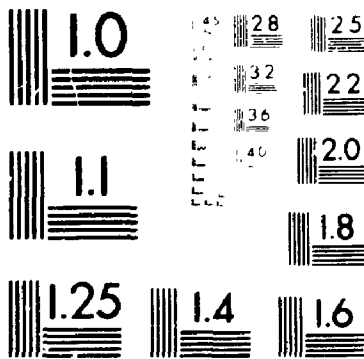
7. For Kristeva matricide is specific to the maternal body. In order for the subject to acknowledge the loss of the maternal body, this matricide is necessary. The subject must have language, the symbolic in order to imagine the other. Kelly Oliver explains

[i]t is possible . . . that if the dependence on the maternal body can be separated from the dependence on the mother, then the necessary 'matricide' can take place and a woman can lose the maternal body and still love her mother. This means she can lose the maternal body as maternal container or maternal Thing and love her mother's body, her own body, as the body of a woman. Unlike Freud, who maintains that in order to develop normally females must change their love

objects and erogenous zones by denying their original love objects and erogenous zones, Kristeva suggests that females must admit, even (re)embrace, those original loves and pleasures. (64)

2

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The Missing Mothers: Re-configuring Motherhood in
Louise Erdrich's Novels

Matricide is our vital necessity, the
sine-qua-non condition of our individuation.
Julia Kristeva

And what I wanted from you, mother, was
this: that in giving me life, you still
remain alive.

Luce Irigaray

Fleur, the one you will not call mother.
Louise Erdrich

Louise Erdrich's fiction does not use fixed, ideal representations of motherhood. While her novels present a world where the mother is often absent--flying off with a pilot, pedalling goods across the American terrain, or running off to a nunnery--this world also characterizes the mother as having a symbolic or an actual "responsibility" that extends beyond the nuclear family. Set primarily on a North Dakota reserve and in the bordering town of Argus, Erdrich's tetralogy, Love Medicine (1984), The Beet Queen (1986), Tracks (1988), and The Bingo Palace (1994), incorporates both Native and White social structures; likewise, many of her characters come from an unknown

mixture of Chippewa and German-American descent. This complicated genealogy, instead of calling attention to race, often acts to erase blood lineage and thus works to negate questions of paternity/maternity and race.¹ In this respect, the possibility of either positive or negative essentialist representations of woman or Chippewa becomes almost impossible in Erdrich's texts.

Erdrich's landscapes are tracked with margins and borders that are always collapsing; the proximity between the reserve and the town of Argus, as well as the issue of land claims, tends to confuse and undermine any possibility of rigid, well-defined borders. Erdrich, in fact, is one of many American novelists writing within a framework which includes the influence of more than one primary culture. Any attempt to fix either Erdrich's male or her female characters into conventional western ideals is turned upside down, for the complexity goes much further than gender representation.

The female characters in Erdrich's texts are often placed in a doubly impossible position: formed by a number of different cultural and religious influences, their "femininity" is rarely at risk of becoming what Luce Irigaray defines as one "that conforms and corresponds too exactly to an idea--Idea--of woman, that is too obedient to a sex--to an Idea of sex--or to a fetish sex has already frozen into phallomorphism" (Speculum 229). Rather than creating feminine stereotypes, Erdrich creates parodies: of

the fertility goddess, the martyr, the saint, and the Virgin Mary. Like Irigaray's strategy of mimicry, Erdrich's parody of female stereotypes uncovers some typical problems in female representation, especially those concerned with motherhood. What Erdrich sets up in Love Medicine, the first published novel of the tetralogy, is the possibility of woman abandoning the role of mother and of man taking on the role of nurturer. Although it is not my intention to read Erdrich strictly in the context of Chippewa or European traditions, or to collapse "woman" and "Native American" by suggesting that there are similarities beyond their "otherness," I see advantages in treating her texts critically in terms of their multicultural landscapes. In terms of the larger scope of this study, I will also analyze in Erdrich's fiction narrative discourses that create gaps, making possible a fictional world where mother outlaws and female vagrants are not only spoken, but speak.

I have chosen to write on the first three novels--with an emphasis on Tracks and Love Medicine, where one more readily moves between the reserve and Argus--in a way which treats them as both separate narratives and one larger narrative. My reasons for doing so are two-fold: all four novels share many of the same characters, the Kashpaws, Pillagers, and Morrisseys; and all four share a similar narrative structure, based on a collection of voices which create multiple perspectives on the same events, with a

movement into and away from a linear time frame. Initially, my working premise was that the collective of voices that Erdrich employs evolved from a female perspective, or from a female tradition of storytelling. My assumptions were related, not unproblematically, to ideas of female individuation that follow Nancy Chodorow's thesis: "the basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine sense of self is separate" (169). But this assumption in the latter part of the twentieth century is in itself problematic. For with little investigation, it is apparent that multiple perspective and non-linear chronology are narrative conventions found in both male and female writing. For instance, an obvious literary influence, whom Erdrich herself cites, is William Faulkner. Yet while the similarities between Erdrich and Faulkner are rich in possibility, the differences between them are also telling: in Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner includes a chronology, a genealogy, and a map, but Erdrich includes no such signposts.

More specifically, though, and following my reading of Mona Simpson's novel, I would like to argue that the multiple perspectives of Erdrich's narrative form enable her, unlike Faulkner, to confound psychoanalytic representations of the mother. For Erdrich's use of the narrative conventions of multiple perspective and non-linear chronology--significantly different from Faulkner's use of

genealogies, chronologies and maps--underscores a characterization of mothering as based on influence and actual nurturing, not on biology or proper names. I would also propose that, given Erdrich's multicultural influences, it is important to keep in mind what Paula Gunn Allen points about traditional tribal narratives, that they

possess a circular structure incorporating event within event, piling meaning upon meaning, until the accretion finally results in a story. The structure of tribal narratives, at least in their native language forms, is quite unlike that of Western fiction; it is not tied to any particular time line, main character, or event. It is tied to a particular point of view--that of the tribe's tradition--and to a specific idea--that of the ritual tradition and accompanying perspective that inform the narrative. (79)

Erdrich, then, who is interested in how traditions survive by evolving and adapting, uses a blend of Native and Euro-american narrative strategies.² On the one hand, it is clearly evident that she is influenced by an oral tradition: her characters, with few exceptions, tell their own stories. On the other hand, allusions to biblical, classical, and the American transcendentalist written traditions are also

evident.³ Not only the circular compilation of events within each novel, but also the compilation of the novels themselves, results in layers of story.

What is most significant about Erdrich's narrative structure, for my purposes, is that by confounding issues of gender and race her form, regardless of where it originates, also confounds historical representation. Unrepresented or misrepresented constructions of Native Americans but also--and this is related to her multicultural/textual realm of influences--constructions of female and male subjectivity, motherhood, paternity, and property rights, among other issues, are all underscored by Erdrich's form. Her "alternative" representation of history destabilizes the dominant discourse of "history" and the accompanying ideologies that are normally figured into this discourse. Motherhood as written by Euro-American ideology is not the norm in Erdrich's novel.

In this chapter, I want to continue to explore the ramifications of the mother outlaw in contemporary fiction. In relation to Erdrich, this term may be more aptly coined as the missing mother. By using the term "missing mother," I refer to the biological mother who is often absent but also to how the role of the mother is represented. My entry into the fiction is by way of the abandoning mothers: the Chippewa, Fleur Pillager-Nanapush in Tracks; the mixed-blood June Morrissey-Kashpaw in Love Medicine; and the German-

American, Adelaide Adare in The Beet Queen. In all three novels, the function of what I term the mother outlaw-- "outlaw" because she attempts to exist outside of tribal custom or patriarchal structures--shifts, depending on the historical or social framework. While Fleur, who plays a central role in Tracks, does not "set out" (224) until the final pages, June and Adelaide's acts of abandonment and consequent absences take place in the beginning pages and work to motivate the subsequent narratives. In the context of narrative, then, the character of the abandoning mother is never itself abandoned. She is often the focus for a narrative created by her children.

Although I chose to enter the fictions by way of these "mother outlaw" characters, each novel also features other (anti) mother figures: in Tracks Pauline Puyat, also an abandoning mother, later renamed Sister Leopolda; in Love Medicine Lulu Lamartine and Marie Kashpaw; and in The Beet Queen Mary Adare and Celestine James, who share between them a role of unconventional mothering. Further, each novel contains strong male nurturers: Nanapush, Eli Kashpaw, and Wallace Pfof. Within these different constructions of "motherhood," a maternal discourse is often heard telling stories which run contrary to conventional discourses on motherhood, and this counter-discourse includes the abandoning mother who is usually outlawed from the dominant--patriarchal, capitalistic, religious, or

psychoanalytic--discourses of motherhood. Often evolving from this present or absent mother-figure, moreover, is Erdrich's presentation of home and homelessness.

Erdrich has commented that in her novels the desire for open space "is there but it's nothing that someone stays in. People aren't 'lighting out for the territory.' The women in my books are lighting out for home" (Interview 145). In the same interview, Erdrich defines home as that "wonderful and difficult mixture of family and place that mysteriously works on a person" (145). Nonetheless, many of her female and male characters are without "homes": Fleur Pillager, June Kashpaw, Adelaide Adare, and Karl Adare, to name a few, are at one time or another vagrants. And when Erdrich's female characters are let loose into a life of literal or symbolic exile, I would like to suggest, they find themselves in a state similar to that which Irigaray describes as dereliction. To be without representation is to be without a home. I am interested in how Erdrich's texts expose various layers of homelessness: the abandonment by the mother, the abandonment of traditional female representation, especially in the context of proper names and property rights.

The abandoning mother, the missing mother, and any idea of defective mothering that considers the perspective of the mother in a larger social structure--all these are often lacking in theoretical and critical accounts of motherhood.

Nonetheless, as maternal discourses emerge, alternative representatations to those of the virgin, goddess, or demon must be figured into the discourse of motherhood. Before I turn to Erdrich's novels, therefore, I want to continue my discussion from the previous chapter of the debate surrounding the mother's treatment in psychoanalysis and literary criticism--a debate that only alludes to the possibility of the abandoning mother.

II

The Missing (M)other

In her essay, "Difference on Trial," Donna Stanton writes that Helene Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva refute the oedipal version of maternity and girlhood to concentrate on the pre-oedipal,

that shadowy sphere 'almost impossible to revivify,' which Freud discovered through his female disciples, that 'prehistory of women' which, he claimed, accounts 'almost entirely' for the substance of their ulterior relations to father and husband. . . . An absent presence, the pre-oedipal attracts maternal exponents of difference as a gynocentric space. (165)

In her review essay, "Reading the Mother Tongue:

Psychoanalytic Feminist Criticism," Jane Gallop argues that "the pre-oedipal period is not only a magical moment for infant and early mother but exercises a charm over those who contemplate it, who study and theorize" (134). Gallop believes that this charm also acts as a blind spot and, consequently, "it is not mother that is lacking from psychoanalytic accounts, but precisely mother as other" (135). Although Gallop is referring to a specific collection of essays, her complaint is a familiar one and is picked up later by Kaja Silverman and Marianne Hirsch.⁴

Gallop notes that in Lacanian models the mother is the prohibited object of desire and in object relations she is the mirror where the infant can find his or her subjectivity. In either case her only role is to complement the infant's subjectivity; in neither story is she ever subject (135). Similarly, Silverman criticizes Kristeva for aligning the semiotic with the mother because it associates once again the feminine with the marginal and nonrational (102); however, as Toril Moi points out, the pre-Oedipal mother for Kristeva is "a figure that encompasses both masculinity and femininity" (165). The mother exists in a constant state of mother and other, as an absent presence, as an (un)representable figure.⁵ In "Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini," Kristeva accou. for the maternal body as the "place of a splitting" and further suggests that,

[t]hrough a body, destined to insure

reproduction of the species, the woman-subject, although under the sway of the paternal function (as symbolizing, speaking subject and like all others), [is] more of a filter than anyone else--a thoroughfare, a threshold where 'nature' confronts 'culture.'

(238)

If the mother were not other, Kristeva continues, "then every speaker would be led to conceive of its Being in relation to some void" (238). In her essay, "The lost territory: Parables of exile in Julia Kristeva," Miglena Nikolchina reminds us that, in Kristeva's work

the desire to 'vomit' the mother comes from the fact of her being 'swallowed' in the first place. [Kristeva's texts] remind us that, in Zeus, there is a swallowed mother; that, in culture, maternity has remained unknown. The quest for the mother, the obsession with translating an anonymous 'lost territory', with externalizing a hidden unnamable presence, thus turns into a historical gesture which, with Kristeva, can be effected only by accepting the necessity of mediation, of rebirth from the 'head' of a culture signed with the Name of the Father and yet containing in itself its mater

abscondita. (241)

Kristeva's emphasis on the pre-oedipal also stresses how this "hidden unnameable presence" associated with the maternal body immerses the subject (and the mother temporarily) in a language that s/he will be forever exiled from if the split with the mother is successful; that is, how the "language" of the pre-oedipal--Kristeva's chora--is necessary for that of the symbolic.

In my discussion of maternity, I want to switch sites from the daughter to the mother, and thus from the pre-oedipal phase to what Kristeva names in Revolution in Poetic Language as the thetic moment: "a threshold between two heterogeneous realms: the semiotic and the symbolic" (48). During the thetic moment "dependence on the mother is severed, and transformed into a symbolic relation to an other; the constitution of the Other is indispensable for communicating with an other" (48). Thus, the semiotic chora is associated with, but not entirely contained by, the pre-oedipal phase where the not-yet-subject is attached to the undifferentiated mother. When the subject finds his/her identity in the symbolic, there is a separation from the semiotic chora. Yet the semiotic, although repressed by the symbolic order, continues to function, and thus the chora is also described by Kristeva as a "mobile receptacle." Kristeva's description of the thetic as a "traversable boundary" suggests that

the thetic is completely different from an imaginary castration that must be evaded in order to return to the maternal chora. It is clearly distinct as well from a castration imposed once and for all, perpetuating the well-ordered signifier and positing it as sacred and unalterable within the enclosure of the Other. (Revolution 51)

The mother, like every subject, participates in the moment of the thetic threshold. This connection between the thetic moment and the mother is also suggested in Kristeva's essay, "Stabat Mater," where the semiotic and the symbolic accounts of motherhood--or maternal jouissance in the pre-oedipal and maternal representation in the symbolic--are related in two columns of print. Kristeva's text, as Mary Jacobus so rightly points out, is divided like the maternal body (167).

By drawing on psychoanalytical and sociological sources, I hope to theorize a concept of motherhood that will include not only the "abandoned" mother but also the "abandoning" mother. Kristeva writes of the child that "abandonment represents the insuperable trauma inflicted by the discovery--doubtless a precocious one and for that very reason impossible to work out--of the existence of a not-I" (Black Sun 241). For the mother, however, the moment of abandonment is also linked to the act of revolution: the eruption in the symbolic of the semiotic is "neither

anarchic, fragmented foundation nor schizophrenic blockage, [it] is a structuring and de-structuring practice, a passage to the outer boundaries of the subject and society. Then-- and only then--can it be jouissance and revolution" (Revolution 17). In terms of the mother, the act of abandonment denotes a giving up of someone else but, at the same time, a giving up of one's self, self-surrender. The mother is in a constant state of active abandonment--being abandoned but also, and simultaneously, abandoning--and it is this position which is potentially one of strength because of its revolutionary capabilities.

Kristeva indirectly considers the mother's own abandonment when she writes that the faces of Bellini's Madonnas "are turned away, intent on something else that draws their gaze to the side, up above, or nowhere in particular, but never centers it on the baby" ("Motherhood According to Giovanni Bellini" 247). At the same time that the Madonna's hands clasp the child, her face "flees the painting, is gripped by something other than its object. And the painter as baby can never reach this elsewhere" (247). This gaze that looks "elsewhere" is for Kristeva the source of maternal jouissance. Still, Kristeva focuses on the child's attempt to reach for the mother's jouissance rather than on the mother's own act of looking away. My departure from Kristeva is a redirection and a relocating of the aesthetic moment, a moment that transfers over to social and

cultural spheres.

This transfer is implicit in Kristeva's work; for instance, Kristeva's description of poetic language--the eruption within the symbolic of the semiotic--is like a mirror-image of the thetic moment, where and when the semiotic is overwhelmed, but not totally annihilated, by the symbolic. For my purposes, I want to transplant the thetic moment, specifically in terms of its characteristic as a "threshold between two heterogeneous realms" (Revolution 48), into a socio-cultural realm in order to situate the abandoning mother and, specifically, the act of abandonment, as a destabilizing force in the symbolic--patriarchal--order. Kristeva's mother potentially incorporates revolutionary capabilities because she is "at the pivot of sociality--she is at once a guarantee and a threat to its stability" ("A New Type of Intellectual" 297). She occupies the advantageous position on the threshold of the (semiotic) "wilderness" and the (symbolic) community.

For my purposes, Louise Erdrich's texts are strategic because they further encode the duplicitous mother in a duplicitous social structure: Erdrich's landscapes can be read as a threshold where language and the unnameable collide, where the institutional and the mystical conflict, and where history and the unwritten merge. Because Erdrich is ultimately concerned with strategies of survival, the place of "motherhood" in her texts is set in and against

these strategies; consequently, my analysis of the mother outlaw is often subsumed by the larger thematic issue of how one culture survives when it is overwhelmed by another. I propose that, like Kristeva's thetic moment, Erdrich's texts recommend that instead of assimilation--an erasure of one culture by another--a "creative" borrowing must take place between these two cultural forces to ensure survival. In Erdrich's texts the traditional trickster figure becomes someone who is able to "borrow" from the encroaching Euro-american government. Erdrich's characterization of the mother outlaw presents another sort of trickster figure who reworks--or works over--the two cultures. I propose that while the mother outlaw is outlawed from her social place, from her physical home, and from the governing laws abiding those places, she has the potential to "act" as the semiotic does, as a destabilizing practice: always overwhelmed but never annihilated.

III

Tracking the Missing Mother

They formed a kind of clan, the new made up of the old, some religious in the old way and some in the new. (Tracks, 70)

Tracks is chronologically the first novel, but the second

last to be published, of Louise Erdrich's tetralogy, which covers a time span from 1912 to the late eighties. Set primarily on a reserve in North Dakota between 1912 and 1924, Tracks is narrated alternately by Nanapush and Pauline Morrissey. Susan Perez Castillo notes that this "dual narrative perspective" enables Erdrich "to recover the collective perspective which characterized traditional Chippewa oral narratives and simultaneously to highlight the spiritual fragmentation of her tribe" (293). Nancy J. Peterson observes that "because of different identities and allegiances, Nanapush and Pauline narrate contrasting interpretations of the historical moment that unfolds in Tracks," thus resisting "absolute groundlessness or relativity" (988). While Nanapush documents the history of the reserve and attempts to fight its extinction through storytelling, Pauline--conflicted by the culture clash between Native and White ways--seeks to destroy that which she cannot incorporate and by the end of the narrative is living in a Catholic convent and has been renamed Sister Leopolda. Fleur Pillager, who refuses to be assimilated by Western values and politics, offers a third perspective, one which cannot be tracked down by Western documents or Chippewa traditions.

Tracks begins with the threat of extinction; the first sentence tells the reader, "We started dying before the snow and like the snow, we continued to fall." Nanapush

continues,

there were so many of us left to die. For those who survived the spotted sickness from the south, our long flight west to Nadouissioux where we signed the treaty, and then a wind from the east, bringing exile in a storm of government papers, what descended from the north in 1912, seemed impossible.

(1)

Talking to Lulu, one of the central figures who will reappear in Love Medicine, Nanapush calls her the "child of the invisible, the ones who disappeared when, along with the first bitter punishment of early winter, a new sickness swept down" (1-2). This opening creates a logic based on absence that will continue throughout the tetralogy. For example, spirits of the dead will often figure prominently in the lives of the characters. Similarly, the novels present a concept of mothering that is based on the absent mother and/or father. Nanapush remembers that "he gave birth in loss" (167), while Lulu is told that Fleur is the mother she "will not call mother" (2). But regardless of not calling or naming, the connection between Fleur and Lulu is made: Fleur is still "mother." In Erdrich's fictitious world, there exists a logic that destabilizes the binary between absence and presence. It is a world where the act of abandonment--another type of absence--is woven into a larger

paradigm, one that works both within and against the community. Like Kristeva's semiotic, this absence is best articulated by a discursive political maneuver.

In this section, I want to focus on Fleur Pillager and Pauline Puyat, the abandoning mothers of Lulu Lamartine and Marie Kashpaw, respectively. Orphans themselves, both biological mothers abandon their illegitimate, female children: Pauline, a mixed blood, abandons first Marie and then life on the reserve, while Fleur abandons first Lulu and then the reservation, although not life on the reserve. Fleur becomes the literal manifestation of her surname: a pillager, then a pedlar who, as a consequence, repeatedly abandons a reserve that is itself on the verge of destruction because of government land claims. Pauline enters a convent, making her forever exiled from the reserve, while Fleur as a wandering pedlar also lives in exile. Although both Fleur and Pauline are abandoning mothers, Erdrich characterizes each of these acts of abandonment quite differently. Pauline abandons maternity and motherhood for a symbolic relationship as figured by the Virgin Mary; Fleur abandons motherhood when the symbolic relationship with her daughter as figured by home, land, and a larger family structure becomes impossible. Pauline abandons the unborn Marie to Bernadette Morrissey before the birth, while Fleur abandons Lulu to the government schools much later in Lulu's life. Yet, although the reasoning

behind and the eventual ramifications of each act might be different, both are rooted in the political, religious, and social structures of the reserve, and to a lesser degree, of the bordering town of Argus. Indeed, because both characters offer a different perspective on abandonment, what becomes evident is the necessity of critiquing the mother outlaw within a cultural context, as opposed to a context which is purely psychoanalytical or sociological. Another salient consideration is the connections between motherhood as an institution, represented by the cult of the virgin, and as a form of nurturing.⁶

One reason why Erdrich's fiction is able to create unconventional representations of motherhood, and "defective" mothers in particular, seems to be that her settings include the reserve, a place which remains largely unwritten. In addition, her characters are often housed in family structures that are anything but the nuclear, or even extended, family unit. For instance, when Fleur Pillager and Eli Kashpaw get together--it is never made explicit whether Lulu is fathered by Eli, or by one of the workers from Kozka's butcher shop, or by Misshepeshu, the monster of the lake--Eli's mother, Margaret, follows her son to Fleur's home and then Margaret's lover, who happens to be Fleur's foster-father, Nanapush, enters the group, to form a new "kind of clan" (70). This clan is formed not only by at least three different blood lineages but also by different

cultural perspectives: "Some religious in the old way and some in the new" (70). It is neither matrilineal nor patrilineal. Eli's mother may be present, but Fleur's foster-father is also there and at least for a while, significantly, they all live on Fleur's property. As Nanapush sees it, he is Fleur's father, just as he later becomes Lulu's father for "the records" (61) because

I saved her from the sickness, I was entangled with her. Not that I knew it at first. Only looking back is there a pattern. I was a vine of a wild grape that twined timbers and drew them close. Or maybe I was a branch, coming from the Kashpaws, that lived long enough to touch the next tree over, which was the Pillagers, of whom there were only two--Moses and Fleur--far cousins, related not so much by blood as by name and chance survival. (33)

Paternity (and maternity) as characterized in Erdrich's texts is not instantaneous and it is not based on blood. It is this kind of reasoning that enables the father of Fleur's child to go unnamed. Lulu's father is Eli because in the early years of her life he is an integral part of the new clan. Then her father is Nanapush because it is his name that is on the government records, a legal detail necessary for her removal from the government school. But, more

important, he "fathers" Lulu when he tells her the history of the Chippewas, and thus empowers her with a knowledge that runs counter to that taught in the government school. Like Erdrich's characterization of motherhood, fatherhood in the novel is not stable, but shifts from situation to situation.

In Erdrich's novels fatherhood is also not necessarily subsumed under the category of patriarchy, for it fails to fit what Kelly Oliver has described as Kristeva's reading of patriarchal family structures:

In the biblical stories, the Virgin is impregnated by the Word, the name of the Father, God. This, argues Kristeva, is a way of insuring paternity and fighting off the remnants of matrilinear society. After all, it is the Name of the Father that guarantees paternity and inheritance. (50)

Nanapush "fathers" Lulu by passing on the words of her mother and thus ensures the matrilineal component of her clan's history. Despite this configuration of fathering, however, conflicting configurations also exist on the reserve. Paternity as figured by patriarchy, as I will demonstrate in the next section on Love Medicine, is connected with land claims, and both are connected to White ways. As Adrienne Rich notes, "historically, to bear a child out of wedlock has been to violate the property laws that

say a woman and her child must legally belong to some man, and that, if they do not, they are at best marginal people, vulnerable to every kind of sanction" (260). In these terms, Fleur's refusal to live on Kashpaw land is not an act of revenge against Eli but a refusal to be contained in the logic of measurements and records, of property rights and paternity. It is a refusal to be bought by government money.

For many of Erdrich's characters, the reserve is experienced as a place of connectedness, especially in contrast to the cities or the town of Argus. This is significant in light of Cyril Aldred's finding that the hieroglyph for "house" or "town" also symbolizes "mother" and, as Adrienne Rich suggests, "[emphasizes] the principle of collective as well as individual nurture" (124). Historically, the Chippewa understanding of personal identity privileges collectivity and inclusiveness as signified by the extended family's common totem (Wong 177).⁷ Although very few of Erdrich's characters are "traditionals" and the reserve is in no way devoid of violence, it does have the collective nurturing that is missing from Erdrich's off-reserve settings.⁸ What I want to stress here is that it is not so much that the reserve is a place where one is nurtured--at best it is a conflicted space--but that it is a place where one is usually nurtured by more than one caregiver. This collective responsibility creates a space in which to articulate alternative concepts of motherhood

because this mothering practice cannot be contained by the Name of the Father, or by psychoanalytic discourse.

At the same time, collective responsibility is an impossibility without land, or more specifically, a large social structure. Potential homelessness thus has ramifications that can sever the collective spirit. Consequently, whether the characters are on or off reservation land, Native or White, male or female, the issue of property rights is a concern in all of Erdrich's novels. In Tracks, Fleur Pillager loses her land because she is cheated by Nector and Margaret Kashpaw: money that should have been used as the annual fees for both the Pillager and Kashpaw allotments is paid only towards the Kashpaw allotment because of the additional late payment tacked onto the original fee. Thus, Nector and Margaret cheat Fleur out of her land because they have all been cheated by the government.

But the origin of Fleur's loss begins much earlier and is, of course, much more complex than the simple financial situation suggests. Nanapush recognizes this complexity and how it comes to affect, not only Fleur, but the Kashpaws and himself as well. To raise the annual fees, they strip the bark off cranberry bushes to sell to a tonic dealer. Nanapush recognizes this act as having many ramifications:

[t]he thin pungent odor stuck to us, lodged
in our clothes, and would be with us forever

as the odor of both salvation and betrayal, for I was never able to walk in the woods again, to break a stick of cranberry without remembering the outcome of the toil that split the skin on our fingers. The bark also dulled us with lack of sleep, for every turn, every shift, every quiet sneaking to the pail in the lean-to at night, caused the lake of drying peels on the floor to rustle like waves, so that from then on that winter there was never silence, but a constant shuffling and scratching, a money sound that dragged around us, an irritation. (176)

The eventual division within the new clan results from its having to adopt a Euro-centric logic by shifting from a notion of property based on use value to one based on money and measurements. It is only Fleur who says "the paper [map has] no bearing or sense, as no one would be reckless enough to try collecting for land where Pillagers were buried" (174). But Fleur's resistance weakens: she becomes "hesitant in speaking, false in gestures, [and] anxious to cover her fear" (177). It is then only when her land is about to be taken away from her by the lumber company and she is forced to abandon her daughter to the government schools that she regains her power. Because Fleur will not operate within the patriarchal logic of property rights, she loses her daughter

and her land and is left to wander in exile, belonging to neither reserve nor Argus.

Fleur's final state of exile, although seemingly unlike her position on the reserve, could also be read as representative of the historical fate of the Chippewa people. My reading of Erdrich's texts as containing multiple planes of "homelessness" is supported by the image of the free-floating reserve, unstable in its dimensions but with shifting borders and altering shapes. The map of the ever-changing reserve consists of green "homesteads paid up," rotten pink "lands that were gone out of the tribe--to deaths with no heirs, to sales, to the lumber company," and yellow lands "in question" (173). Fleur, like the reserve, is also described as a shape changer:

She laid the heart of an owl on her tongue so she could see at night, and went out, hunting, not even in her own body. We know for sure because the next morning, in the snow or dust, we followed the tracks of her bare feet and saw where they changed, where the claws sprang out, the pad broadened and pressed into the dirt. By night we heard her chuffing cough, the bear cough. (12)

Pauline's description of Fleur as a spirit bear reinforces the idea of Fleur's ability to avoid conforming to either a White or a Native idea about herself. Fleur becomes a

version of Irigaray's idea that

woman is neither open nor closed. She is indefinite, infinite, form is never complete in her. . . . This incompleteness in her form, her morphology, allows her continually to become something else, though this is not to say she is ever univocally nothing. (This Sex 229)

Irigaray often grounds her discussion in the premise that woman is "homeless" in the symbolic order, that even her unconscious is borrowed, and that, consequently, she is without representation.

Given her ability to become a shape-changer, the final image of Fleur as a pedlar is double edged. She is in exile but she is also mobile, a nomad with a house in her cart. Her reappearances in The Beet Queen as a midwife and as someone who could be either "a witch or maybe a saint cast off to wander" (46) and then again in The Bingo Palace, as "a presence that did not stand to reason" (140) confound the possibility of any final image of her. Fleur as nomad also takes on historical connotations; by returning to the nomadic life of her ancestors--but with a difference--she not only refuses to be contained by maps, she refuses history. But this nomadic way of life does not exist exclusive of larger social structure. At the same time that her absent presence continues to be felt in the community at

strategic moments, Fleur's actual presence continues to disrupt the reserve throughout Erdrich's tetralogy.

Pauline (Puyat) Morrissey in many ways acts as a destructive mirror-image of Fleur. Although both Pauline and Fleur abandon their children, Pauline abandons her illegitimate daughter for the church, for an (absent) maternity based on the Virgin Mary, about whom she says that "in the years to come, I learned Her in each detail" (92). Pauline seems to demonstrate Kristeva's idea that

a concrete woman, worthy of the feminine ideal embodied by the Virgin as an inaccessible goal, could only be a nun, martyr, or, if she is married, one who leads a life that would remove her from that 'earthly' condition and dedicate her to the highest sublimation alien to her body.

("Stabat Mater" 258)

Throughout Tracks, Pauline enacts parodies of these different feminine ideals: martyr, saint, and nun. Her actual pregnancy goes un-named and is cloaked under a "concealing dress" (132), yet the father, unlike Fleur's maternity, is named, not once but three times. The literal father, "Napoleon" (132), is named to Bernadette, who in turn names the foetus, "for the Virgin" (133), Marie. Meanwhile Pauline knows "different" and believes that the true father is "Satan" (133). Within one pregnancy, Pauline

incorporates the various European discourses of motherhood. As (non) mother, Pauline embraces the purely symbolic and represses the semiotic; consequently, her maternity is without meaning. During the birth of Marie, Pauline "held back, reduced [her]self to something tight, round, and very black clenched around my child so that she could not escape" (135). She does not deliver, but is delivered by Bernadette using "an instrument made of two black iron cooking spoons, wired together at the handles" (135), and too soon Pauline and the child are "divided" (136). Despite Pauline's denial of the semiotic, however, it is not annihilated. The moment of Marie's birth is rewritten in Love Medicine when Marie visits the dying Leopolda. The resolution between them is enacted by a struggle over Leopolda's "heavy black spoon" (155), an enactment that places Leopolda as pulling Marie out of darkness. At the same time, her absent maternity/motherhood is no longer entirely contained by the symbolic.

In contrast, Fleur's maternity is related to resisting the traditional discourses associated with motherhood. It is a maternity that answers to Adrienne Rich's call for a motherhood that is not based on "self-denial and frustration" but one where

the quality of the mother's life--however embattled and unprotected--is her primary bequest to her daughter, because a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and

who continues to struggle to create livable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist.

(247)

Fleur's act of abandonment is a political act, a refusal to live in a space that is dominated by Euro-centric values; Pauline's abandonment of Marie is also a political act, though in the opposite direction: it is an abandoning of the Chippewa culture and an assimilation to the Euro-american culture.

From the beginning, Pauline is characterized as someone who "had decided to learn the lacemaking trade from the nuns" (14) rather than bead in the Native tradition. The denial of her heritage, her view that "despite [her] deceptive features, [she] was not one speck of Indian but wholly white" (137), is symptomatic of her destructive presence on the reserve. Before she is accepted into the Roman Catholic convent, her role in the community is to "[enter] each house where death was about to come, and then [make] death welcome" (69). Pauline's characterization as a midwife of death complicates her connection to extinction. Just as her identification with whiteness is associated with her desire to be the Virgin Mary, so also is there an association among her relationship to death, to her religious "mission," and to the Chippewas' potential extinction.

Throughout the twelve-year narrative of Tracks, the threat of death does not let up. Pauline's relationship to death is like a constant reminder of the Chippewas' possible extinction. When Pauline experiences a visitation from "Him," she learns that

I should not turn my back on the Indians. I should go out among them, be still, and listen. There was a devil in the land, a shadow in the water, an apparition that filled their sight. There was no room for Him to dwell in so much as a crevice of their minds. (137)

Pauline's "mission" is to assist in the extinction of the tribe. She is aligned with a Lord "who had obviously made the whites more shrewd, as they grew in number, all around, some even owning automobiles, while the Indians receded and coughed to death and drank" (139). Unlike many of the other characters in Tracks, Pauline never learns to integrate Chippewa beliefs with those of Christianity. Unlike Margaret Kashpaw, for example, she will never call the "different Manitous along with the Blessed Virgin and Her heart" (51). Because she cannot live in a hybrid culture, she must choose one culture over the other.

Pauline's first and foremost desire is to destroy Fleur and all that she is associated with, for Fleur is a Pillager, "who knew the secret ways to cure or kill, until

their art deserted them" (2). Pauline's presence at Fleur's two births is connected to death. At Lulu's birth, Pauline attempts to shoot a spirit bear. She "shot point-blank, filling the bear's heart," but "the lead only gave the bear strength" (60). Nanapush "heard the gun go off and then saw the creature whirl and roar from the house" (60). This could be read as a symbolic account of Pauline's attempt to destroy Chippewa myths, but it backfires: with the threat of destruction, the need for myth increases. During the second birth, when Fleur's baby arrives much too early, Pauline acts as the midwife of death:

I do not know why the Lord overtook my limbs
and made them clumsy, but it must have been
His terrible will. I never was like this
during sickness before, not since Bernadette
taught me. But I could not work my arms, my
hands properly, my fingers. The only sound in
the cabin was the bed, a rocking movement,
the hold and release of Fleur's breath. (157)

What Pauline does not realize is that Fleur's sickness is complicated by the baby's premature birth. In this instance, Fleur leads Pauline into death and back again, and this experience of death is far removed from any Christian rites or White ways. They "passed dark and vast seas of moving buffalo and not one torn field, but only earth, as it was before." In this land of Chippewa death, "there were no

fences, no poles, no lines, no tracks" (159). Ironically, Pauline ends up on the Chippewa death road of the Old Ones. This place of death does not include the White ways of measurements and mass extinction.

Pauline will never be a mystic, saint, or martyr; she will always be only a parody. She goes to great extremes to play the martyr, but her acts--among others, wearing potato sacks for underwear and her shoes on the wrong feet and urinating only twice a day--are meaningless. Fleur's acts, however, especially in the context of the entire tetralogy, have ramifications that reverberate through at least two more generations. Keeping in mind the importance of Nanapush's pattern, one could say that Fleur's actions initiate a pattern of resistance that is enacted first through Lulu and then through Gerry Nanapush, the great escape artist who "believed in justice, not laws" (Love Medicine 161).

IV

Abandoning Mothers

I remembered the year I carried her. It was summer. I sat under the clothesline, breathing quiet so she would move, feeling the hand or foot knock just beneath my heart. We had been in one body then, yet she was a

stranger. We were not as close now, yet perhaps I knew her better. (Love Medicine, 158)

The various forms of abandonment that take place in Love Medicine again allow for a discussion of different social constructs of motherhood, this time involving not only biological mothers but also, and perhaps more important, foster mothers. Covering a span of over fifty years (1934-1981), Love Medicine is told from a myriad of generational perspectives, and slowly a family history is revealed, with the death of June Kashpaw connecting the narrators/characters. Because June's voice is absent, Love Medicine risks becoming another example of the mother's story told by others; however, within the narrative there are mothers speaking, both biological and surrogate, who are making sense not only of June's life but also of their own and of those in their extended family. Further, June's spiritual and physical presence frames the narrative and influences the lives of those who speak on her behalf. In this novel, the mother/infant dyad is housed in the nuclear family but, more important, it is enclosed further by the larger structure of the extended family and, beyond that, of the reserve. And on the reserve, the social construct of the family is obviously different from that of the Euro-American nuclear family. The borders here are not as rigid as in a typical white, New World community.

Love Medicine begins in 1981 with the death of June Kashpaw. One function of the scraps of narrative that follow, stretching as far back as 1934, is to make sense of her life and death and, by extension, of the experience of the Native American in the late twentieth century, especially in relation to the issue of extinction. Recalling the opening narrative of Tracks, Albertine Johnson, June's niece, is informed in a letter from her mother, Zelda, that June is "not only dead but suddenly buried, vanished off the land like the sudden snow" (7). Living in Fargo, in a "white woman's basement," Albertine realizes, "that letter made me feel buried, too" (7). June dies somewhere between Williston, "a town full of rich, single cowboy-rigger oil trash" (8), and the reserve. Erdrich suggests the dangers of cultural displacement. Like her aunt June, Albertine is "clearly a breed" (24): her mother is Zelda Kashpaw and her vanished father is "Swede Johnson from off-reservation" (10). Both women are introduced on a landscape that is off-reservation; however, one distinction between them is that Albertine is mobile and June is not. Albertine crosses borders with her Mustang--"the first car [she] owned, a dull black hard-driven car with rusted wheel well, a stick shift, and a windshield wiper only on the passenger side" (11)--while June is shown "killing time before the noon bus arrived that would take her home" (1). Ironically, June's son, King, buys a Firebird (which acts as a phoenix in the

narrative) with the insurance money from her death, but then loses it in a game of cards. Significantly it is won by Lipsha, her other son, and driven from Minneapolis back to the reserve. Mobility is important for the characters who cross borders between the White and Native worlds. Mobility is one strategy for preventing assimilation.

Although the Firebird King buys, and Lipsha later wins, is loaded with options--"it has a tapedeck and all the furnishings" (23)--June is not; and her lack of options is connected to her absent mothering. One of the first details Albertine remembers about June is that she "had no patience with children. She wasn't much as a mother; everyone in the family said so" (8). To negate June's role as mother is firmly to establish June as a "bad" mother, but a mother nonetheless. Thus it is the memory of June that initially generates the narrative, but it is specifically June as an abandoning mother that provides the connections between the sections. In the Kashpaw household, the memory which characterizes story-telling and which is necessary for survival is predominantly matrilineal. While the women are in the main house passing on memories of June, Albertine speculates about her grandfather's senile dementia:

Perhaps his loss of memory was a protection
from the past, absolving him of whatever
happened. He had lived hard in his time.

. . . His great-grandson, King Junior, was

happy because he hadn't yet acquired a memory, while perhaps Grandpa's happiness was in losing his. (19-20)

Yet Lipsha Morrissey, the abandoned biological son of June and the foster son to Marie (Lazarre) Kashpaw, unlike Albertine's grandfather who was educated in the government school and knew "white reading and writing" (19), recognizes memory as an extraordinary attribute that organizes and makes sense out of the present. He describes Grandma Kashpaw as having a "memory like those video games that don't forget your score" (240).

It is Marie Kashpaw, in fact, who is both biological and foster (grand)mother to many of the other characters. Marie (Lazarre) Kashpaw, "a skinny white girl" (63), insists, like her mother Pauline before her, that she "[doesn't] have that much Indian blood" (43). Her brand of mothering is based on white patriarchal values, and it is only through an act of abandonment--abandoning a maternity that is based on children as commodities--that she is able to imagine another kind of maternal care. She does not abandon any of her own children, but rather takes in children who have been abandoned. Nector explains Marie's capacity for mothering as a way of helping her to cope with the loss of two of their own children:

there was a long spell of quiet, awful quiet,
before the babies showed up everywhere again.

They were all over in the house once they started. In the bottoms of cupboards, in the dresser, in trundles. Lift a blanket and a bundle would howl beneath it. I lost track of which were ours and which Marie had taken in.

(126)

Although Marie's mothering is rooted in patriarchal values, this abundance of children defies the strict connection between property and paternity.

For a short time, Marie stands in as June's foster mother after her sister, Lucille Lazarre, "died alone with the girl in the bush" (85). When her mother dies, June survives because she "had sucked on pine sap, and grazed grass nipped buds like a deer" (87). Initially, Marie does not want June because she already "had so many mouths [she] couldn't feed", but she ends up "keeping her the way [she] would later end up keeping her son, Lipsha, when they brought him up the steps" (85). It is eventually revealed that Marie's denial of June is related to her fear of being abandoned as mother. She realizes that, "[m]aybe it scared me, the feeling I might have for this one. I knew how it was to lose a child that got too special. I'd lost a boy. I had also lost a girl who would have almost been the same age this poor stray was" (86). Marie's fear of abandonment is also connected to her position as an abandoned child. Significantly, it is Marie's foster-mother who brings June

to be taken in; "the old woman who [Marie] didn't claim as [her] mother anymore" (85) abandons June on Marie's doorstep. The moment of abandonment involves both infant and mother and thus resembles Kristeva's thetic moment.

It is only a short span of time before June does abandon her foster-mother/aunt by leaving Marie's household to live with her Uncle Eli in his "mud-chink bachelor shack on the other end of the land" (91-92). According to Marie, Eli is "a nothing-and-nowhere person, not a husband match for any woman" (92). Marie explains her loss by claiming that it is "a mother [June] couldn't trust after what had happened in the woods" (92); however, it is as if June is abandoning her foster-mother to return to the place of abandonment: a place of "wild unholy songs" (92) where there is no property.

Marie's brand of mothering is firmly planted in the patriarchal order. She surrounds herself with children as she would with landscaped property. She attempts to define herself through her children and her husband:

I had decided I was going to make him into something big on this reservation. I didn't know what, not yet; I only knew when he got there they would not whisper "dirty Lazarre" when I walked down from church. They would wish they were the woman I was. Marie Kashpaw. (89)

In a similar manner Marie attempts to make something of June that she isn't. She dresses June in Zelda's cut down dresses, Gordie's pants, and one of her own blouses. It doesn't work. Instead June picks up "an old scrap of billed hat from a dump and [wears] it just like [Eli], soft and squashed in on her head" (92).

Marie's attempts to become a revered mother are preceded, and given another context, by her attempts to become a White saint at the Sacred Heart Convent. She explains that she could "pray as good as they could. Because I don't have that much Indian blood. And they never thought they'd have a girl from this reservation as a saint they'd have to kneel to" (43). The connotations of this particular scene multiply when read in the context of Tracks and the mother/daughter relationship between Marie and Sister Leopolda. For their Indian blood and their blood relationship discards the very religious structure they want so desperately to uphold. Although Marie quickly leaves the convent, her desire to become a saint persists. Since she cannot become the Virgin Mother, she instead becomes a parody of the Mother, a fertility goddess. Marie clearly represents a maternity that exists outside of the site of abandonment and which is firmly established in the symbolic community. When she revisits the convent, she wears a "solid dress" and believes that "by now [she] was solid class. Nector was tribal chairman. [Her] children were well behaved

and they were educated too" (148). Ironically, when she returns home she discovers that the institution of marriage is not as dependable as she first thought. Her husband, Nector, has temporarily left her for Lulu. Her reaction--to wash the floor and peel all the potatoes in the house--conveys how shallow her resources are, at least when confined by patriarchal notions. The foundation of her house is a fragile structure.

Marie's role as wife and mother can be linked to the capitalistic structure surrounding, and encroaching upon, the reserve. Janet Farrell Smith suggests that

'[h]aving children' and 'having a family of one's own' to keep and protect in one's private home sometimes indicates attitudes toward parenting that are analogous to attitudes toward property. As one has a house to rent, use and decorate as one wishes, one may also have children of one's own to raise, train, and educate as one wishes. (199)

Although Smith argues that the property model in parenting is gender-related, it could also be applied to property concepts associated with race. One of the themes in Love Medicine and the tetralogy as a whole is related to property: land claims on and off the reserve. Marie's naive understanding of her children and husband as extensions of herself, a self which, in turn, is based upon a

representation dependent on her children and husband, produces a relationship between them that lacks meaning. Surrounded by legal children and property, she is "homeless." Only when Marie begins to reach out for connections that go beyond those defined by the law does her role as mother gain meaning.

Marie's attitude toward children and property is contrasted with Lulu Lamartine's. One way these two women are connected is through Nector Kashpaw: Marie is his legal wife, while Lulu is his mistress; Marie is the mother to his legitimate children, while Lulu is the mother of his illegitimate child. Like Marie, Lulu is surrounded by children; unlike Marie, however, Lulu's children are not homogeneous. In 1957, Lulu has eight sons:

some of them even had her maiden name. The three oldest were Nanapushes. The next oldest were Morrisseys who took the name Lamartine, and then there were more assorted younger Lamartines who didn't look like one another, either. (109)

By the time Lulu retires from child bearing, she has another son by Nector and a daughter by a Mexican migrant worker. Lulu does not act out the conventional role of mother. When she is pregnant with Lyman she tells Nector, "'I'm putting on the hog.' She clicked her tongue, patting her belly, which was high and round while the rest of her stayed slim"

(135). Lulu's existence does not include the patriarchal definitions of motherhood. Like her mother, Fleur Pillager, Lulu exists on the threshold of abandonment because she is constantly undermining patriarchal notions of ownership.

Lulu is thus associated with a concept of motherhood that is constantly in flux. She does not mother her sons; instead they mother each other: "Lulu's boys had grown into a kind of pack. They always hung together. . . . Clearly they were of one soul. Handsome, rangy, wildly various, they were bound in total loyalty not by oath but by simple, unquestioning belongingness of part of one organism" (118). Lulu's attitude towards her children is similar to her attitude towards land. She explains, in a tone reminiscent to that of Fleur Pillager,

All through my life I never did believe in human measurement. Numbers, time, inches, feet. All are just ploys for cutting nature down to size. . . .

Henry Lamartine had never filed on or bought the land outright, but he lived there. He never took much stock in measurement, either. He knew like I did. If we're going to measure land, let's measure it right. Every foot and inch you're standing on, even if it's on the top of the highest skyscraper, belongs to the Indians. That's the real truth

of the matter. (281-82)

Significantly, when Lulu attends the tribal meeting to protest the council's decision to take government money and build a tomahawk factory on her land--where "the Lamartines lived all their life" (284)--the issue of property becomes entangled in the issue of paternity. Lulu threatens the entire tribal council when she decides that,

Before I'd move the Lamartine household I'd hit the tribe with a fistful of paternity suits that would make their heads spin. Some of them had forgotten until then that I'd even had their son. Still others must have wondered. I could see the back neck hair on the wives all over that room prickle. (285)

Lulu is fighting White ways with White ways: property rights for proper names. What Lulu recognizes is that her predicament is representative of the larger land claim issue. She remembers that "the Chippewas had started off way on the other side of the five great lakes. How [they] were shoved out on this lonesome knob of prairie [her] grandmother used to tell" (282).

The issue of property thus extends beyond that of paternity; nevertheless, it is interesting to note that in Lulu's world the question of paternity is used against the fathers. Ultimately, her strategy fails, but her household is eventually relocated onto land that is better than

Henry's, "with a view overlooking town" (288). With this move, she takes over the rightful ownership of her household from her dead husband and the tribe. It is as if Fleur's resistance in Tracks continues with Lulu's fight. In Love Medicine there is retribution when the logic of maps and measurements gives way to an ownership of land based on use. With Lulu's relocation, the reserve's borders shift and expand--her land is "rightfully repurchased from a white farmer" (288)--to include, not exclude, her clan.

The reserve is a world where the border between the nuclear family and the extended family does not exist. For a mother to abandon her child to the care of an extended family does not mean that the mother too must be abandoned. (In The Beet Queen this is not the case. After Adelaide abandons her children, she in turn is abandoned by Mary with a postcard which reads, "All three of your children starved dead" [52].) The mother may sometimes remain nameless, but she is not forgotten. June abandons two children. Her first child, King, is fathered by her husband and cousin, Gordie Kashpaw. Her second son, Lipsha Morrissey, is fathered by Lulu's eldest son, Gerry Nanapush. Both sons end up in the care of Marie without the knowledge that they are brothers.

Lipsha, abandoned on Marie's doorstep when he is a baby, does not know where he belongs. Marie, who is once again afraid of abandonment, does not tell him about June and Gerry. It is Lulu who tells him, "They all know. Grandma

Kashpaw, she's afraid to tell you because she loves you like a son. It frightens her to think that you might run off. June's dead. My son Gerry's in the clink" (336). Lulu tells Lipsha about his parentage because she is "the only one who had nothing to lose" (336) in the telling. Nonetheless, in the end, it is Marie who enables Lipsha "to get down to the bottom of [his] heritage" (342). Lipsha believes that when Marie shows him where she keeps her stash of money she is "offering [him] something. Bus fare, . vbe, the chance to get away from here in [his] confusion" (338).

Marie's "gift" to Lipsha is also a gift to herself. By abandoning her fear of abandonment, she is able to discover an "identity" that is apart from Nector. Her changed attitude is a result of the love medicine that she asks Lipsha, who has "the touch," to practice on herself and Nector. Marie wants to stop Nector once and for all from sneaking off to see Lulu Lamartine. Yet instead of feeding Nector and Marie the fresh hearts from a pair of geese (who mate for life), Lipsha cheats and feeds them two frozen turkey hearts, bought from the Red Owl Store and blessed by Sister Martin. Although Nector ends up choking to death on his turkey heart and Lipsha temporarily loses the touch, both Lipsha and Marie are given a gift that is related to the love medicine. Lipsha explains that

your life feels different on you, once you
greet death and understand you heart's

position. You wear your life like a garment from the mission bundle sale ever after-- lightly because you realize you never paid nothing for it, cherishing because you know you won't ever come by such a bargain again. Also you have the feeling someone wore it before you and someone will after. (256)

After Lipsha tells Marie what he has done, he explains that the love between her and Nector is stronger than any magic because "it's true feeling" (257). In return, Marie gives him the gift of his mother's rosary beads. Lipsha recovers his healing powers and begins to heal himself. The self-healing is an act of nurturing; the sun is "hot and heavy as a hand" (257) and "the touch got stronger as [he] worked through the grassy afternoon" (258) pulling dandelions.

The healing between Marie and Lulu comes when they are able to represent a concept of motherhood that extends beyond the nuclear family. When Lipsha finally meets up with his father, Gerry Nanapush, Gerry wants to hear news of his own mother, Lulu. Lipsha tells him "how she's started running things along with Grandma Kashpaw" (268). Lulu's concern with her own property evolves into a larger concern for the land claims of the reserve. Lipsha tells Gerry how Lulu "even testified for Chippewa claims and that people were starting to talk, now, about her knowledge as an old-time traditional" (268). Unlike Nector Kashpaw's memory,

which deteriorates, Lulu's improves. She does not forget the lessons about story-telling and survival told to her by Nanapush in Tracks. When Lulu's eyesight weakens, she explains that it was as "if the longer I sat quiet in the Senior Citizens, reflecting on the human heart, the more inward turned my vision, until I was almost blind to the outside world" (232). It is this reflection that contributes to the voice that is able to work for the Chippewa people. With insight comes the ability to feel a responsibility for the tribal community, a responsibility that extends beyond her "pack."

With Nector, the patriarch, dead, Marie and Lulu establish their own bond. Marie remains "good at taking care of things" (231) and abandons enough of the past to be able to care for Lulu's eyes. After Marie peels off the bandages, Lulu no longer sees her as a rival; instead she sees her "huge and blurred, the way a mother must look to her just-born child" (297). Marie continues to be cast in the role of mother, but she now begins to act on her own behalf and that of the larger community. Just as Lulu recovers tribal land as a form of restitution, Marie recovers tribal history:

Marie had started speaking the old language, falling back through time to the words that Lazarres had used among themselves, shucking off Kashpaw pride, yet holding to the old strengths Rushes Bear [Margaret Kashpaw] had

taught her, having seen the new, the Catholic, the Bureau, fail her children, having known how comfortless words of English sounded in her ears. (263)

Like Lulu, Marie extends her nurturing role beyond that of her immediate family. Lulu and Marie's past differences are buried in favour of the larger good of the tribe. From the perspective of Lyman Kashpaw Lamartine, Marie and Lulu "were now free to concentrate their powers, and once they got together they developed strong and hotheaded followings" (303). In Love Medicine, one learns that the nuclear family is a destructive, rather than a generative, force.

The one nuclear family that is depicted in Love Medicine consists of King, Lynette, and Little King. Living off the reserve in the twin cities, they are truly in a state of abandonment that is almost without hope. When Lipsha visits King, he describes their apartment as having a "deranging" effect: "the place was like a long dark closet. The narrow rooms was laid in a row. The air was smoky and thick. The walls was a most disturbing shade of mustard green" (343). King's apartment is like a prison cell, but unlike Gerry and Lipsha he does not have the skills to escape. In this world the child not only abandons his father; he turns him in to the police. Lynette tells Lipsha that Little King "'don't call himself Little King anymore. . . . He thinks his name's Howard'" (343). When the police

come to the door looking for Gerry, Lipsha sees that the boy "was suddenly a tiny, lined, gray grown-up who threw himself in concentration up to the latch, screaming the name of his father" (359). After Lipsha wins King's car, it becomes likely that King and his family will remain in a state of abandonment indefinitely. In this situation, if King or Lynette were to abandon King Junior on the reserve, it would be an act of mercy.

Lipsha claims his heritage by helping his father escape from the police and by winning the Firebird King bought with June's insurance money. Given Gerry's reputation as an escape artist, moreover, the escape itself is a claim to the other half of his heritage. Returning to the reserve, Lipsha realizes that when June abandoned him it was an act of mercy and that

[i]f it made any sense at all, [June] was part of the great loneliness being carried up the driving current [of "boundary" river]. I tell you, there was good in what she did for me, I know now. The son that she acknowledged suffered more than Lipsha Morrissey. The thought of June grabbed my heart so, but I was lucky she turned me over to Grandma Kashpaw. (366-67)

Lipsha's act of mercy towards June is to "bring her home" (367). Throughout the various narratives, the Firebird is

associated with June's spirit to such an extent that "Eli won't ride in it" (23). The firebird as a symbol of the phoenix echoes the colored easter eggs June is eating in the first section of the novel. Thus the theme of the Chippewas' survival is associated with the mother outlaw. To bring the car back to the reserve is to reestablish June, the mother outlaw, in the Chippewa community. At the same time, Lipsha learns that it is not his biological ties that make him one of the "real children" (342) but that, as with the love medicine, this is accomplished by "true feeling." Gerry Nanapush explains to both King and Lipsha, "'We got dealt our hand before we were ever born, and as we grow we have to play as best we can'" (357). Lipsha's advantage is that he learns from many players how to play.

V

The Thread is Flight

My mother knew she'd lose everything now. His wife was smiling in the photograph. Our big white house was in Mr. Ober's name, along with everything else except an automobile which Adelaide sold the next morning. On the day of the funeral, we took the noon train to the Cities with only what we could carry in suitcases. (The Beet Queen, 7)

Although the narratives of The Beet Queen (1932-1972), which overlap temporally with both Tracks and Love Medicine, mainly take place off reservation, Erdrich's concerns as presented in the previous two novels remain in the foreground: displacement and homelessness are as inevitable on the landscape of Argus as they are on the North Dakota Chippewa Reserve. As in the other two novels, The Beet Queen begins with death and is propelled forward by a subsequent abandonment, this time of Mary and Karl Adare by their mother Adelaide. Unlike those of Fleur and June, however, Adelaide's act of abandonment is not incorporated into a larger narrative. The tracks Adelaide leaves behind lead nowhere; consequently, her children destroy, discover, and create their own patterns by which to survive. In this section I want to propose that only when the outlaw mother is re-written into alternative narratives--narratives that are not overwhelmed by the dominant discourse of the mother or which stand outside it--does a meaningful representation of the outlaw mother become possible. In fact, precisely because The Beet Queen offers individual and familial accounts of the abandoning mother that are not incorporated in a meaningful way, this novel serves to accentuate Fleur Pillager's abandonment of Lulu as a political act. Further, The Beet Queen presents accounts of motherhood that cannot be incorporated into conventional narrative patterns surrounding the mother and thus mothering must at best

borrow from many discourses.

The Beet Queen begins with the issue of land claims, but here the issue is associated with gender, not race. Even though Adelaide and her illegitimate children have been living in the big white house for many years, it is legally in Mr. Ober's name. Once again, property rights and paternity rights clash. Yet rather than fight, as Lulu does in Love Medicine, Adelaide retreats and loses any property rights she had when she abandons the "big white house." She then gives up her mobility by selling the only thing in her name, the car. And finally, when she abandons her three children for Omar the pilot, she trades in one form of representation that is meaningful for another without meaning.

Initially, Adelaide's abandonment appears to be aligned with freedom and open space. But this flight and the wide open space surrounding it are without meaning and therefore can only leave her "grounded." By looking at two brief accounts of Adelaide which follow her abandonment--both focalized through Omar, the pilot--one can see how her "homelessness" persists. The first, in the section "Aerial View of Argus," takes place immediately after the plane catches fire and she and Omar are in the hospital. Although she now has some control over finances, she is still a "kept" woman: "Omar didn't like to think that while Adelaide was sleeping now it might be Mary, or that other one, a boy,

that she dreamed of and not him" (54). But whether it is her absent children or Omar whom she dreams of, what is apparent is that Adelaide has no control over her "self" or further, over how that self is represented by others. Attempting to act as the keeper of her (un)conscious, Omar creates his own narrative about Adelaide and imagines her, not as the abandoned and abandoning mother she is, but as his own personal martyr:

He was proud that she'd left her children and her whole life, which he gathered had been comfortable from her fine clothes and jewelry, for a bootlegger with nothing to his name but a yellow scarf and an airplane held together with baling wire. (54)

Adelaide's flight is associated with enclosure: the misspelling of "aeronaught" (10) is one indication, the faulty plane another.

The second scene, entitled "The Birdorama," serves to parody Adelaide's flight for freedom. No longer an "aeronaught extraordinaire," Omar keeps birds caged in a silver gazebo. Adelaide, like one of his caged birds, lives a life of depression and anger. After Adelaide has swept the "ornaments off shelves" (207), the final image of her is one which suggests madness: "[s]he stood in the middle of the kitchen floor, her feet smeared with blood. Her hair was combed tight into a bent steel clip, and the cumulus puffs

of her white gown hung flat. Her lips were pinched pale, and her spent eyes held his, frightened" (208). Adelaide travels from one state of homelessness to another. Left without even the function of mother, she exists in a state of dereliction.⁹ Further, the constant destruction of the domestic site prevents the possibility of anything more than a fleeting role as "wife" to Omar.

In this novel *Adelaide Adare*, the abandoning mother, becomes "the mad woman in the attic" and is left in horrible silence. Her status might be understood in terms of Irigaray's argument that "the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects" (86). Where there are no alternatives to the conventional Christian and psychoanalytic representations of motherhood, the abandoning mother cannot be articulated but has to be incorporated into "proper" narratives, accounts that work within the western metaphysical system, or she will be left in silence.

Karl, Mary and Omar all create versions of Adelaide that reflect a particularly western way of thinking. Creating narratives, as both Karl and Mary discover, is a way of developing understanding. Celestine comments that "Mary tries to get imagination to mend the holes in her understanding" (237). Karl, meanwhile, becomes "tired of weeping and [begins] inventing scenes of [his] mother that [give him] more pleasure" until he is finally convinced "that she hadn't really abandoned [him]" (47). Although all

three characters create different narratives, they all desert the abandoning mother. For Karl "it came quite naturally that the man in the white sweater, leather helmet, orange gold scarf had stolen her off against her will" (47), whereas Mary kills off the mother when she imagines that Omar dropped--abandoned--her mother "overboard" (15). Then, in a reverse narrative, Mary sends a postcard with an aerial view of Argus to tell her mother that "All three of your children [are] starved dead" (52). Significantly, Omar is the person who makes sure Adelaide gets the card. All three narratives support Irigaray's thesis that "to speak of or about woman may always boil down to, or be understood as, a recuperation of the feminine within a logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, nonrecognition" (This Sex 78).

The counter-narrative of Adelaide as abandoning mother is told by Sita. In her version, Adelaide's flight is told in romantic terms. According to Sita, Adelaide is

sucked up into a cloud. Her bones hollowed like a bird's. Her wings never made that terrible chicken sound, thrashing earth, but no sound at all. She didn't have to flap but effortlessly swerved into the streams and the currents that flow, invisible, above us. So she flew off. (259)

But this invisible and soundless flight leaves only spaces to be filled by demonic, abandoned, or romantic notions of

the abandoning mother. This version, like the others, withdraws agency from the abandoning mother: she is abandoned, stolen, or swept away. Ironically, Omar's version of Adelaide as martyr is the only narrative that bestows agency; but here it is only sacrifice without meaning.

In contrast to Adelaide's (non)mobility, the mobility associated with Fleur Pillager, also an abandoning mother, prevents her being contained by someone else's physical shelter or someone else's idea of her. In Thurmer-Rohr's terms, Fleur resists fitting into a paradigm where "the worthiness of the male and the worthlessness of the female are bound up with the woman's readiness to be empty, to prepare her 'dwelling' for man; being fulfilled by a man, through him, requires her to reserve a space for him to inhabit, give content to, illustrate" (103). Fleur wanders in exile, belonging to land neither on nor off the reserve. She might seemingly belong nowhere, but her exile differs from that of Adelaide, for at least she has mobility. A new world Gypsy, Fleur carries her home in her cart. In no way can she be identified with potential sites of domestic madness. Thus her mobility allows her to resist Jean Baudrillard's suburban homes that

have something of the grave about them. . . .

The unspeakable house plants, lurking everywhere like the obsessive fear of death, . . . and lastly, the wife and children, as

glowing symptoms of success . . . everything here testifies to death having found its ideal home. (30)

Further, Fleur resists the economic basis of capitalism. She makes her living by bartering and pedalling used goods: "mismatched plates, mended cups, and secondhand forks" (44). Her customers cannot pin her down: "they were wary and approached her with a hint of fear, as if she were a witch or maybe a saint cast off to wander" (46). As in Irigaray's desire to jam the theoretical machinery, here the two opposing representations of witch and saint, although still present, are confused.

Unlike Fleur, June, and even Pauline, Adelaide abandons her children to no one in particular, just as she has abandoned herself to an empty sky. After she flies off with Omar--appropriately at an "Orphan's Picnic, a bazaar held to benefit the homeless children" (10)--her children (with the exception of the baby, who is abducted by a father whose baby has died) realize they are "thoroughly lost" (13). Mary, forever resourceful, is able to find her aunt and uncle in Argus and to make herself "essential to them all, so depended upon that they could never send [her] off" (18). Her aunt and uncle eventually leave Argus, but her created home is the butcher shop, not the people who populate it. She recognizes that "the shop was my perfect home" (61). After Fritzie and Pete leave, Mary renames "Kozka's Meats"

"The House of Meats." Eccentric as she may appear, Mary is able to ground herself in family matters. Through her relationship to Celestine James and to her niece, Dot, she creates an extended family that acts as a shelter from the town of Argus. Nonetheless, Mary lives a life that is a reaction to her abandonment. Her need to be both an aunt and a sister to Dot makes Celestine feel as if she has "two unruly daughters who won't listen or mind me" (193).

Mary's brother, Karl, although Celestine's lover and the biological father of Dot, does not share the same shelter. His life also is highly influenced by Adelaide's abandonment, but in his case it leads to a rebirth through Fleur: "[w]hile I was dead to the world, Fleur Pillager proceeded to knead, mold, and tap the floating splinters of my bones back into the shape of ankles, feeling her own from time to time to get the right shape" (44). Just as Karl's ankles take the same shape as Fleur's, so too does his life: like Fleur, he lives in exile, yet unlike Fleur's, his exile is without meaning: "I give nothing, take nothing, mean nothing, hold nothing" (285). His flight more closely resembles that of Adelaide. With characters like Adelaide and Karl, Erdrich's novel implies that issues of displacement and representation are not confined simply to race or gender.

One character who is not abandoned is Mary's cousin, Sita. But even though Sita is "housed" in a labyrinth of

shelters, her existence is similar to Karl's or to King's, who in Love Medicine is living off-reserve in a state of abandonment. But more so than these other Erdrich characters, Sita resembles Mona Simpson's character, Adele Diamond. At an early age she buys into the American narrative of progress and opportunity, and as is true for Adele, her version of it is blended into Friedan's feminine mystique. Sita waits, as Adele does, for the right husband and home to complete her. Her one attempt at business is riddled with ironic overtones. Sita remodels her exhusband's restaurant, which she receives in her divorce settlement, into a French restaurant. Like Mary, Sita gives a name to her place of business, Chez Sita. The failure of this restaurant is, however, indicative of Sita's larger predicament. While The House of Meats indicates a family business run inside a home, Chez Sita indicates that Sita herself is the home. Throughout The Beet Queen, this paradigm is constantly upheld. Sita deals in dreams of the domestic. As a young girl she wants to move to Fargo and marry a rich professional. This dream fails and is replaced by marriage to Jimmy, owner of an Argus steakhouse. When this marriage ends in divorce she marries Louis, a scientist of sorts. It is not surprising, then, that Sita looks up to her Aunt Adelaide:

I really thought that Mary just ran away from her mother because she could not appreciate

Adelaide's style. It's not everyone who understands how to use their good looks to the best advantage. My Aunt Adelaide did. She was always my favorite, and I just died for her to visit. But she didn't come often because my mother couldn't understand style either. (26)

Sita is paired with Adelaide, just as Mary is paired with Fritzie: mother/daughter relationships are based on patterns, not blood. Attempting to create her own pattern that will include Dot, Sita tells her "that she wasn't like her mother at all and resembled, around the nose and eyes, her grandmother Adelaide" (259). Sita informs Dot about her grandmother's flight in a way which "made it romantic, almost like a legend" (259). It is only when Dot rejects Sita's version of Adelaide, and discovers on her own how the consequences of flight are at best double-edged, that Dot is able to create her own pattern.

While a further manifestation of Adelaide's predicament, Sita's (imaginary) voice loss and her stay in the state mental hospital also take on larger ramifications in terms of female subjectivity. In the contained world of the psychiatric hospital, female representation contradicts female subjectivity: Mrs. Waldvogel, "the perfect grandmother" (186), believes that she is a cannibal. It is

this inconsistency which shocks Sita and causes her to get her voice back. Yet although Sita may speak again, she is never really cured; instead she becomes addicted to tranquilizers and exists in another kind of silence.

Sita's relationship to the domestic is another implicit form of silence. Describing the inside of Sita's house, Celestine speaks of it as "neutral," as a place where "you don't get any feeling about anyone who lives there" (242) and where the coffee is actually kept "in the green cannister labeled COFFEE" (243). Sita's relationship to her cannisters and, more generally, to the domestic is underscored by Mary and Celestine's more flexible relationship to the cannisters as containers of various things. Celestine tells Mary,

"I use my coffee cannister for trading stamps. . . . It fills up exactly the size of two booklets."

Mary brightens and draws her hand out of her bag.

"The flour bins," she says, "they're too small in those sets. That's where I like to keep my screwdriver and my canning tongs."

(244)

When Mary and Celestine check Sita's flour cannister it is full of flour, but it is also "crawling with pills" (244)-- pills which are the price of doing "things by the book"

(243). Thus only when she is close to death does Sita finally develop her own personal relationship to the domestic. Living in the most undomesticated part of the house, the recreation room, she transforms the pool table into a bed, using its pockets for her "rolled-up magazines, tumblers and hairbrush" (253). Ironically, the moment when she begins to take control of her life, she ends it.

Dot may believe that "there is a thread beginning with my grandmother Adelaide and travelling through my father and arriving at me. That thread is flight" (300). But the flight she takes does not last. When the plane touches ground, she is more grounded than ever before. In the air, she felt "too light, unconnected" (301). Dot's mobility returns her to the ground to be greeted by her mother and taken home. In Love Medicine, Dot is once again associated with flight but here it is with Gerry Nanapush's flights from prison. The child conceived with Gerry "is as restless a prisoner as its father, and grew more anxious and unruly as the time of release neared" (163). Dot represents a maternity that causes Albertine to realize that she "had a false view of pregnant women" because she "thought of them as wearing invisible halos, not committing mayhem" (157). Through Dot, Adelaide's flight is transformed into a return to the mother, and through Dot and Gerry, the powerful alliance between the Nanapush clan and the Kashpaws continues. In their totality, then, the discursive consequences of

abandonment are neither negative nor positive. However, Erdrich does suggest that individual and familial narratives must circulate, and that bartering and borrowing are discursive practices that ensure survival.

In Erdrich's tetralogy, meaningful flight is usually associated with the political: a flight from law to justice, or from recorded measurements to use value, or from conventional representations of motherhood to a mothering that can be freed from biological and cultural implications. When flight and abandonment are without purpose, however, they end in dereliction. The exception is when the clan can incorporate the act into a narrative pattern and transform it with meaning.

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Louise Erdrich's tetralogy creates a world where there are many concepts of motherhood. In this world, the abandoning mother is as vital a figure as the fostering mother. It is not my intention to glorify the abandoning mother; however, I want to emphasize the importance of abandoning social and ideological constructs traditionally associated with motherhood. Erdrich attempts to discard conventional representations of motherhood by her use of parody, her construction of multicultural settings, and her adjustment of the focus on marginal female characters. It is

only through a relinquishing of the traditional discourses that "mothering" will encompass a responsibility towards children that is ungendered. In these terms, an act of abandonment can also lead to an ethical responsibility that extends beyond biological connections. Another related way of understanding the mother's act of abandonment is to perceive it as an act of faith in a world that is larger than the nuclear family. An ethical change in this direction would also result in a discourse which makes way for the mother as subject in her own right: a spoken, but also speaking, mother.

NOTES

1. Erdrich was "called" for her lack of attention to race issues by Silko and was later supported by Castillo. I will contend that her so-called lack of attention to native problems is in itself a strategy to get at the issues.

2. Hertha D. Wong sees the characterization of Erdrich's style and form as either "Indian" or "female" to be problematic. She points out that Erdrich's texts are written as a form of collaboration with her husband, Michael Dorris, and concludes that, while "Erdrich's collaboration is certainly communal, it is also individual, mirroring the community of distinct voices in the novel and replicating the positive role of mothers as creators of identity and producers of meaning" (191).

3. Related to form is Erdrich's need to create a new way of historicizing the events she narrates. See Nancy J. Peterson for an analysis of how Erdrich attempts to destabilize but also rewrite the dominant historical narrative of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa:

since traditional written history, based on documents, is another kind of violence inflicted on oppressed peoples, Tracks features oral history. . . . [T]he evocation of the oral in a written text implicates this counterhistory in the historical narrative that it seeks to displace.

(985)

4. See Hirsch (175) and Silverman (105-07).

5. E. Ann Kaplan contends that

the lack of cultural discourses setting forth woman's subjective pleasures in mothering (apart from such pleasures taking place "der the auspices of the Father or the state) has still not been adequately studied; nor has the possibility of a desire for the child for its own sake been examined. No one has yet answered Kristeva's question, 'What is it about this representation (of the patriarchal or Christian Maternal) that fails to take account of what a woman might say or want of the Maternal . . . ?' (3-4)

6. Adrienne Rich differentiates between two types of motherhood: the potential relationship of any woman to the powers of reproduction and to children; and the institution, which aims at ensuring that that potential--and all women--shall remain under male control" (13).

7. Wong's article, although published after much of this chapter was written, is in agreement with many of my assumptions. She proposes that it is up to "the adoptive mothers and thrown-away youngsters . . . to reweave the broken strands of family, totem, and community into a harmonious wholeness" (191) and that the "[threat of] cultural extinction . . . is accentuated by those mothers who flee to the white towns or to the Catholic God" (191).

8. When June Kashpaw is off-reserve in an oil boom town she freezes in the snow; June's niece Albertine is off-reserve when she feels as though she were buried alive underneath her White landlord's home; Fleur is off-reserve when she is beaten and raped; and the non-Native character of Adelaide Adare from The Beet Queen, is off-reserve when she becomes caged in her own madness.

9. In Dorothy Allison's novel, Bastard Out of Carolina, a similar state of dereliction is depicted when Bone's Aunt Alma's husband refuses to father any more children. Her dereliction is characterized in a scene where she destroys the domestic site:

[Bone] opened the car door on [her] side and stepped out. There was a fork under my foot, the tine buried in the ground. Flatware was scattered everywhere, and an egg turner stuck up out of a broken flowerpot. [She] stepped over a smashed plate and saw dozens of spools of thread under the porch and a pair of pliers under the Pontiac's right front tire. Dust was on everything, making it hard to see what was what until [she] looked closely. Just past the fender, a little breeze lifted a tangle of red-brown curly hair from the hairbrush that lay near a shattered hand mirror. [Bone] bent over and saw a stack of faded pictures half-buried under the crushed petals of black-eyed susans and a smear of baby's breath. The fan

shaped wedge beside them looked like the venetian blinds that Aunt Alma had always hung in her bathroom. (267)

I find quite interesting the relationship here among female "madness," the destruction of the domestic site, and child-bearing or the lack thereof. As far as I can tell, the violence of the actual destruction is usually filtered or in the past; rarely is it ever dealt with "head on." Like childbirth, it is a silent narrative.

Vagrant Genres: Thelma & Louise and Leaving Normal

(Un) Settle the Frontier

Alone, I rediscover my mobility. Movement is
my habitat. My only rest is motion. Whoever
imposes a roof over my head, wears me out.
Let me go where I have not yet arrived.

Luce Irigaray

Better not look down, if you wanna keep on flyin'.
Put the hammer down, keep it full speed ahead.
Better not look back or you might just wind up cryin'.
You can keep it movin' if you don't look down . . .

B.B. King

To begin, I want briefly to consider B.B. King's song,
"Better Not Look Down." I call attention to this particular
song from the soundtrack of Thelma & Louise because it is
the one song the screen writer, Callie Khouri, has scripted
into the final shooting script and because the lyrics offer
an oblique analogy to the main focus of this chapter: female
movement in an already defined male grid.

In the first lines of "Better Not Look Down," King
establishes his authority as a seasoned wanderer by telling
us that he's "been around and [that he's] seen some things."
He then suggests that he has "some advice to pass along,
right here in the words to this song." But what I find

telling is, not so much his actual advice, as found in the above refrain, but that those who ask for his advice are female: his former girlfriend and the Queen of England. The ex-girlfriend asks, "B.B. do you think I've lived my life all wrong?"; the Queen of England wonders, "Oh B.B. sometimes it seems so hard to try to pull things together. Could you tell me what you think I ought to do?" In this song, inexperienced females--even one with enormous power--seek the wisdom of the experienced male. In Ridley Scott's Thelma & Louise (1991) and Edward Zwick's Leaving Normal (1992), unseasoned female characters attempt to escape their present situations by following the worn trails of Western heroes and outlaws.

By focusing on these two films, this chapter proposes to show how female vagrancy is articulated in the American popular imagination by way of American cinema. I will consider how female vagrancy is depicted when set against traditional male cinematic genres, those being the Western, the road film, and the buddy film; and necessarily related to this, how female vagrancy is depicted by the conventions of the camera and continuity editing in American cinema. More specifically, I am interested in the dynamics of a "contemporary" female movement embedded in an already defined male grid: that of the wandering hero-outlaw.

My primary interest is in Thelma & Louise, but I will conclude with a brief discussion of the lesser known Leaving

Normal to show how both films treat similar issues, but depict them through different narrative forms. These issues range from specific feminist issues, such as female representation, female mobility, and female subversion of the social order, to myths of the American imagination, such as 'lighting out for the territory,' re-inventing the self, and self-reliance. Although both films feature two women on the road, their motivations and their destinations, coupled with the narrative forms that encode their journeys, result in two distinct treatments of female vagrancy. In Thelma & Louise, the necessity of vagrancy in refiguring female subjectivity is conspicuous, . areas in Leaving Normal, vagrancy, although an obvious presence, is necessarily secondary to the characters' desire for creating a stable domestic dwelling. In the first section of this chapter I will situate female transience within the Western genre; in the second section I will situate transience within the road-trip genre but also within the frontier settlement narrative, a narrative which could be said to act as the domestic alternative to the Western. While Thelma & Louise attempts to unsettle the frontier--with its female outlaws on the run--Leaving Normal attempts to settle that same frontier.

Transience is defined as both homelessness and movement. While Thelma & Louise focuses on the desire for movement, Leaving Normal focuses on the desire to stop

moving. Yet, regardless of the motivation, both films are about escape. Although quite different from one another, they both may be thought of as existing within, while also appropriating, the American genres of the Western, the road-trip, and the buddy film. While Thelma & Louise has been touted as a feminist revision of various cinematic genres from the Western to the Adventure film, it is the Western genre, I would contend, that is most salient, although it could be argued that the logic behind much of the theorizing of the Western can be summed up quite simply: if a Western then a road trip. Leaving Normal might also be viewed in terms of the Western frame, but unlike Thelma & Louise, this film departs from, rather than appropriates, the Western. Although the ghost of the Western remains, once the major Western motifs have been cast off the characters enter what might be called a version of the buddy-road film. Then, when they do arrive at their destination, Eternity Bluff, Alaska, the road film is replaced by a rendition of life on the frontier. Though both films begin with all the trappings of the Western, then, they attempt to escape the very genre that partially defines them by revising it into a different narrative--or, to use a metaphor more appropriate to Thelma and Louise, these films attempt to get to the end of their narrative without going through Texas, and they stick to the secondary roads in doing so. In theory, there are numerous narrative possibilities for a feminist revision of the

Western genre, as both Thelma & Louise and Leaving Normal confirm. However, the female characters in these films are not only entrapped in narrative conventions; for they are further entrapped in a history of technical and productional devices: cinematic conventions that uphold the very structure that the narratives attempt to disrupt. Like the mother outlaw, the female outlaw/vagrant is a figure represented in a conflicted space.

The idea of genre is in itself problematic. As argued by Jacques Derrida, "[a]s soon as the word 'genre' is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn" (52); but simultaneous to this "law" another "law" is evoked: "the law of the law of genre," which enacts "a principle of contamination, a law of impurity, a parasitical economy" (55). In the case of the Western, there are many examples of female characters whose sole purpose is to disrupt the formula, especially once it has been declared dead, as the Western has, many times over. In effect, then, the disruptive female character is used to put new life into an old formula. My intention here is not to study the changing social conditions of the Western, but to note that while the basic oppositions within the Western have evolved to reflect changing ideologies in American culture, the female role in the Western of the fifties, sixties, or even the eighties remains virtually the same.'

Even Nicholas Ray's "feminist" Western Johnny Guitar

(1954), which I will later discuss in more detail, has Vienna domesticated by the conclusion of the narrative. In George Roy Hill's parodic/revisionist Western Butch Cassidy and the Sun Dance Kid (1969) the outlaws become the heroes, whereas the school marm, who accompanies the outlaws to South America--significantly in the role of linguistic advisor, domestic cover, and the Kid's lover--eventually opts to return home. The narrative motivation for her return is based on her refusal to witness the death of the heroes. Her narrative ending, however, with a return to the domestic and the school, is the exact place where every female in a Western eventually ends up. In my discussion I often blur the categories of the classic and self-reflexive Western, but suffice it to say that even within these variations there are persistent conventions, especially in relation to female characters. Before considering the films, therefore, I will briefly survey certain elements of the Western--and I might add that many of these elements can be applied to other genres--that are pertinent to my study.

In cinema, as in literature, the Western, the road-trip, and the buddy narrative are not exclusive from one another. Arguably, in fact, one line of the American literary tradition of the transient may be traced from the Western and originates with the hero-outlaw figure. John Cawelti explains that

[t]he hero's membership in the masculine gang

and his initial rejection of domesticity relates to another trait he commonly possesses: his desire to keep moving. Just as Natty Bumppo felt he had to move on when the settler's cabins began to impinge on his wilderness, so the modern cowboy hero is represented as a bit of a drifter. (64)

Recalling versions of both Cooper and Emerson's traditions of self-reliance, both the Western and the road-trip are specifically American narrative structures. These genres continuously evoke Thoreau's rejection of "a cabin passage" for a place "before the mast and on the deck of the world" where one "best see[s] the moonlight amid the mountains" (343). The role of the "outlaw" fits easily into the Western and the road-trip: he is Natty Bumppo and he is Captain America. And as Leslie Fiedler reminds us, the American "outlaw" often has a buddy: Ishmael has Queequeg and Butch has the Sundance Kid. In these narratives it is not so much that these heroes exist outside of the law, but that they uphold a certain code of ethics despite the law. Like Louise Erdrich's escape artist character, Gerry Nanapush, they fight and often die for justice, not laws.

The hero or anti-hero of the Western is almost always defined by the desire for movement. In a certain sub-genre, after the correct "law"--based on justice--is established the hero must move on, to conquer new lawless territory. In

traditional Western narratives, whether they be the Leatherstocking novels of James Fenimore Cooper or the early films of John Ford, movement is always on some level concerned with the movement west, away from civilization; but paradoxically, the wandering hero is at the same time concerned with creating a "civil" world. Given this paradox, it is fitting that the Western setting is almost always associated with a literal or symbolic frontier. Most often, but not always, this frontier is defined by the clash of savagery versus civilization, lawlessness versus law and order, freedom versus restraint, or, as Jane Tompkins notes, things versus words (West 48); it is a place characterized by binary oppositions.

With few exceptions, Westerns are a male-dominated genre with female characters functioning as obstacles for the hero or villain. Even when female characters are protagonists, they are always aligned with the law. If they are blatantly against the established legal forces, by the end of the film they are reconciled to those forces; usually, they are married and firmly meshed in the domestic once more. Although these females can be of questionable character, they rarely, if ever, exist outside of society. They are almost exclusively aligned with civilization and, by extension, with the domestic. Even characters like Chihuahua, the bar maid in John Ford's classic Western My Darling Clementine (1946), and Mrs. Miller, the madam with

an entrepreneurial spirit in Robert Altman's revisionist Western McCabe and Mrs. Miller (1971), though of questionable moral character, are confined by the domestic. By the end of My Darling Clementine, Chihuahua is bathed in soft light as she dies a saintly death, while Mrs. Miller, because she oversteps her proper place in the Western genre, is left to waste away in an opium den. Perhaps the most extreme example of this female character is Altar Keane, in Fritz Lang's Rancho Notorious (1952), who dies when she takes a bullet meant for the hero. Significantly, before she dies she is made to feel repentant for successfully hiding fugitives from the law and thus being complicit in the crimes they have committed. The majority of female characters, however, keep relatively still. Usually the movement has taken place before the film opens and if it has not, the ride is almost always in a buggy, in the enclosed space of a stagecoach, or in a bandwagon with a man at the reins. In Ray's Johnny Guitar, Vienna has long ago packed away her trunk, and her life is focused on remaining in one place and building a town around her.²

As many critics have recognized, then, the movement in a Western is triggered by a need to escape home and the woman who embodies the values associated with the hearth. Leslie Fiedler, writing about the Western tradition in literature, states that "westering, in America, means leaving the domain of the female, since in our classic books

fathers are usually invisible or conveniently dead" (60). But westering for a female character is often simply to wait for the hero's return. In West of Everything, Jane Tompkins argues not only that the Western is a reaction against the domestic novel of the nineteenth century, but further, that it

answers the domestic novel. It is the antithesis of the cult of domesticity that dominated American Victorian culture. The Western hero, who seems to ride in out of nowhere, in fact comes riding in out of the nineteenth century. . . . If the Western deliberately rejects evangelical Protestantism and pointedly repudiates the cult of domesticity, it is because it seeks to marginalize and suppress the figure who stood for those ideals. (39)

Tompkins extends this point in suggesting that, by "repeating the pattern of domestic novels in reverse, Westerns either push women out of the picture completely or assign them roles in which they exist only to serve men" (39-40). Given this structure, one might question whether the Western is an impossibility when a female character takes the reins. Does the appropriation of the genre imply simply a reversal of genders? What is important for my purposes is that by framing my discussion of the female

vagrant in the context of the Western genre, I can consider how the social construction of woman is contained not only by spoken narrative and visual images but also by the invisible technical devices inherent in the production of that screened narrative. The two films in question suggest that the female vagrant seeks to dismantle roles, whether male or female, which traditionally define gender; however, these films also suggest the impossibility of dismantling all narrative devices that project the vagrant.

In the case of Thelma & Louise, it is not the actual film, but much of the media's response--yet another narrativization which projects--that constructs it as simply a reversal of genders. For example, Margaret Carlson claims that Thelma and Louise "become like any other shoot-first-and-talk-later action heroes" (57); Richard Schickel thinks of the film as a "gender bender" as opposed to a "genre-bender" (52); while Patricia Kowal believes that, "[b]y choosing simply to place two female characters in a male-oriented action-adventure, . . . the filmmakers created a motion picture which merely worships that which is viewed traditionally as male and denigrates all that is powerful in being female" (402). Kowal's criticism represents a common assumption that the "male" can be and has been "traditionally" represented, but that the "female" is simply and essentially female.

Certainly it is true that like the traditional cowboys

of yore these two women are escaping from domestic restraints; but the domesticity they are escaping is more aptly aligned with Jacques Lacan's Law of the Father than with a maternal or feminine space. In this they are unlike Fiedler's Western heroes: for these female characters, the Father is very much alive and present. And while the impetus for escape is initially a domestic form of the Law of the Father, by the end that Law extends to subtle refinements of public law. As Thelma comments, "The law is some tricky shit."³ As I will later argue, the Frontier Thelma and Louise are after is the space beyond patriarchy. And this, rather than the fact that they are usurping the roles of "shoot-first-and-talk-later action heroes," is one reason why their vagrancy disrupts the genre. They are not simply appropriating the use of guns and automobiles; they are indirectly deflating the phallus which gives symbolic value to these objects.

Thelma & Louise is about the misadventures of Thelma Dickinson (Geena Davis) and Louise Sawyer (Susan Sarandon).⁴ The two women leave for the mountains to enjoy a weekend of fishing, but due to bad luck and a series of bad moves they never arrive. What ensues is a road trip that creates of the once traditional women two fugitives. And although their original destination is the mountains, their arrival at the Grand Canyon is a fitting symbol of the reversal that takes place. What begins as a weekend away from home--their

motivation initially connected, in part, to knocking some sense into their men--ends up by taking on the connotations of a mythical journey. As I will later argue, these women not only become the protagonists of a Western, they also disrupt the male gaze and reach a moment of "transcendence" when their literal mobility on the road is transferred to a moment of "spiritual" mobility, evoked by the conventions of nineteenth-century Emersonian transcendence--that is, a transcendence brought on by one's relationship to the landscape. Like Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's The Awakening, Thelma and Louise attempt to transcend any possible female representation offered by the social construct. They evolve into active agents, creating their own narrative--a narrative, however, which leads them to glimpse into their own anteriority and eventually to opt for death. Their transience leads them to transgress boundaries, and once they have "crossed over" they realize they cannot cross back.

As Thelma & Louise gains momentum, it moves further and further west and further and further into the Western. But it is a Western concerned with a woman's place in the social organization, told from the perspective of the female. Although the camera roams casually around their moving automobile, often the shots do not originate from, and are not controlled by, the male gaze. In other words, once they become fugitives the narrative changes and becomes, as Ann

Putnam argues, "the story of female protagonists who reject their status as objects of the male gaze, and appropriate the power of the gaze for themselves, and by doing so enter into narratives of their own making" (293). In this respect the subject matter of this film sharply contrasts with that of the Western structure that houses it; it is like a vagrant in the genre that defines it. While the opening credits evoke the Western--country and western music defines the soundtrack and the only interruption in an otherwise untouched landscape is a long shot of an empty dirt road--the enclosures that characterize the opening sequence sharply undercut this initial impression. While the soundtrack creates a sound-bridge into the opening shot of the diner where Louise is waitressing, and then to Thelma's kitchen where she is pouring coffee, in both introductory sequences Thelma and Louise are framed in a series of medium and close-up shots, smack in the centre of the domestic.

In addition, the mise-en-scenes of both the diner and kitchen are crowded and cluttered. Thelma, housed in a small dark kitchen, with the ceiling in view, looks as though she is caught in some kind of domestic prison. Her jittery movements and repetitive actions, reinforced by the feeling of instability rendered through the hand-held camera, serve only to augment the image of someone who is not in control. The telephone conversation between her and Louise reinforces this: Louise addresses her as "little housewife" and when

she discovers that Thelma has not yet told Darryl that she and Louise are going away for the weekend, Louise asks her, "For Christ sake, Thelma, is he your husband or your father?" Louise, on the other hand, who walks with purpose through the diner, seems to have more control than Thelma. Although the diner is crowded, it has a large window that lets in light and suggests that the outside is easily accessible. Nonetheless, like Thelma, Louise--pouring coffee for someone other than herself--is also hemmed in by the domestic. Louise's apartment, spare and neat to the point of neurosis, is also quite different from Thelma's house, which is cluttered and under renovation, both inside and out. Louise's character is pinned down when she packs her shoes in a plastic bag. It is tempting to read these characters as antithetical, but what becomes clear, as the film progresses, is their similarities. Almost literalizing the fades used when Thelma and Louise are in the Thunderbird convertible, the two characters seem by the last shot to merge into one. Their vagrancy leads them to dismantle traditional feminine roles and to appropriate alternative roles, only to dismantle them and then appropriate other roles. For Thelma and Louise, stepping into character always means stepping out of character.⁵

Visual icons have always played an integral part in the characterizations of the Western. In the classic Western, characters are defined by the colour of their hat. In a

revisionist Western like McCabe and Mrs. Miller, the viewer is alerted to possible weaknesses in the character of McCabe because he is introduced wearing a bowler hat and looks too much like a dandy to fill the requirements of a "real" Western hero. In the campy film, Johnny Guitar, Vienna-- although she initially materializes, in black pants and shirt, mimicking the clothes of a gunslinger--appears in the climactic scene dressed in a tulle white gown, while Emma Small, the town conscience, is dressed in funereal black. What is important for this discussion is that they are dressed to contrast with each other.

A similar use of icons appears in Thelma & Louise, but it is doubly misleading. Initially, Thelma and Louise are introduced in what one might call domestic apparel: Thelma wears a housecoat and Louise wears a white waitress uniform. By changing into iconic Western clothing, they then step into the Western. Louise wears jeans and a white shirt with black embroidery that suggests a kind of lasso look (she seems to have packed the black bolero jacket that she earlier tries on in her bedroom), while Thelma wears an off-the-shoulder blouse and a Western skirt and jean jacket. It is significant that the Western iconography appears somewhat confused. It is the experienced Louise, with her buttoned up white shirt, who looks like the school marm, Clementine Carter, while the innocent Thelma, with her hair down and her Mexican clothing, resembles the experienced saloon girl,

Chihuahua. However, this confusion extends beyond these particular mixed icons: in almost all Westerns if a female character is initially dressed in pants, by the end of the narrative she is most certainly wearing a dress. In Thelma & Louise their initial attire is related to the domestic, but throughout the film, in various ways that will be discussed later, they shift to masculine dress. Further, once they are mobile, it is only a matter of scenes before Thelma is wearing Louise's jacket and her sunglasses. Along the road, both characters borrow and steal various items of clothing that take them beyond any simple masculine mimicry and into a disruption of the social order.

It is only shortly after Thelma and Louise are on the road that Thelma's desire for transformation becomes evident. While pretending to smoke an unlit cigarette, she watches herself in the side-view mirror, the moving landscape in the background. Louise asks her what she is doing, and she replies in a tough voice, "Smoking. (pause) Hey, I'm Louise." Thelma's attempt to mimic the seasoned and "independent" Louise is thus experienced by the viewer as a mirror-image. The mimicry later becomes reciprocal: midway through the narrative Thelma is donning Louise's black bolero jacket, while Louise is wearing Thelma's sunglasses. What becomes apparent is that, rather than being opposed, these two characters increasingly overlap. Rather than merely collapsing into each other, however, they move

through a series of appropriations by means of iconic costume. By the end of the narrative, Thelma is wearing a trucker's hat and a black t-shirt (sleeves ripped off) that resembles something out of Dennis Hopper's Easy Rider (1971), while Louise is wearing a cowboy hat and the policeman's sunglasses. The appropriation of costume, all items somehow signifying past Westerns, works as a way of undermining the social order. Donning these articles of clothing becomes a form of empowerment, however destructive.

Thelma's experimentation with different roles begins before they actually become fugitives, but this role-playing is limited to traditional representations. In the Silver Bullet, Louise comments that she is used to a more "sedate" Thelma. Throughout the initial sequence with Harlan (Timothy Carhart), Thelma acts very coquettishly, literally batting her eyelashes. The limited number of "appropriate" female roles available to Thelma outside of the domestic sphere becomes apparent after the murder of Harlan for his killing also kills off any possibility of acting in traditional roles. In this light, the playing of Tammy Wynette's song "I Don't Want to Play House" on the juke box at the truck stop becomes doubly ironic; it refers to Thelma's eventual realization that returning to Darryl is worse than death, but also to the fact that once Louise commits murder, there is only unmapped territory available to them; there is no more "playing" out of traditional roles. The impossibility

of available roles becomes quickly apparent when they stop at the motel. Not used to seeing Thelma angry, Louise asks her, "Why are you actin' like this?" Thelma's response is indicative not only of her own state of mind, but also of their overall condition: "Actin' like what?! How am I supposed to act? 'Scuse me for not knowing how to act when you blow someone away." Once they exhaust any possibility of appropriate female representations, Thelma and Louise begin to appropriate male models, as signified by the borrowing, trading, and stealing of clothes. Even though the killing of Harlan immediately renders them "fugitives," it is only much later that they are able to identify themselves as such. Louise tells Thelma, "You just gotta stop talking to people. You just gotta stop being so open. We're fugitives now, alright. Let's start behaving like that." At this point they step into character and begin to perform as fugitives.

Not surprisingly, it is Louise who is able to articulate the situation, but not until she makes up her mind to go to Mexico. Initially, she stalls for time because she is not ready to go to jail. But soon she wants to avoid jail entirely and to do so she must become Billy the Kid or Butch Cassidy; she must become the outlaw that escapes to Mexico. Thelma is not so quick to cross over. En route to pick up the getaway money, Louise gives Thelma the option of returning to Darryl or going with her. Thelma's response suggests that she wants someone else--in this case, Louise--

to make the decision for her; she tells Louise that she is not sure what Louise is asking of her, not sure what she is saying. Louise's response, like Thelma's earlier retort in the motel room, points not only to the past and the present, but also to their future:

Now, don't you, don't you start flaking out on me. Goddamnit Thelma, every time we get into trouble you just get blank or plead insanity or some such shit. Not this time. This time things have changed. Everything has changed. But I'm going to Mexico. I'm going.

Louise chooses not to let Thelma fall back on any of the previous roles made available to women gone wrong: she won't be psychotic or schizophrenic. Madness is not an answer. In this way there is an attempt to enter a space that is beyond patriarchy.

In Thelma & Louise two women slowly break away from female representations defined in relation to patriarchy and attempt to move towards something different. Throughout the film there is both a loss of "identity" and a series of transformations. When Louise informs Thelma that "everything has changed" so she has to stop drawing "blank," she implies that Thelma must become responsible for her own reading and interpretation of the unfamiliar world which they are travelling through. But their ensuing unstable identities are further contained within the codes of classic Hollywood

cinema. The following discussion considers how the characterizations of Thelma and Louise are often overwhelmed by the invisible technical devices which contribute to, and often control, the narrative.

For instance, in the sequence with Harlan both inside and outside the Silver Bullet, the camera tends to mimic Louise's statement that she hasn't "seen a place like this since [she] left Texas." During this sequence the camera frames Thelma and Louise as objects of desire; as in the traditional camera movements in the Western, the camera is aligned with a controlling male gaze. Similarly on the dance floor, Harlan appears as if he is not dancing with Thelma but holding her in a head lock. Putnam points out that this is the scene which

highlights the screen image of woman as spectacle. Nowhere is this more easily seen than in the line dance sequence which is itself pure spectacle, and it plays out like a scene out of a musical, which is the way the narrative always acts when a woman walks into the scene: the entrance of the woman onto the screen stops the narrative and freezes the action. What had begun as a prelude to the dance, a sequence of gazes and return gazes, a ritual ceremony of looking and being looked at, culminates in the

invitation to the dance and everything that follows. (294)

These "gazes and return gazes" are evoked once more--in the murder scene itself--but this time with quite different results. A pivotal point in the film comes during the shot/reverse shot exchange between Louise and Harlan: in a series of more than ten increasingly short and fast cuts between them, a traditional gunfight is evoked. While he holds his dick (so to speak), Louise holds the gun, and in this scenario that which symbolizes male sexuality is more powerful than the thing itself. Consequently, the symbol of the phallic is deflated. Their "shoot-out" is also replayed as a verbal exchange:

Harlan: "I should have went ahead and fucked her."

Louise: "What did you say?"

Harlan: "I said, suck my cock."

And bam, Louise shoots him, getting in the last word, "You watch your mouth, buddy." Importantly, she gets in the final word here, because the linguistic aggression by men--as picked up again in the scene between Thelma and Louise and the trucker--is as devastating as the physical aggression. It is, in fact, the linguistic aggression not the physical aggression which triggers the murder. Louise not only murders Harlan, but she also, with Thelma, attempts to change the rules of the Western. They will no longer be looked at; instead, they will do the looking.

Yet appropriation of the controlling male gaze is no small task. As Laura Mulvey was the first to theorize, the male gaze is linked to scopophilia and is central to mainstream cinema. Mulvey also extends the male gaze to the cinema audience and connects it to the larger structure of narrative:

According to the principles of the ruling ideology and the physical structures that back it up, the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification. Man is reluctant to gaze at his exhibitionist like. Hence the split between spectacle and narrative supports the man's role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen. The man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extradiegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle. This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects

his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (20)

In contrast to what Mulvey describes, Thelma & Louise incorporates two protagonists who are female and further, aligns the spectator's gaze with these two characters, who on occasion objectify the male body. Consequently, in the later scenes with J.D., the camera is aligned with Thelma's point of view, not J.D.'s. Two obvious subjective point of view shots occur when Thelma, situated in the car, watches J.D. walk towards her in the side view mirror. Later, in the parking lot of the Vagabond Motel, she watches him walk away through the rear window, commenting, "I love to watch him go." Although Thelma (and Louise by implication) is eventually duped by J.D., the viewer is made to feel that there was more of an exchange than a dupe. Thelma not only has an orgasm and finds out what the "fuss" is all about; she also finds an appropriate role model as an outlaw. Because J.D. incorporates proper manners in the guise of gestures and verbal niceties, he introduces Thelma to a new kind of outlaw, one that even she can emulate. Ironically, these same traits have enabled him to "rob" Thelma.

The lovemaking scene between J.D. and Thelma also

offers, however, a disturbing parallel with the attempted rape of Thelma by Harlan. In both scenes, the camera focuses on a medium close-up shot of Thelma's backside. Although the narrative context undermines the parallel shot--in the scene with Harlan Thelma is overpowered, while in the scene with J.D. Thelma is obviously on top--the camera's objectification of Thelma's body acts to undermine the narrative context. Thus while the narrative space of Thelma & Louise continuously attempts to create a vagrancy that is free from the patriarchal order, the technical devices that house that narrative often, although not always, uphold that which the narrative attempts to escape.

Another device which might be said to contribute to the "characterizations" of Thelma and Louise is the narrativization by the media. By considering the response of the reviewers I want to look at yet another aspect of Thelma and Louise's unstable identities. Because Ridley Scott utilizes continuity editing in Thelma & Louise, the film invites a realist reading and, consequently, questions of verisimilitude enter any discussion of the characterizations of Thelma and Louise. Within the media's varying responses to Thelma & Louise there is a general view that Louise should fess up to Thelma about her traumatic experience in Texas. Alice Cross best represents the overall opinion that

There is a perfect moment, near the end of

the movie, when Louise ought to share her secret. The women have outgrown their conventional roles and self-absorbed men. They're bold and angry enough to humiliate the grimvisaged policeman and the obnoxious truck driver. Why, then, can't they talk? Thelma has been assaulted, too, as she reminds Louise. She wants to know what has hurt her friend so grievously. Louise will only say, 'I'm not going to talk about it.' If we are to believe that the women's experiences have led them to a deeper, richer comradeship and understanding than any shared with men, then why not show the connection here, a bond of abuse now transcended, however recklessly and fatally? (33)

In a similar tone, Margaret Carlson believes that "(t)he characters don't confide in each other as real life women would. When Thelma asks what happened in Louise's secret past in Texas that makes her murderous, Louise refuses to talk and warns her not to ask about it" (5); in a similar vein, Patricia Kowal complains that "the two women are never afforded many moments of intimate relating" (400). Possibly, these reactions are more related to the healing of the "inner child" phenomenon of the early nineties and to the "confess and bond" imperative that characterizes certain

strands of feminism than they are to the film. But, in the context of the Western, these criticisms are rather absurd. It seems perfectly reasonable that Louise should not confess because their relationship has moved beyond this traditionally "feminine" kind of exchange. Their vagrancy has taken them beyond the "essential" female traits of "bonding" and "confiding." Unwittingly, these criticisms continue to question the film's unconventional "representations." Like the technical devices that overwhelm and eroticize Thelma and Louise's run from the law--perhaps, indeed, because of this eroticization--the reviews in the media work hard to encode Thelma and Louise's characterization in gender terms.

Before I finish this discussion of Louise's failure to confide in Thelma, I want to take a closer look at the scene in question:

Thelma: It happened to you . . . didn't it?

Louise: What?

Thelma: In Texas. I mean that's what . . .
that's what happened. You were raped.

Louise: (pulls over, leans over and possibly
grabs Thelma's shirt) Hey now look . . . I'm
warning you. Just drop it! I'm not gonna talk
about that! You understand?

Thelma: Ya.

Louise: I'm not talking about it!

Thelma: Okay.

Louise: You understand?

Thelma: Ya okay, Louise . . . It's okay . . .

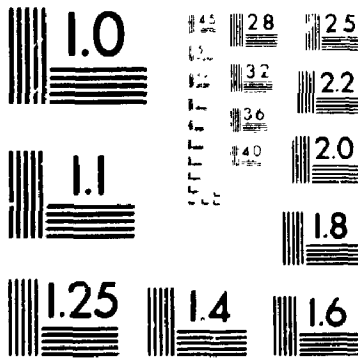
It's okay.

The narrative gap here and Louise's later silence when the detective, Hal Slocumbe, tells Louise, "I know what's makin' you run. I know what happened to you in Texas," strongly suggests what happened in Texas. These narrative gaps, coupled with Louise's familiarity with the subtleties of the law, suggest that she has been not only physically abused by someone, but also linguistically abused by the legal system: in other words, she has been physically and linguistically "fucked over." In this situation taking control is equivalent to remaining silent, rejecting the verbal. Thus Louise's refusal to speak is not articulated as a passive moment, it is actively aggressive. She's not "talking about it" and she's not making "any deals."

Jane Tompkins asks, "Why does the Western hate women's language?" One of her responses is that "[m]en would rather die than talk, because talking might bring up their own unprocessed pain or risk a dam burst that would undo the front of imperturbable superiority" (West 66-67). In Thelma & Louise, however, the relationship between language and the social organization is not restricted to any one paradigm. Despite Louise's silence and Thelma's appropriation of a "masculine" language, Louise and Thelma also attempt

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linguistically to domesticate those who offend them. One of the primary motivating forces behind the killing of Harlan and the blowing up of the sixteen wheeler is the failure by Harlan and the trucker to respond with appropriate language. To speak rudely is to be blown away. The demand for verbal propriety is thus used as a tool against the kind of patriarchy that unrealistically defines woman as sexual object. Louise's final words to Harlan are, "You watch your mouth, buddy." Before the blow-up of the rig, Thelma and Louise attempt to make the trucker apologize for his behaviour, but he cannot bring himself to do so; "no way," he insists and calls them "bitches."

Language is also used as an external sign that Thelma has gone from housewife to fugitive. After the murder of Harlan, she ends one of her first conversations with Darryl, and in effect her marriage, by telling him, "Go fuck yourself." When she rejoins Louise, Thelma asks her "So how long before we're in Goddamn Mexico?" She asserts herself through language. Before this point, she has not sworn; but after this point even the tone of her voice is transformed from high to low, as her language changes. She no longer draws blank; she has found, not necessarily her own voice, but a series of voices to draw upon.

When the parameters of realism shift to include implications of genre, verisimilitude of characters becomes less important. Certainly, Thelma & Louise is about the

female identity in the nineties, but it is also a response to film conventions and the big myths of America. More than a sociological or psychological study, Thelma & Louise is about representation.

Nowhere is this more clear than in the shots of first, Thelma, and then, Louise, in the passenger seat looking in the rear view mirror. An almost classic shot of femininity in Hollywood Cinema is that of the female passenger tilting the rear view mirror to apply lipstick. Under the usual circumstances this shot is one directed at the controlling masculine gaze. In Thelma & Louise lipstick signifies the limitations of traditional female identity or, as Cathy Griggers notes, "trouble with lipstick signifies trouble with either feminine identity or the social contexts and consequences of femininity" (139). Griggers explicates this trouble by noting the condition of Thelma's lipstick during the stop-over at the Silver Bullet:

Thelma's innocently applied lipstick--here a marker of traditional, straight femininity--becomes a sign of her potential status as victim and object of denigration. By the end of the scene, her face is smeared with lipstick and mascara; her mask is ruined, a sign that traditional femininity has failed her. (139)

Another lipstick scene occurs during one of the more

unsettling moments in the film. While Thelma is offscreen enacting her first hold-up, Louise, waiting in the passenger seat of the car, notices a pair of older women staring at her through the plate glass window of a coffee shop. These women are made to look like caricatures, a mimicry of the female gender: their hair is curled and stiff, their faces are overly made up. Through the plate glass they look as if they are not only curious but a bit envious. Their expressions suggest more than wondering about the strangers in town. Their gaze makes Louise self-conscious enough to take out her lipstick, but the moment her eyes meet her own in the rear view mirror, she sighs and throws away the lipstick. Her relationship to "lipstick" changes as the origin of the gaze shifts from the external in the guise of the traditionally feminine women to an internalizing, and ultimately, a rejection of the gaze. At the next stop Louise trades all of her jewelry, including, presumably, the engagement ring from Jimmy, for a weathered straw cowboy hat. Whether stripping away or reconstructing identity, both characters are never fixed in any one role. Their "identity" is always mobile.

In the vast desert landscape, Thelma and Louise's vagrancy, their un-becoming, is underscored by a failing American dream of progress, made evident by the fossilized small town they drive through. While traditional Westerns create a clash between civilization and wilderness, in this

Western, civilization is specifically refigured as patriarchal technology. Initially, it is Louise's vehicle which might be discerned as intrusive. The first extreme long shot of the moving Thunderbird sharply contrasts with the landscape it speeds through, full of grazing cattle and decrepit barns. But almost immediately--in fact, the moment they decide to stop--their place on the freeway is dwarfed by semi-trucks.⁶ Before they stop at the Silver Bullet, the changing light and the "assault" by a street-cleaning truck that showers their open convertible foreshadow Harlan's attempted rape of Thelma, which significantly takes place against the trunk of a car in a parking lot which is seemingly devoid of people, but full of cars. Thus Thelma and Louise quickly move, to use Leo Marx's configuration, from the garden to the machine; from the pastoral to the highly industrialized; or from the safety of the settlement to the Wild West. They are fugitives by their mere attempt to appropriate for their own use the male symbols of the automobile and of the gun, snug in the womb-like enclosure of Louise's purse. The mere fact that they are in the driver's seat changes their status from that of secondary to that of primary character, especially on the big screen. When they drive away from the parking lot of the Silver Bullet, they zig zag in and out of traffic. But for Thelma and Louise their mobility is continuously checked by masculine technology.

One configuration of this technology is the railway, which often appears in the Western and whose function is to point to the oncoming wave of civilization. By those in the town it is desired, but for the wandering hero the railway is often a source of trouble, connected to the arrival of a female, a hold-up, or some kind of entrepreneurial plot. So it is for Thelma and Louise. After they decide to escape to Mexico they are stopped at a rail road crossing, the map flapping on Thelma's lap as they attempt to discover a route to Mexico by secondary roads that by-pass Texas. The sound of the train drowns the sound of the moving map and their voices. But the train is just one of many manifestations of the numerous technological assaults on the two. If at first the viewer experiences a sense of freedom at seeing Thelma and Louise speeding down the road, that freedom (and hope) is quickly undermined when a crop duster, like the train, drowns out the sound of their radio. Their speeding car, viewed through an extreme long shot, seems minuscule in comparison to the tip of the plane's wing, seen close-up in the corner of the frame, and to the sound of the motor that becomes increasingly loud. This same crop duster, appearing out of nowhere, prefigures the helicopter that is part of the posse that hunts them down.

These machines--crop dusters, street cleaners, trains, and eighteen wheelers--seem to stalk Thelma and Louise from the moment they leave home. For the eventual blowing up of

the rig acts more as a response to the continuous assault on Thelma and Louise by patriarchal technology than to one isolated confrontation. The encounters with the semi are numerous and seem to fall in strategic points in the narrative, before Thelma and Louise actually "force" the issue. What Thelma and Louise can never forget is that heading out for the territory beyond patriarchy is to manoeuvre Louise's Thunderbird through a landscape brimming with male authority.

But it is not only external figures of male authority that track them. All along the secondary roads there are phonecalls to Thelma's husband, to Louise's boyfriend, and to Hal, the private investigator. Like the industrial presence, the law of the Father is constantly present; the women's mobility is constantly checked. Thom Noble's editing also emphasizes this relentless presence of the Law. For example, a typical edit is apparent when Thelma and Louise are driving from their motel room in Arkansas to the Vagabond Motel in Oklahoma City, with the sound track situating them as "standing at the crossroads," and the camera cuts to the police station where their whereabouts are being discussed. The camera then cuts back to the image of their car speeding down the road, but this time with their backs to the camera and the dialogue from the police station bridging into this next cut. The picture, then, is a long-shot from behind their moving car, with Hal's sidekick

saying, "Well, why don't we go ahead and let the Bureau in on this?" The tension that is produced from these cuts, that of opposing the visual images with the sound track, implies that the Law is never far off; and for the viewer Thelma and Louise's actions seem to be under constant surveillance.

Even Thelma's hold-up, although initially treated as successfully overcoming their dire straits, is doomed from the outset. She does not narrate her story; instead the viewer is aligned with the law and with her husband, as they watch the bird's eye security video. Her robbery finances the escape to Mexico, but it also facilitates the Law in locating them. Her "calling" is over before it has begun. At this point, it is as if the conventions of classical Hollywood cinema can no longer accommodate the escape of Thelma and Louise, and thus the camera shuts down and lets the security camera take over. The duplicity in the narrative is also present in the camera movements. After the actual hold-up, but before the viewer witnesses it, the camera tracks the get-away car in such a way as to render the mobile car as, not only stationary, but trapped. Initially the Thunderbird enters the screen from frame right, the camera tracking the license plate so closely as to give the illusion of standing still, and then when the camera cuts again, the Thunderbird enters the screen from the opposite direction, frame left. The effect of the camera movement and the use of screen space is that Thelma and

Louise seem trapped: they are caught in mid-motion. Significantly, it is the license plate, that which identifies them in the Law, which is the focal point of the camera. The videotape "catching" Thelma on tape parallels the camera's ability to render their mobility as immobility, reinforcing their lack of freedom. However, it is important to realize that the same edit that depicts them as caught also destroys the screen space as understood by classical Hollywood cinema. The 180-degree rule, central to continuity editing, is broken when the position of the camera jumps from one side of the screen to the other. In this instance, however, the jump-cut--traditionally used for disrupting realism and the viewer's pleasure--is used to uphold the Law.

Consequently, if Thelma and Louise are outlaws it is only in a minor space. In the world of patriarchal technology, as is made apparent by the continuous assault by other modes of technology, existing outside of the Law is an illusion.

By the last third of the movie, Louise's car has weathered, just as the two women have. Their tanned skin is without make-up and the colours of their clothes now tend to blend into the landscape. In contrast to the black and white car and uniform of the cop whom they politely lock in the trunk, and the marijuana-smoking cyclist who is dressed in bright yellows and reds, Thelma and Louise are visually at home in the landscape.⁷ like the men of the Western described by Tompkins who "imitate the land . . .; they try

to look as much like nature as possible. Everything blends imperceptibly into the desert" (72). Tompkins further explains that in the Western genre,

Nature is the one transcendent thing, the one thing larger than man (and it is constantly portrayed as immense), the ideal toward which human nature strives. . . . What is imitated is a physical thing, not a spiritual ideal; a solid state of being, not a process of becoming; a material entity, not a person; a condition of objecthood, not a form of consciousness. The landscape's final invitation--merger--promises complete materialization. Meanwhile, the qualities that nature implicitly possesses--power, endurance, rugged majesty--are the ones that men desire while they live. (West 72)

The privileged encounter with the landscape described here--fusion and the simultaneous empowerment for the subject--is also central in Emerson. Louise and Thelma's mobility leads them to an Emersonian moment of being as they become, in effect, Emerson's "transparent eyeball." But it must be remembered that in Emerson--as in the "IT" of Kerouac--transcendence is a masculine privilege. But like that of Edna, in Chopin's The Awakening, Thelma and Louise's "moment" can be seen as surpassing issues of gender and

patriarchal constraints. Even Mexico and the promise of changed names fade when compared to a moment that transcends how they have been represented by the social construct. In *Thelma and Louise's* scenario, transcendence is achieved through a negative process of un-becoming, rather than a positive arrival at a "solid state of being" as in the Western.

For both women their state of mind changes as the landscape becomes what at least appears to be the desert of New Mexico. While the cops are snug at Thelma's home, watching a melodrama, Louise and Thelma are being awed by the landscape and their seeming freedom of movement. For however brief a time, facilitated by the point of view shot, they are able to experience the land and their lack of a firmly constructed identity as separate from the controlling male gaze. Their present and always provisional "identity" surpasses any relationship they might have with their male partners and the ever-present law. In Elemental Passions, Luce Irigaray, searching for a female identity, describes a state of transcendence that is perhaps more appropriate for the two female outlaws than Emerson's: "for me infinity means movement, the mobility of place. Engendering time, yes. Always becoming. How can the future be brought to pass between your instants which are always already counted" (71). So as Thelma and Louise are driving through the desert buttes, the camera fades from a close-up of Louise to a

close-up of Thelma, merging their two identities, or it carefully moves from one close-up shot to another, keeping them in the same cut. When Thelma falls asleep, Louise steps outside of the car, and the camera pans the early morning sky from Louise's point of view, then cuts to what appears (although not as obviously) to another point of view shot. Standing still, Louise is in control and, in effect, has already reached her destination. At this point, she is aware that the destination of Mexico is necessary only in so far as it is necessary to facilitate their movement. In the wide open space, she reaches a moment of transcendence that is closer to that of Irigaray than that of Emerson as, standing still, her life becomes "a supple and mobile dwelling" (Elemental 69). She is housed by movement.

Thelma's moment of transcendence comes after she has realized that "Something has crossed over in me and I can't go back. It's like I just couldn't live." While mobile or stationary, Thelma is continuously looking out the side-view mirror. The culmination of her looking occurs through a point-of-view shot when the viewer, aligned with Thelma's gaze, witnesses the mirror-image of the landscape they have already passed set against the landscape that they are driving into. It is as if Thelma's past and present merge to become a moment where she is finally "awake," more awake than she's ever felt before. Her internal vision has changed in such a way that "[e]verything looks different." Consider-

ing these two subjective point-of-view shots not necessarily as moments of transcendence but at least as moments when the two characters are given a brief reprieve from the social construct of "identity," one is not surprised that the absurdity of the crucker with his shout, "Hey baby, are you ready for a big dick?", as well as the outlandishness of the silver truck that literally mirrors the very landscape that has facilitated their reprieve, should provoke Thelma and Louise to blow up the truck, the object that defines the trucker. Not only in American film, but also in American literature, the automobile more often than not symbolizes the phallic. By blowing up the tanker truck, Thelma and Louise attempt to destroy the phallic. Once again they are in a situation where they have the literal gun; and this time, however, they have two, while the male character has only the symbol.⁸ In destroying the phallic, they are also blowing up how they are represented by the trucker. Who they are and who he thinks they are are incompatible. Unlike the murder of Harlan, this scene presents Thelma and Louise as now more interested in blowing up the "language" that has attempted to encode them than in killing one male who speaks that language.

Corresponding to the blowing up of the tanker is the crumbling of Darryl. Listening to a description of his wife as "armed and extremely dangerous," Darryl, reduced to tears, is transplanted into a melodramatic moment. However,

the viewer might question whether the character of Darryl has actually evolved or whether his breakdown is a consequence of having his security, rendered by the once passive Thelma, destroyed. Because she is no longer closed in by his walls, his identity is disrupted.

Hal (Harvey Keital) is thought of as a sympathetic male. Yet he has a relationship to Thelma and Louise that is analogous to the ones represented by the trucker and Darryl. In one of his first conversations with Louise he tells her, "I almost feel like I know you, Louise." She replies, "Well, you don't know me." Although his intention is to save them from being "fucked over," it is also to reinscribe them in the domestic. He needs Thelma and Louise to substantiate who he, Hal, is. He doesn't want to lose the outlaws because his representation of them as such helps define who he is. Outlaws, in effect, define the law. Again, Irigaray's interrogation of the male subject is applicable to these three characters: "Since you cannot exist if not reflected, did you not need someone to ensure this faithful reduplication of yourself?" (Elemental 45).

Thelma and Louise's eventual flight off the Grand Canyon invokes a refusal to be re-inscribed in traditional representations of female identity, as well as a refusal of "guilt." Thelma and Louise refuse to apologize. As Louise tells Thelma, "There's one thing you oughta understand by now, Thelma, it's not your fault." Although caught in an

unresolvable situation, then, they do indeed go forward by not going back. By refusing to re-enter patriarchal society, they become responsible for their own ending, an ending that would have been inevitable. At this point they know that they have pushed the Law too far and that being caught would result in a figurative, if not a literal, death. They then become aligned with the freeze-frame ending of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid more than with the demise of the literary road outlaws. They don't settle for a temporary "connection."

In his discussion of Kerouac, Tim Hunt reminds us that

The ecstasy and community of 'IT' are at best temporary states and thrive perhaps only at moments of transition or outside the normal social order. Like Huck and Jim on the raft, Sal and Dean in the car pass through the world but are not forced (at least temporarily) to be of it. They are free to respond to the landscape, as it unreels, with dream-like rapidity . . . but the inevitable result of being on the road is exhaustion. As Huck and Jim know . . . the river ends. Even the car cannot escape, finally, the presence of the outside world. (quoted in Ortega-Murphy and Hardy 72-73)

For Thelma and Louise, however, the road is not exhaustion,

for their "only rest is motion" (Elemental 25). When their mobility is checked, there is no place to go but forward. For once they have cast off the representations assigned to them by the patriarchy, they find that there is nothing to replace these representations. The territory beyond patriarchy is epitomized by the Grand Canyon, an empty space. Thurmer-Rohr's conjectures related to the space beyond patriarchy provide another dimension to Thelma and Louise's suicide-ride, one that takes the final freeze frame beyond a mere repetition of the final sepia-toned freeze frame in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid:

Now what happens to women if . . . if they are not willing to see their own value as defined by man, from the male point of view?

Women fall into a void. This does not mean they were previously on solid ground. For man as the determiner of value requires women to maintain empty ego-spaces in readiness for him to fill the void. These empty egospaces, in keeping with a patriarchal female morality, are fulfilled by being filled full with him. The worthiness of the male and the worthlessness of the female are bound up with the woman's readiness to be empty, to prepare her 'dwelling' for man;

being fulfilled by a man, through him, requires her to reserve a space for him to inhabit, to give content to, illustrate.

The devaluation and demystification of man does not mean that this empty space is now at woman's disposal, ready to be newly furnished, a beckoning new territory. No--it is bare and uncultivated without models or concepts, without images or myths. (103-04)

Thelma and Louise can thus be seen to fall forward, creating myths of female outlaws. But, paradoxically, the frontier they drive into is one which does not and cannot exist. As the social order is constructed, the space beyond patriarchy, as symbolized by the Grand Canyon, cannot be figured into the narrative.

Although the vagrancy of Thelma and Louise is certainly written into Khouri's script, this vagrancy is continuously checked by the production values and the technical conventions of classical Hollywood cinema. To conclude, I want to return to B.B. King's song to exemplify once again how the script is overwhelmed by the production values and technical devices of the overall film. In Khouri's final shooting script, "Better Not Look Down" accompanies Thelma and Louise's flight over the Grand Canyon. Rendered in this way, it is clearly an up-beat moment, an escape. However, what reaches the audience in the final cut of the film is an

entirely different moment. B.B. King's song is replaced by the eerie instrumental of Hans Zimmer, the same music which plays over the opening credits. The result is a more conflicted moment for the viewer: Thelma and Louise's getaway is accompanied by a sense of doom. B.B. King's song is not eliminated from the final cut of the film, just situated in a different narrative moment: after the extended conversation between Louise and Hal which leads to the tracing of their whereabouts and before their encounter with the trucker that leads them to blow up his rig. In effect, Thelma and Louise are already caught at this point, as the image of the sheriff's helicopter rising out of the smoke from the blown tanker suggests. At best, then, Thelma & Louise exists in a conflicted space. The conclusion is a moment between death and the patent existence that is behind them. They are frozen in the space and might be said to "escape" through a liminal suspension of the "end." But it must be kept in mind that although female representation is unsettled in Thelma & Louise, this disruption is then further "settled" by technical devices such as continuity editing, camera direction, and even the soundtrack.

"O.K. Someday--we're gonna get the jack together and we're gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an' a cow and some pigs and---"

"An' live off the fatta the lan'," Lennie shouted. "An have rabbits. Go on George! . . ."

Marianne reading John Steinbeck, Of Mice and Men

to the two Inuit boys, Leaving Normal

"Darly, just because you're leaving doesn't mean that you're not still in the same goddamn place."

Marianne, Leaving Normal

While Thelma and Louise drive further and further into the Western, Darly Peters played by Christine Lahti, and Marianne (Morrison-Shore-Johnson) Trainer played by Meg Tilly, move further and further away from the Western into what can only be called a fairy tale version of life on the frontier. Like Ridley Scott, Edward Zwick uses all the conventions of realism, but he then repeatedly disrupts that established realism. When Scott strays from cinematic conventions a hyper-real image is created. Zwick's image, conversely, is often disruptive--at moments the image appears to be painted; his mise-en-scenes often appear unreal; and Victor Du Bois' edits--incorporating an inordinate number of wipes, fades, and dissolves--often create an impression that resists the realism of continuity editing. The editing style incorporated into these two films could be said to reflect their content. Whereas the Western often takes on the figurations of mainstream culture, the road trip is often indicative of counter-culture.⁹ My question here is, therefore, do these departures necessarily mean "you're not still in the same goddamn place?"

I propose that although Leaving Normal occupies a different screen space in terms of narrative and form than

Thelma & Louise, like the later film, it too is conflicted in its treatment of female vagrancy. Both films are at odds with themselves, but for different reasons. In the case of Leaving Normal it is the visual screen space which initially appears to undermine the rather "sentimental" frontier narrative evoked by Edward Solomon's film script; whereas in Thelma & Louise, as I have earlier argued, the potential of the film script is undermined, or at least put in check, by the visual screen space. Nonetheless, in neither instance are the films total failures in terms of questioning how female characters are constructed and projected on the screen. Both films, however slightly, serve to interrogate female representation by way of female vagrancy.

In this section I want to consider how the conflicted space of Leaving Normal is generated not only by the tension between the visuals and the narrative but also by the evocation of a frontier narrative which replaces the desire for conquering new territory and taming the wilderness with the desire for domestic bliss. Thus, while Thelma and Louise attempt to explore female representation outside of the domestic sphere, Darly and Marianne explore female representation in terms of the domestic. Although they leave "Normal," normality as rendered by a traditional view of domesticity is never far off; and only when they are able to refigure their domestic expectations do they provisionally find and settle their domestic frontier. Like the migrant

workers in John Steinbeck's novels, the shiftless George and Lennie in Of Mice and Men in particular, Marianne and Darly are without a home and have no skills to get them beyond their present financial situation. They are left to wander rather aimlessly on a road that is traditionally thought of as male territory. And like that of the traditional picaresque road trip, the road they travel is cluttered with obstacles and secondary characters that serve to move them forward.

As in Thelma & Louise, the opening sequence of Leaving Normal is situated in the domestic. Marianne, portrayed as a young girl, is inside the family home. Similar to the scene which takes place in Mona Simpson's novel, Anywhere But Here, where Ann constructs a crayon city--a scene which calls attention to Ann's desire for "home" but also to the artifice of home--Marianne, as a young girl, is drawing a chalk version of her vision of home: four stick figures, two children and a father and mother stand beside a house, under a moon and stars. The camera opens on a night sky, then slowly dissolves into Marianne's picture of the night sky, eventually settling on her hand drawing the last stick figure. In the context of the immediate scene, the choice of chalk is significant because as she creates a picture of home, her parents dismantle the actual one. They are packing up to move on. The chalk image is also significant in relation to the overall narrative because, although

Marianne's initial vision of home is erased, the chalk residue remains. The sound track tends to mimic the notion that the ideal vision of home is always overwhelmed by a starker or at best another, image. In the forefront of the soundtrack, Marianne sings a version of "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star," while in the background her parents argue about the lack of work available. Their argument reveals that although they have been in Montana for only a week, the father wants to move on to Florida. Viewed from the child's perspective, the shots are low and the picture is incomplete. Following this shot, but still as part of the opening sequence, the camera cuts to an extreme long shot of the family van driving off the road into the night sky. Inside, Marianne constructs a "happily-ever-after" ending. She tells her sister, "Don't worry Emily, everything's going to work out fine. I know it is." The shot then moves outside of the van as it travels through an aurora borealis sky. The shot then dissolves to Marianne's point of view as, now an adult, she watches the moving landscape from inside a bus. The opening sequence thus suggests a motivation for the pattern of leaving and the overwhelming desire for a traditional home that characterizes Marianne's adult life.

In a sequence of shots which recalls the opening of John Schlesinger's Midnight Cowboy--another revisionist Western which becomes a buddy-road film but which is also concerned with creating a new domestic structure--Marianne

continues to narrate her story to passengers who dissolve from one character to another. Although her hopeful voice continues the possibilities of a "happily-ever-after" narrative, this narrative is incomplete. What is made clear is that once again her desire for the fairy tale ending originates with a husband: "Did you ever want to do something really big like get married and you find yourself a doin' it." These words become especially painful when it is discovered that what she is about to do is to marry unsuccessfully a second time.

After a shot which superimposes the face of Marianne onto the landscape of Normal, Wyoming, the camera then frames Marianne looking at the highway from a kitchen window, located somewhere in Normal. The establishing shot, like the shot of Thelma in her kitchen, includes the ceiling. Similar to the editing in the scenes between Thelma and Darryl, most of the shots in this scene render Marianne and her husband, Kurt, as already estranged. The only time they are in the same frame is just before, and when, he hits her. Thus they are apart visually, even before the actual separation takes place. (Directly before she leaves they are once again in the same frame, but that frame is split down the middle as they are now in two different rooms.) The image of her departure--she's running away from the house while his voice can still be heard shouting her name--is typical of their brief "marriage." The motion continues and

the effect is to suggest that this has been just like her last attempt at marriage. She keeps leaving, only in order to arrive at the same place. Her mobility, up to this point, suggests that she is "in the same goddamn place."

Whereas Marianne is introduced in relationship to both domesticity and a mobility based on repetition, Darly is initially introduced outside of the domestic, in the typical western setting of a saloon, The Last Call Bar. The men are in cowboy hats and western clothing. In this sequence Darly, wearing a low-cut short black dress, is characterized as the "other woman." She is bar maid and home wrecker--having had an affair with the husband of her co-worker and "only friend." But with Darly's last call, "Adios Amigos, Adios Shithole," the potential for this film to be a Western diminishes. Once she and Marianne link up, they do not head West, but North, towards Eternity Bluff, Alaska. And although the "other" is encountered, they are Inuit, not Indians. Yet because the two boys are not really "confronted," but rather are quickly incorporated into the make-shift family, this narrative situation acts as yet another frontier "bluff" in the film.

The first act of the movie, then, is a series of rejections. Both women reject their life in Normal, Wyoming: Marianne rejects any possibility of staying with an abusive husband, and Darly rejects her life as a barmaid. Like Steinbeck's Lenny and George, both women dream of living off

the fat of the land. Darly's dream is, at least initially, based on a realistic possibility: "Ok, listen up. All you needle-dicks can just kiss my ass 'cause my ship has finally come in and I'm sailing the fuck out of here." Her ship is the deed for what she thinks is a house built on property in Alaska, bought during the Native Alaskan Land Settlement in 1973 and returned to her by her now dead ex-husband.

Although Darly and the audience are not yet aware of the fact, the house has never been built. Nonetheless, the property and the structure for it do exist. However, it is also eventually discovered that the main motivation for her leaving Normal is not the house but the home and all that it represents: to recover the baby she abandoned eighteen years previously.

Once the jaded Darly and the naive Marianne meet up, the soundtrack gets louder and it is as if it is at this moment that the real story begins: the previous scenes have just been a brief preamble to what constitutes the primary narrative. Like *Thelma and Louise*, but unlike many pairings in male buddy-movies, Darly and Marianne do not have a hierarchical relationship. Initially, it appears that Darly will take care of Marianne; after all, she has offered to drive her to Portland and then, once there, invites Marianne to go with her to Alaska. But Marianne, like the character of *Thelma*, has the ability to take charge when Darly's cynicism gets the better of her. If anything, Marianne's

idealism and Darly's cynicism unite to create a contradictory picture of the domestic, one that attempts to rewrite both the "life is shit" narrative and the happily-ever-after fairy tale. Their extreme visions of home are dramatized during their brief stay at Marianne's sister's home. When Darly tells the children a Huggy bear bedtime story, she changes the rules: "[n]o, the forest burned down, so the trappers sold him to the zoo. . . . Yes, Sarah. I'm telling you life can suck. . . . It's just not a pretty picture."

Juxtaposed with this rendering of life is Marianne's "bed time story." Visually, her fairy tale is set against a sequence which has the effect of one continuous shot. It begins with an extra-long shot of her sister's white house framed centre, then moves up into the night sky and slowly dissolves, creating an effect that is much like the continuity of the shot, into the wallpaper of the children's room, to rest on Marianne's face who then begins to speak in the following dialogue:

Marianne: When I was little we moved around so much I never felt really like I had a home. But Emily and me, we always used to dream that this was the way it was going to be: a home, a husband sleeping next to me, kids down the hall, lots of kids, you know, big noisy holidays, coats on the bed, happy

faces, a family. You know. I figured this was the way it was always going to be. You know Darly, did you ever figure that?

Darly: You mean it's not always that way.

Marianne: I don't know. Maybe it is. Maybe you just need special glarses or something.

(pause) Darly, is Alaska nice?

This scene ends with another shot of the white house, but this time it is dawn, and Marianne and Darly are "busting loose." Again, the soundtrack gets louder and it is as if this is the real beginning to their story. Marianne opts to reject her childhood dream, or at least how it has been enacted in Emily's life. With their decision that "fate will choose for us," they also reject Marianne's brother-in-law's definition of adulthood as "making choices." The chalk drawing is erased as their journey becomes a journey of re-socializing themselves and revising their expectations. In this brief narrative space Marianne rejects not only the abusive picture of domesticity, but also its idealized--white picket fence--image.

At the same time, the rejections embedded in the narrative share an uncomfortable parallel with the formal devices: the seemingly un-cut long shot of the opening scene of Marianne's childhood is strikingly similar to the seemingly un-cut long shot that accompanies the narrative of her childhood longing and the immediate rejection of that

domesticity. Similarly, the repetition of W.G. Snuffy Walden's rising musical score, which accompanies Marianne and Darly's departure from Normal and their ensuing departure from Emily's home, suggests that there are only slight variations in this pattern. The effect of the repetitions is to render Darly and Marianne's mobility analogous not to stability, but to im-mobility.

Expectations of the road trip genre also shift when Darly's car is dismantled in her absence, for without their "horse," the two travellers are removed further from the Western. That they have to rely on their own resources is made explicit when they continue their journey by hitchhiking and one more aspect of past Westerns is left behind. But other aspects are recalled when their ticket to mobility ends up being the Solo Flyer, a truck that is very similar to the sixteen wheeler found in Thelma & Louise. But, unlike Thelma and Louise, Darly mimics the female representation that Leon, the owner of the truck, is expecting. To get mobility, and eventually some money, Darly needs to put Irigaray's conception of mimicry to work, but here for different purposes than Irigaray presents. Darly, as she is characterized, is very aware of her status as commodity. After her car overheats, she poses in front of a billboard, mimicking the advertised image of a woman, and then in disgust shouts, "Fuck you, faker asshole!" But, unlike Thelma and Louise, although Darly is able to get

money and knowingly uses her status as commodity, she does not change the rules. In contrast, after being duped twice, Thelma refuses to get money by the expected channels and instead commits armed robbery. Darly, as she is characterized, can only return to previous scenarios: waitress, waitress, topless dancer, cocktail waitress. Similarly, although Marianne does not get married a third time, her relationship of dependence upon Darly uncomfortably enacts scenes from her past marriages. In this situation female mobility is aligned with repetition.

Another image of female representation is portrayed through the character of the waitress 66, played by Patrika Darbo. When she enters the lives of Darly and Marianne, the Western and the road trip are evoked once again. Just fired, 66 pulls out a gun from her glove compartment and shoots out the truck stop's neon sign. At the same time, however, she also reasserts the conventional notion of the fairy tale:

I believe there is one person somewhere in
the world present for me and only me. I
haven't met that person yet but I believe I
will. (pause) Well, I'm dancing.

66 then enters Darly and Marianne's quest for a home, but hers takes on the configuration of a "search for true love"--a search that achieves the fairy tale ending, but with a parodic conclusion. After driving past the border, into Canada, they crash a July fourth picnic. As they are

sitting around a picnic table, set in pastoral surroundings, a man approaches 66 and asks, "excuse me. You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Would you honour me with a dance?" In a scene which could be said to echo the dance between Wyatt Earp and Clementine Carter in My Darling Clementine, they waltz for what appears to be hours. Daylight turns to dusk and the fireworks go off. The scene eventually cuts to Darly and Marianne sitting around a campfire complaining that 'She's been gone for four and a half frigging hours!" When 66 does return, it is in a long white limousine. She introduces Dan Earl Spicy Jones, owner of the third largest spice farm in Western Canada, as her fiance. Thus she has found her fairy tale, but with fireworks, waltzes, and a limousine, this happily-ever-after ending takes on the flavour of a bad country and western song. Once 66 "gets her man" she quickly gives up her wheels and mobile home; in true fairy tale style, 66 must hand over her independence in order to accommodate the happy ending. In 66's optimistic world view domesticity and mobility are at odds.

Although Marianne and Darly are given the car and the trailer, their ensuing conversation implies that their mobility is pointless:

Marianne: You know what's weird? All this stuff about our fate, it was her fate we were affecting the whole time.

Darly: We don't know what we're doing or where we're going and she lives happily ever after.

In other words, fate is equivalent to marriage, anything in between is nowhere. So, because Darly and Marianne's mobility is always contained by a world view that is defined in terms of marriage and the house, they continue to be immobile. Unfortunately, there appears to be no critical awareness built into the characterization of Darly and Marianne. For example, it is telling that while 66 becomes the fairy princess as a reward for her belief in the system, Darly becomes the wicked witch and is thus punished--over and over--for her previous "mistakes." She has done the unthinkable, and it is interesting that her past is introduced at this point in the narrative. An intimate conversation between Darly and Marianne around the camp fire leads to a debate about who is the more "horrible" of the two:

Darly: Ya, well, I split on my kid when she was two days old. (Silence) Ding!--I win.

Marianne: (pause) You abandoned your baby?

Darly: Excuse me?

Marianne: You . . .

Darly: No, no, sorry I didn't know if it was you who said that or the little witch voice inside my head. . . . Next thing you know I'm

on the road and the rest as they say. . . .

Yup, this is who you're travelling with. It's fun to share, isn't it?

The reward/punishment paradigm of fairy tale morality is here un-critically written into the narrative. Yet the larger issues underlying Darly's past, the fact that she was "embalmed" during her past in Alaska, suggest that if given a different narrative context--Louise Erdrich's texts come quickly to mind--her previous "mistake" might be thought of as appropriate to the situation.

Potentially, Darly's revelation that she is the abandoning mother could be the most subversive moment of the film; certainly, anything else would pale in comparison to the silence "spoken" by Marianne and, by extension, the audience. For given the way in which motherhood is depicted in American culture--and this film is no exception--the abandoning mother can be met only with silence. This representation of motherhood is one that goes unwritten, unspoken: it does not fit into the fairy tale or the Western. Darly's quest for her abandoned child is thus a quest to rewrite her self. But any revisionist tendencies are limited to the character of Darly; they do not extend into the larger narrative context. The punishment/reward paradigm persists. When set next to the situation in Leaving Normal, the fact that the characters of Thelma and Louise are both childless becomes significant. How else could their

characters appeal to the mass media? To have an abandoning mother as protagonist is unthinkable. The vagrancy of characters like Helen, the abandoning vagrant mother in Josef von Sternberg's Blonde Venus (1932), are motivated by recovering their child, but the initial "evil" always originates from out there: by the end of the narrative Helen is safely contained within the domestic structure with her husband and child. Rarely is an act of abandonment committed, as in the case of Darly, because the character simply "reacted" and "ran out."

The "horrific" nature of Darly's abandonment haunts her. When she arrives at her property she discovers that the house has never been built. It has only the frame and foundation. She ponders,

What was I expecting? (laugh) I don't know what I thought. I mean, I knew she wouldn't be here. I just thought, you know, maybe--but I knew Joe didn't want kids. I mean, I knew he split the second I did. I knew she could be anywhere in the whole god damn world but here. It just, it just would have been nice to know she was o.k. To know she was some place good, that's all. Ah, fuck it. Forget about it.

Through the monologue, it becomes evident that Darly's motivation for leaving Normal was not the house, but a

desire for knowledge of the daughter she abandoned. She is thus "punished" by the incomplete house and by the nurse's response to her request for information: "You abandoned your daughter. . . . The time to find out would have been eighteen years ago." Still, in true fairy tale style, Darly's quest continues and pits her against a number of obstacles. Darly must face her past and go through a series of initiations; it is as if she must enter Hades to reclaim, not her daughter, but herself. She finds a job at the Eternity Bar as a waitress, gets fired, then has to don the guise of "Pillowtalk"--her name when she was a topless dancer--once again. When her daughter proves impossible to locate, Darly's "sin" is nevertheless redeemed because she has completed the quest and closed the circle. Her reward is not the recovery of a home that, according to the domestic ideology she had internalized, she was supposed to have shared with her daughter, but the household she establishes with Marianne and the "took-in" Inuit boys, and which, not without struggle, she finally accepts as home.

In a dynamic similar to that found between Thelma and Louise, the moment Darly loses hope, Marianne takes charge of the situation. She will get money by reclaiming the wedding ring that she bought in the first place and by getting a job, her first job. Like Thelma at a similar point, she asks for the keys and begins driving and making decisions. She will work at a hardware store, a place which

will better enable her to help build the house. When romance arrives in the semblance of Harry, the trucker-poet, she is able to refuse his offer of mobility. She has learned enough about her situation to realize that home is equivalent to stability.

The film concludes with what appears to be a "happily-ever-after" ending. In leaving their "normal" expectations behind, Darly and Marianne discover an "abnormal" familial structure as an acceptable alternative to the traditional nuclear family. After a number of dissolves in which their house is built, they are pictured as a "family" encircling the dinner table as Darly says grace. On the one hand, the final shot can easily be construed as a cliché: it is the log cabin with lit windows and smoke drifting out of the chimney that is suggestive of the American frontier. There is the rugged wilderness in the background and the voicing of a prayer. But inside the structure a different story is told: two women sit down for supper with two Inuit boys, addressing their prayer to a possibility, "Dear whoever, if you're actually out there, somewhere." A new version of the American nuclear family has been forged, but one that is not definitive: "Please bless this home, this family, whatever the hell it is." But what is most significant is that 66's trailer is not abandoned but has become an integral part of the structure, symbolizing their mobility: "Please just help us to keeping going, somehow." While the use of dissolves is

used to portray the building of the house, thus enacting the formal repetition of the seemingly un-cut temporal long shot Du Bois uses in the previous rejections of domesticity, here there is a variation. The center of the frame dissolves but the border of the frame stays the same. The film closes with the suggestion of a tentative stability for Marianne and Darly.

On a superficial level, then, it might be said that although the characters of Thelma and Louise as feminist outlaws are quickly picked up by the popular imagination, Marianne and Darly seem to offer a more substantial--as they are neither married nor suspended indefinitely--version of the feminist outlaws of the nineties. The house is built, but the mobile home remains part of that structure. However, when these films are placed in the larger project of feminism, in all its pluralities, their limitations become all too apparent. While Thelma & Louise offers a worthwhile critique of the social, narrative, and visual conventions that have situated women to be without agency, the film also might be said quickly to undermine the agency of Thelma and Louise by presenting a protean, but finally eviscerated, postmodern subject: agency without an identity, or at best multiple, contradictory identities. Approaching the female subject from another angle, Leaving Normal also is useful for questioning social and cultural narratives that contain women in limited positions. But while the film tampers with

female representation, its overall effect lacks a serious critique of the larger structures that contain female identity. For instance, while the realism is disrupted by the fairy tale structure, the embedded morality of the fairy tale remains intact. In this scenario, the "transformed" home acts as an uncritical extension of "transformed" female identity. Although the home may be superficially challenged, it seems merely to enact a Baudrillardian manoeuvre: signs of the frontier do not necessarily refer to a new frontier; they refer only to previous signs of the frontier and thus are drained of new meaning. The over-all effect is to render female vagrancy formally contained and neutralized by the conclusion of the narrative.

NOTES

1. See John Cawelti's description of how the Western evolves. In Cawelti's analysis the Western genre retains the main plot of James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales--the clash between wilderness and civilization--and thus meets viewers' expectations but at the same time other elements, such as time, geographical location, and character traits, change to reflect the cultural milieux. See Christine Bold for an analysis of how the Western genre evolved in relation to the technological innovations of printing, transportation, and mass publishing.

2. Their lack of movement is also tied into their position as secondary characters. The figure of the horse, with its movement, is especially conducive to the big screen. Without the horse, the female character is left to wither in fairly stationary shots.

3. Although I have referred to Callie Khouri's film script for purposes of spelling and punctuation, the passages I quote from Thelma & Louise are taken from the film itself. In the case of Leaving Normal all passages quoted are taken from the film itself.

4. Although there does not seem to be any direct correlation with Emily Dickinson and Tom Sawyer, these surnames do evoke prominent traditions in American letters. Tom Sawyer is one of Fiedler's male heroes, while Dickinson emphatically is not. Louise's name suggests a male hero,

while Thelma's calls to mind a reclusive woman. Conversely, in the realm of popular culture Thelma Dickinson also evokes Angie Dickinson, one of the first female cops in a show simply called Police Woman.

5. One distinction between Thelma & Louise and the male oriented action films is their relationship to roles. For example, in Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction (1994), there are two gangsters, Vincent and Jules, who are about to do a "clean up" job for their boss. Before entering the apartment where they will carry out the killing, they are engaged in a discussion on the covert meaning in a foot massage. Just before they are about to enter the apartment, Jules looks at Vincent and says, "That's an interesting point, but let's get into character" (16). Vincent distracts Jules from the job at hand and they continue their discussion, but this time the subject matter is the boss's wife, Mia. While Vincent wants to pursue the discussion, Jules is ready to get to work:

Jules: That door's gonna open in about thirty seconds, so git yourself together--

Vincent: --my self is together--

Jules: --bullshit it is. Stop thinkin' 'bout that Ho, and get yourself together like a qualified pro. (17)

The point I want to emphasize here is that in the Western or the Gangster film the job at hand is always to "get into

character" and to remain in character despite external or internal distractions. For Thelma and Louise the momentum of the film is based on stepping out of character. It is not a matter of getting "yourself together" but dismantling the self as it has been socially constructed. The roles they try on are, at best, provisional.

6. Using a convertible allows easy cinematic access to the characters, but in this particular film it also renders Thelma and Louise vulnerable to the patriarchal technology they are attempting to escape. The street cleaner showers their open car and they easily become a linguistic target for the trucker who re-appears time after time.

7. The cyclist, equipped with flashy sports wear and walkman, seems to be cycling into the wrong film. However, like Thelma and Louise, he, too, seems to be experiencing a "transcendant" moment brought on by the landscape (and possibly, the marijuana). His place in the Western echoes that of the bicycle salesman in Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid who proclaims, "The horse is dead."

8. Before they destroy the sixteen-wheeler there is a verbal "shoot-out" which is similar to the one found earlier, between Harlan and Louise:

Louise: You say you're sorry.

Trucker: Fuck that!

Louise: You say you're sorry or I'm going to make you fucking sorry.

Thelma: Are you going to apologize or what?

Trucker: Fuck you!

9. At the same time it should be noted that there seems to be a tradition, even within Classic Hollywood Cinema, that gives the road-trip genre much more freedom with the camera and editing than with other genres: on the road anything goes.

Constructing the Unfinished: Re-Creating Inhabitant
and Home in Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping

But what could be done for the female vagrants like that poor creature, stretched on her elbow (as if she had flung herself on the earth, rid of all ties, to observe curiously, to speculate boldly, to consider the whys and the wherefores, impudent, loose-lipped, humorous), he did not know. Bearing his flowers like a weapon, Richard Dalloway approached her; intent he passed her; still there was time for a spark between them--she laughed at the sight of him, he smiled good-humouredly, considering the problem of the female vagrant; not that they would ever speak. (Woolf 152)

The female vagrant, a shadowy presence in literature, rarely appears as a full-fledged character. When she does appear, as is evident in the above passage by Virginia Woolf, it is generally as a projection of another character or as a compositional element in the countryside or city-scape.¹ In these cases the vagrant usually is focalized through the gaze of the male wanderer and thus becomes symptomatic of the larger condition of woman. The period of modernity, as Janet Wolff has suggested, is characterized by the separation of the private and the public, creating a literature in which only male heroes experience the "possibility and the prospect of lone travel, of voluntary

uprooting, of anonymous arrival at a new place" ("Invisible Flaneuse" 39).² Thus the female vagrant in Virginia Woolf's novel, Mrs. Dalloway, is by her very appearance an anomaly, but one that is quickly neutralized through her objectification by other characters. In Woolf's narrative she is represented through different points of view: those of Richard Dalloway (as quoted above), Peter Walsh, and Rezia Warren Smith. Rather than elucidating her subjectivity, their observations comment upon their own interiorities. Her composite character acts as a fractured mirror. In these projections she does not speak, and when she is heard, in this instance by Peter Walsh, it is as "a frail quivering sound, a voice bubbling up without direction, vigour, beginning or end, running weakly and shrilly and with an absence of all human meaning" (105).

The sound, like the female vagrant herself, can be described only by simile. It is "like a funnel, like a rusty pipe, like a wind-beaten tree for ever barren of leaves" (105). The female vagrant herself is also described in terms of metaphor: her mouth is "a mere hole in the earth, muddy too, matted with root and fibres and tangled grasses" (106). She has no conventional identity; she has "the voice of no age or sex" (105). Only the skirt that she wears identifies her as "the battered woman" (106). The sound of her voice, focalized through Peter Walsh, is heard as uttering a conventional narrative of love, for the loss of love is the

only context in which Walsh can make sense of her existence.

The "sound" becomes a song of love:

love which has lasted a million years, she sang, love which prevails, and millions of years ago her lover, who had been dead these centuries, had walked, she crooned, with her in May; but in the course of ages, long as summer days, and flaming, she remembered, with nothing but red asters, he had gone; death's enormous sickle had swept those tremendous hills, and when at last she laid her hoary and immensely aged head on the earth, now become a mere cinder of ice, she implored the Gods to lay by her side a bunch of purple heather, there on her high burial place which the last rays of the last sun caressed; for then the pageant of the universe would be over. (106)

For Walsh "the problem of the female vagrant" is solved through a narrative of love. He quickly imposes conventional images associated with the nineteenth-century female vagrant, that of the abandoned/fallen woman. In this conventional narrative she does not attain an individual identity, but one that is contingent upon myth: she defies time by containing all female vagrants, past and future. Walsh imagines that "millions of years ago she walked with

her lover" (106) and that "she would still be there in ten million years" (107). The language of realism cannot contain her. If Walsh, moreover, can think of this woman as eternal, a transhistorical phenomenon, then he need not think about her concrete presence before him. In Woolf's novel the female vagrant is visible, even heard, but only as a semiotic "bubbling" or as projection.

Departing from a representation of the silent or inarticulate female vagrant as simply projection or scapegoat, Marilynne Robinson creates in Housekeeping an articulate first-person narrator who is also a female drifter.³ And although Ruth Stone often feels most terrified and most comfortable when she seems "invisible--incompletely and minimally existent" (105), it is this same invisibility that allows her the privilege to "watch [the world] unawares" (106). Housekeeping is the story of how Ruth leaves her grandmother's home in Fingerbone, Idaho, to take up a life of drifting with her Aunt Sylvie, and of how Ruth's sister Lucille also leaves that same house to live with her Home Economics teacher, Miss Royce. During the course of Ruth's narrative, the grandmother's house occupies a role as central as that of the many female inhabitants it shelters. For as much as this novel is about the homeless condition, it is also about coming to a new understanding of shelter and the ideology of home. In this context it is worth noting that while Lucille's departure is voluntary,

Ruth and Sylvie's is not: if they want to keep their household intact, they must leave the home they have created. ⁴

Although Ruth is not the first female vagrant to appear in American letters, she is far removed from the earlier example of the squatter, Mrs. Malloy in John Steinbeck's 1945 novel, Cannery Row,⁵ who is described as living with her husband in an abandoned engine boiler and wanting to furnish their shelter with rug, washtub, lampshade, and eventually curtains. Frustrated by her husband's response-- "But, darling--for Christ's sake what are we going to do with curtains? We got no windows" (29)--Mrs. Malloy explains, "Men just don't understand how a woman feels. . . . Men just never try to put themselves in a woman's place" (30). Similarly, William Kennedy in his 1983 novel Ironweed characterizes Helen Archer, a drifter, as a fallen but saintly woman, who wishes to die with her belongings surrounding her; in other words, she transforms the hotel room into a home. In these two examples, the female characters are reduced to a domestic stereotype: the homeless become "homeful".

In terms of the current debate on female subjectivity and female representation, Robinson has made great strides in depicting the unrepresented "life" of the female vagrant. Yet her characterization of Ruth does not remain uncontested. Sian Mile, who writes specifically in the

context of the recent debate on female subjectivity, concludes that

Robinson's affirmation is impalpable nonetheless and seemingly detached from any notion of the social/political--race, class, or gender. Robinson can show what "is not" (as her final paragraph amply proves) but cannot declare outright what "is," and specifically what female subjectivity "is." It's hard to see the potential of such an amorphous blob--this may be the femme foetal, but we need, for the world, the newly born woman. (134-35)

Keeping in mind Jacques Lacan's insistence on the interdependence between the imaginary and the symbolic, as well as Julia Kristeva's insistence on the interdependence between the semiotic and the symbolic, I propose that in Robinson's narrative what "is not" is inescapably connected to what "is" and what "is" is inescapably connected to what "is not." In these terms, Mile's yearning for a utopian feminist alternative to the status quo does the novel a disservice. For while the narrative does centre on a matrilineal line and does avoid romantic or conventional forms of femininity, it does not purport to offer solutions to specific feminist concerns. Written in the tradition of Henry David Thoreau's Walden, Housekeeping asks us to share

Sylvie's understanding of the world. In a recent essay Marilynne Robinson wrote that Sylvie "expresses the fact that human nature is replete with nameless possibilities, and, by implication, that the world is accessible to new ways of understanding" ("When I Was a Child" 16). For my present purposes, Robinson's description of Sylvie's character offers a useful position from which to read other thematic elements in the narrative, such as shelter and the state of homelessness. In Housekeeping the representation of home is constructed to be as unlimited as that of vagrancy.

My reading of Housekeeping is situated within the debate on female subjectivity but I want to shift, however slightly, the focus of the debate. In contrast to a purely psychoanalytic or literary reading, I incorporate current sociological studies on female homelessness and current architectural theories related to the ideological structure of the house. My approach makes use of David Lodge's rather broad assumption that realism may be defined as "the representation of experience in a manner which approximates closely the description of similar experience in non-literary texts of the same culture" (25). Applying Lodge's assumption to "non-literary" descriptions of female vagrancy in North American culture, however, is not without difficulties. Robinson's novel, published in 1981, does intersect with an historical moment when female vagrants began to exist in their own right, that is, when

sociologists created a category for homeless females and the media began to exploit and sensationalize the story of the "bag lady" (Golden 85-90). Nonetheless, prior to this moment and in large part continuing through this moment, female vagrants continued to exist outside of a positivist category. For instance, and in the context of this study, female transients initially appear to offer a representation that is not contingent upon the domestic; however, when woman, so deeply entrenched in the "cult of domesticity," is outside of that realm she is only made "real" by defining her against that realm. There is no tradition of female transients, female vagrants, or female tramps; there is only "female homelessness." In contrast to this lack of a clear category for female transients, a long tradition of male transients exists in the figures of tramps, hobos, and railriders; and when the economy necessitates their mobility, male transients become cultural heroes.⁶

In the eighties, a number of sociological studies addressing female homelessness appeared. Lesley D. Harman's 1989 study, When a Hostel Becomes a Home: Experiences of Women, questions the inexorable connection between women transients and the home.⁷ Harman differs from other contemporary sociologists in that, rather than seeking the reasons for women's homelessness, she questions the status of the traditional nuclear family itself:

We must become aware of how homeless women

construct their own social reality and in turn how imputational specialists construct the social reality of homelessness and attempt to reconstruct 'homefulness,' for these two conceptions are very closely linked. What is it about the conventional home that has caused these women to become 'homeless'? What does it mean, in turn, to 'have a home'? The attribution of deficiency, through which it is assumed that homeless women have failed their families, is precisely rooted in a conception of domesticity which is stubbornly inflexible. Perhaps it is the 'nuclear family,' as an obsolescent institution that is under considerable stress as increasingly unrealistic demands are placed upon it to conform with the myth of home, that is failing. If the conventional home as a desirable form of social organization is on the wane, then perhaps it is time that we ceased regarding the homeless as 'failures' and began to regard the whole notion of home as problematic. (23)

Harman also considers the way female homelessness as a relatively new social problem is domesticated:

"Linguistically, appropriation, bringing home, and control translate the new into the existing language which in turn serves to familiarize the strange, to make 'normal' or 'acceptable' that for which our present tools of typification will not suffice" (15). In line with Harman's redirecting the "problem of the female vagrancy" (Woolf 152) to "the notion of home as problematic" (Harman 23), this chapter departs from my earlier focus on vagrant female characters to consider the possibility of refiguring female vagrancy within the shelter of a changing definition of "home."

The myth of the American frontier and how it surfaces in fiction has led me to reconsider thematic discourse on vagrancy. As mentioned earlier in this study, one general characteristic of the American bildungsroman is the requirement that if a character is to reach self-realization, this will happen only outside the realm of home. To "light out for the territory" has thus become particular to male initiation in American fiction. As previous chapters have argued, female characters are also part of this tradition, whether they act out or revise that flight. At first glance, Housekeeping appears to be written in the same tradition of escape, as well as in many other American traditions. Certainly the initial criticism of Robinson's novel reads it either in terms of the American canon or as a developmental novel told from a female

perspective--or as a blend of these two figured as the female quest.⁸ It is not my intention to reject these readings, or to imply that Housekeeping is not situated in the tradition of American letters. My contention, rather, is that the novel is concerned equally with escaping and with redefining the domestic: it "burns down" but it also reconstructs. The text that depicts a simple escape from the domestic leaves the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity unaltered; "home" continues to be aligned with traditional constructions of domesticity and mothering. To posit the home as a constraint to be escaped--or, in other words, to posit home as an opposition to vagrancy--is to continue defining vagrancy in domestic terms.

The literary criticism on Housekeeping enacts a "domestication" similar to that which is described by Harman in sociology. While the initial articles on the novel tend to critique it in terms of the American canon, specifically that of the transcendentalists, recent criticism cites this novel as an instance in the larger debate on female subjectivity.⁹ However, because these critics have certain presuppositions about the value of subjectivity that the novel does not share, this results in a "domestication" of Robinson's representation of subjectivity. For Robinson creates a first-person female narrator who is in control of her narrative, but at the same time this narrator's wisdom leads her to dismiss not only the integrated "subject," a

concept that has always been central to Western philosophy/humanism, but also the primacy of the subject's place in the world. Through the course of her story, Ruth comes to realize that permanence can be found only in impermanence and that presence can be found only in absence. Robinson's prose, replete with images of water and abandonment, is a constant reminder of the "the life of perished things" (124).

Although a few readers have been aware of the problems involved with critiquing a text that radically undermines conventional values related to the construct and primacy of subjectivity and "home," critics have tended, for the most part, to apply conventional values to an otherwise unconventional narrative. The most extreme example of this domestication can be found in the work of Anne-Marie Mallon, who purports to speak for her readership as well:

Transients and runaways are not among society's favoured or fortunate; and homelessness is a condition that evokes our pity or our tension--depending on how deeply it threatens our own rootedness--but never our assent. Like the townfolk of Fingerbone, we believe that people and things--like children, relationships, jobs, and houses--need to be made secure. We might permit, with tentative indulgence, a "stage" of

rootlessness, a year or two of journeying.
 But ultimately, we will maintain, everyone
 and everything need a home. (95)¹⁰

This position--opposing journeying and rootlessness (read homelessness) to home and security--enforces a domestication of Robinson's text.¹¹

At the same time, as is made explicit by Mallon's comments, the criticism on Robinson's novel projects prescribed values even onto the vagrant characters. In the criticism, for example, there is much talk of sadness, loneliness, and discomfort. Yet the problem with projecting conventional values onto an otherwise unconventional text is made clear by Robinson herself, who writes elsewhere about her experience of loneliness:

in the West "lonesome" is a word with
 strongly positive connotations. . . . I
 learned to assume that loneliness should be
 in great part pleasure, sensitizing and
 clarifying, and that it is even a truer bond
 among people than any kind of proximity.
 ("When I Was a Child" 14)

Robinson's narrative offers this unfamiliar logic. Contrary to critics like Mallon, therefore, I would argue that the text does not ask us to side with casseroles and mittens, nor does it ask us to side with vagrancy. What it does ask is that as readers we attempt to reconstruct our

understanding of the material world and, directly related to this, of shelter. Near the conclusion of the narrative, Ruth provides an apt metaphor for how the changing status of the house begins to incorporate transience:

Imagine that Noah knocked his house apart and used the planks to build an ark, while his neighbors looked on, full of doubt. A house, he must have told them, should be daubed with pitch and built to float cloud high, if need be. A lettuce patch was of no use at all, and a good foundation was worse than useless. A house should have a compass and a keel. The neighbors would have put their hands in their pockets and chewed their lips and strolled home to houses they now found wanting in ways they could not understand. Perhaps, pious as they were, these ladies did not wish to see me pass into that sad and outcast state of revelation where one begins to feel superior to one's neighbors. (184)

The transient life that Ruth and Sylvie come to live is like the ark. It is not so much that they are without a "home" but that their "home" is without a visible and thus, definable, "foundation." Given the narrative of Housekeeping, the critics' domestication is not surprising. In her sociological study, The Women Outside, Golden argues

that female transients do not belong to any recognizable category and are therefore rendered "indefinable" (217). Similarly, the reconstructed house and the deconstructed domestic ideology in Housekeeping do not conform to our immediate understanding of the family narrative.

Although most of Ruth's narrative is concerned with her arrival at a (non)place, transience as a metaphor prevails much earlier. As many critics have acknowledged, Housekeeping breaks down binary oppositions such as inside/outside, lost/found; yet these same critics see the departure of Ruth and Sylvie as a clear-cut moment that is different from what has gone on before: because the "homeless" transience of Ruth and Sylvie is set against a conventional notion of "home," their earlier "homeful" vagrancy is negated.¹² I argue, however, that "home" as conventionally and ideologically defined is destabilized much earlier, and consequently their transience is enacted in various ways before their "final" departure. It is only when their "home" and the household it contains are threatened from the outside that they "decide" (are forced) to leave and take up drifting. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the changing status of the house, a change that replaces the nineteenth-century ideal of "domestic bliss" with what might be called a transient definition of home and family: a home that does not rest on the binary oppositions of outside/ inside; chaos/stability; lost/found.

Recognizing how Ruth and Sylvie's habitation includes numerous "departures" necessitates new theories of shelter which are able to unsettle conventional views on home and domesticity. For example, the architect Lars Lerup strives for a creation of residential shelters that resist closure:

when I suggest that designing for residential habitation is 'building the unfinished,' it does not mean necessarily that the scaffold is unfinished in itself, but that it is only one component of a set, other components being the dwellers' own props and doings (habits and actions). The physical comes alive through use. (Building 24)

Lerup suggests that in traditional residential architecture "the single-family house is a 'disciplinary mechanism'--morality manifested in form. The assignment of rooms, furniture, and equipment, and their syntax, is a vehicle of ideology and a behavioral modifier" (Planned 16). Lerup proposes that because individuals interact ("based on self-reflection and interpretation" [Building 20]) with their environment, they are part of the meaning-making of the architectural structure. Given this definition, "home" does not have one stable meaning, but the potential for many meanings.

Lerup's theory of architectural space can also be applied to the spatial relationships in fiction. As

theorized by narratologist, Mieke Bal, in order for the place in fabula to become the space in story a similar process to that described by Lerup occurs:

places are linked to certain points of perception. These places seen in relation to their perception are called space. That point of perception may be a character which is situated in a space, observes it, and reacts to it. (93)

Replacing the ideologically sound structure with the "unfinished" building, the dwelling place of fabula with the space of story, enables escape mechanisms to be built within the ideological foundation. Home does not necessarily mean entrapment, and vagrancy does not necessarily have to mean homelessness. Replacing a conception of home as upholding the dominant domestic ideology with home as a dismantling of the dominant domestic ideology allows for replacing the stereotype of the female vagrant in any of its guises with the female vagrant as a complex subject whose practice refuses to be encoded in any one narrative. Working with Lerup's theory of residential architecture, Bal's comprehension of space in fiction, and Harman's understanding of homelessness, I will suggest a reading of Housekeeping that interprets the "final" departure of Sylvie and Ruth as part of an ongoing deconstructive process.¹³ Given this paradigm, transience as a metaphor for subversion

expands to include various forms of shelter, and the transient female's subjectivity need not go homeless; conversely, the home need not be totally and inclusively constructed by the dominant ideology and cultural practice. My reading will also consider a topic ignored by all criticism: the male vagrants and the shelters that they construct will be seen as forces equal to the townspeople of Fingerbone and the shelters that they construct.

Much of the criticism on Housekeeping posits the house that Ruth's grandfather built as the patriarchal "father-house."¹⁴ However, it is significant that the house that Edmund builds does not begin as a finished, stable structure. We are told, for example, that the stairway "terminated rather oddly in a hatch or trapdoor, because at the top of the stairs one came face to face with a wall so essential to supporting the roof (which had always sagged somewhat in the middle) that my grandfather could not bring himself to cut another door in it" (47-48). In a narrative that continually evokes the language of entrapment and escape, the "trapdoor" signifies the domestic possibility of fluid foundations. The "trapdoor," the "hatch" which evokes the arc, is an escape mechanism--neither ceiling/floor nor door--built into the structure. When the family expands, the "loft with a ladder up to it" (48) is renovated into bedrooms for the children. It is also made known that "the hall from the kitchen to the front door sloped rather

sharply, though the angle was eased somewhat by a single step midway" (44), that the chest and wardrobe in the bedroom are fixed with mismatched legs "to compensate for the slope of the floor" (89), and that the house's "fenestration was random" and its "corners out of square" (74). Because Edmund "had built it himself, knowing nothing whatever of carpentry" (74), the house begins as a "faulty" vehicle of ideology. It contains what Lerup identifies as "traps" (Planned 32), places/objects that frustrate and expose the domestic narrative. For example, the stairway is "wide and polished, with a heavy railing and spindle banisters" (47), but only leads to a "trapdoor"; consequently, it not only calls attention to itself as ornament but at the same exposes the division between upstairs and down, and between the parents' and children's living space--the master bedroom is on the main floor. The sloping floors and the random fenestration mark the instability of the domestic narrative. I will return to the way Sylvie creates further traps when she takes over the house.

While other critics have acknowledged the changing status of the house, Paula Geyh providing the most comprehensive interpretation, they note only those changes apparently effected by Sylvie. However, as Ruth notes, before Sylvie's return the house is "changed," for it "shifted and settled" (48), and the orchard produced

"smaller and wormier apples and apricots and plums" (27). In fact, the house is neither fully representative of patriarchy, nor, later, fully subject to Sylvie's heterodox housekeeping.

As Lerup suggests, the house is always already unfinished and thus Robinson's house undergoes a series of changes that reflect its primary inhabitants: it is dynamic, not static. Furthermore, without the father's presence, this particular house, and its faulty but inherent ideology, seem to recede in both function and importance. Although under the grandmother's care the house remains "well-kept," other slippages do occur. For instance, while the fact that the house is built by Ruth's grandfather, Edmund Foster, is made explicit in the first paragraph, his carpentry is undermined by the many female inhabitants who take up residence in (and who are eventually absent from) the house:

My name is Ruth. I grew up with my younger sister, Lucille, under the care of my grandmother, Mrs. Sylvia Foster, and when she died, of her sisters-in-law, Misses Lily and Nona Foster, and when they fled, of her daughter, Mrs. Sylvia Fisher. Through all these generations of elders we lived in one house, my grandmother's house, built for her by her husband, Edmund Foster, an employee of the railroad, who escaped this world years

before I entered it. (3)

Moreover, though the house is built by Edmund, it is built for Sylvia. Before it is identified as "Sylvie's house" it is identified as the "grandmother's house;" never is it identified as Edmund's house. Further, at the same time that it is identified as Sylvie's house, the trace of the grandmother, whose name Sylvie bears, never completely disappears.

Without the father, the transformation of the household enacts a transformation of the conventional domestic ideology, especially in terms of the Freudian family drama. It is as if Edmund Foster's death allows the family of women to be "cut free from the troublesome possibility of success, recognition, advancement" (13) (however, it must also be acknowledged that his life, too, contributes to their serenity, as he builds the family home in Fingerbone, a town chastened "by an awareness that the whole of human history had occurred elsewhere" [62]). Edmund's death transfers the daughters' gaze back to their mother: "his sudden vanishing had made them aware of her" and "they pressed her and touched her as if she had just returned from an absence" (12). With his death, then, a psychoanalytical reversal occurs with a return to the pre-oedipal phase. The cord that binds the daughters to the symbolic order is cut free and for a short time there is a loss of identity as the daughters merge into one consciousness, reunited with their

mother. The physical structure of the house recedes in importance and it is as if the daughters and their mother provide shelter for each other:

When their mother sat down with her mending, they would settle themselves around her on the floor, trying to be comfortable, with their heads propped against her knees or her chair, restless as young children. (10)

Conversely, the mother

had always known a thousand ways to circle them all around with what must have seemed like grace. She knew a thousand songs. Her bread was tender and her jelly was tart, and on rainy days she made cookies and applesauce. In the summer she kept roses in a vase on the piano, huge pungent roses, and when the blooms ripened and the petals fell, she put them in a tall Chinese jar, with cloves and thyme and sticks of cinnamon. (11-12)

In Edmund Foster's time the second floor separates the children from the parents. With him gone, although the children still sleep upstairs and Sylvia downstairs, it is as if all the house's physical divisions, walls and floors, dissolve. This is further exemplified by the merging between mother and daughters. We are told that "the customs and

habits of their lives had almost relieved them of the need for speech" (15).¹⁵ However, just as they are encircled further by the structure of the house, so meaning precedes the intuitive tasks they perform. Thus the movement back to the mother is not characterized by dereliction. Although the house as a physical and social structure recedes in importance, it does not totally disappear.

Without the father, there is what might be characterized as a movement from historical time to mythic time. In "Women's Time," Julia Kristeva associates mythic time with female subjectivity, with

cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extra-subjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable jouissance. (34)¹⁶

In the time between the father's death and the daughters' departure, "they had no reason to look forward, nothing to regret. Their lives spun off the tilting world like thread off a spindle, breakfast time, suppertime, lilac time, apple time" (13).¹⁷ However, the narrating of this "serene" time is disrupted by Ruth's knowledge of the future (a linear disruption in itself), when she observes that those "five

serene, eventless years lulled [her] grandmother into forgetting what she should never have forgotten" (13). The tone that hints at catastrophe or tragedy thus superimposes historical time upon the potentially utopian, mythic time. This rupture is also evident in the first paragraph when Ruth says that her grandfather "escaped" the world. Edmund's absence, and the absence of the symbolic order, is like the watch Edmund gives to his wife: the face is replaced by two seahorses, "antic and heraldic, and armored in the husks of insects" (12); nevertheless, the case and crystal enclosure remain.

Conversely, by the time Ruth and Lucille arrive at the house it is as if the grandmother--having lived alone for some time--has been overwhelmed by the symbolic order. She is no longer mother, or even woman: "she looked as if the nimbus of humanity were fading away and she were turning monkey" (26). The grandmother provides a kind of hollow care; it is purely symbolic. By redefining the space of the house, it is Ruth, then, not her grandmother, who creates a domestic space:

I remember sitting under the ironing board,
which pulled down from the kitchen wall,
while she ironed the parlor curtains and
muttered "Robin Adair." One veil after
another fell down around me, starched and
white and fragrant, and I had vague dreams of

being hidden or cloistered, and watched the electric cord wag . . . (27)

This distorted domestic space is constructed by the house and domestic objects, not the grandmother. The cord of the iron acts as an umbilical cord, while the ironing board, attached to the wall, creates the womb-like space. The inhabitants, not the structure, provide meaning.

During this period, the house is (inaccurately) associated with security. Sylvia Foster tells Ruth and Lucille to "sell the orchards . . . but keep the house. So long as you look after your health, and own the roof above your head, you're as safe as anyone can be" (27). But the arrival of Sylvie shakes that security: she transforms the house--the house does not transform her. She resists any preceding family narratives, thus allowing a lack of security, inherent in every family narrative, to be exposed and reconfigured. For example, although Sylvie becomes "head" of the household, she does not immediately occupy the master bedroom: the room she sleeps in is not even a fully constructed room but "a sort of narrow dormer with a curtain closing it off from the hallway" (48). When she does finally move into the master bedroom, "her clothes and even her hairbrush and toothpowder [are kept] in a cardboard box under the bed" (102-03). She sleeps clothed, on top of the covers, with her feet on the pillow. As Ruth acknowledges, these are "clearly the habits of a transient" (103), but in

this case the transience is contained by shelter.

To put this idea another way, the house itself becomes a transient structure. In particular, the transience is characterized as a partial destruction of the symbolic order and as an acknowledgment of other forces. For instance, during a spring flood, the external forces of nature alter the house, but under Sylvie's care nothing is done to restore order, just as the household does not participate in the "restoration of the town" (75). In fact, the altered house works to distance its inhabitants further from the community. The couch, full of water, offers a perfect excuse not to ask visitors to stay. Further, the flood allows the meaning behind the architectural space to change. The second floor once reserved for children (although at this point in the novel Sylvie is still sleeping in the narrow dormer room) becomes a shared space; Ruth remarks that "[w]e lived on the second floor for a number of days" (61). The activities once reserved for the kitchen and parlor now take place in the bedroom.

This initial transformation, along with Sylvie's unconventional views of housekeeping, permanently changes the syntax of the house. Eventually they "simply ceased to consider that room a parlor" (180). Instead it becomes a place of storage. Revisioning domesticity renders the parlor obsolete; appropriately, it is filled with "things utterly without value" (180). Ruth interprets this particular room

as an enactment of Sylvie's views of housekeeping:

Sylvie only kept them, I think, because she considered accumulation to be the essence of housekeeping, and because she considered the hoarding of worthless things to be proof of a particularly scrupulous thrift. (180)

In Sylvie's enactment of domesticity, she turns gesture into symbol. The description of the parlor could very well be turned into a visual sculpture that acts as a commentary on the changing meaning of parlours and the twentieth-century obsession with possessions. The hoarding and stacking of newspapers and magazines are a practice that looks back to Lily and Nona stocking the pantry with enough canned goods that they "could have lived through a dozen floods without difficulty" (65). But unlike the canned goods, with their practical use, the empty cans "stacked to the ceiling" (180) are without apparent value and thus act as another "trap."

With Sylvie as the "head" of the household, old patterns of domesticity are unsettled. The meaning behind the fenestration of the house changes. Rather than functioning as a division between the inside and outside, it begins to indicate similarity rather than difference. In the evening Ruth and Lucille "[step] through the door from sheer night to sheer night" (99); most of the windows are without panes (199); and that which is conventionally thought of as belonging outside comes inside: "leaves began to gather in

the corners" (84-85). Eventually there are "crickets in the pantry, squirrels in the eaves, sparrows in the attic" (99). Conversely, and following Thoreau's method of housecleaning, Sylvie takes the "plum-colored davenport into the front yard, where it remained until it weathered pink" (86).

The kitchen window, a central image throughout the history of the house, changes and expands in meaning. Under Sylvia Foster's care, the window is used only in daylight: at night "in the bright kitchen [the] white curtains screen[ed] out the dark" (11). Under Sylvie's care, the curtains no longer have any functional use because the window is also used at night. Because Sylvie "dislike[s] the disequilibrium of counterpoising a roomful of light against a worldful of darkness" (99), they eat their evening meal (of "cold food" [87] from "plates that came in detergent boxes" [100]) in the dark, with the kitchen lights off; consequently, there is no need for curtains. At one time consumed by fire from the candles of Ruth's birthday cake, the charred curtain remains hanging, an image of the changing notion of privacy. Sylvie and Ruth thus stare "through the warped and bubbled window at the brighter darkness" (100). In this position they occupy a middle-ground: they are neither deceived by the "image of [seeing themselves] in a lighted room," nor are they in the darkness looking into the lighted room and painfully aware of "all the difference between here and there, this and that" (158).

The dissolving of threshold and sill expands the "perimeters of [their] attention" (154); nonetheless, they are sheltered in their "wandering."

Significantly, then, Sylvie's "housekeeping" works to bring the outside in, and the inside out. One of her primary methods of housecleaning is "open[ing] doors and windows" (85). She "prefer[s] [the house] sunk in the very element it was meant to exclude" (99). The property surrounding the house reflects the changes taking place inside. Approaching the house, Ruth is

newly aware of the changes that had overtaken it. The lawn was knee high, an oily, dank green, and the wind sent ripples across it. It had swamped the smaller bushes and the walk and the first step of the front porch and had risen to the height of the foundation. And it seemed that if the house were not to founder, it must soon begin to float. (124-25)

By allowing the outside to remain untended, Sylvie begins to obscure the house as a separate physical structure. The untended lawn not only reflects the untended house; it obliterates landscaping and allows the trace of the "wild" to resurface.¹⁸ At the same time, the impulse that newly creates the house extends to the outside, thus enlarging the space of home. Ruth's diction, however, foreshadows the

tragedy of having to "burn" down the house, and thus destroying any possibility of remaining in their arc.

It is not only the physical structure of the house that shifts, moreover, but also the domestic habits of the inhabitants that it encloses. Although most of this indoor transience is attributed to Sylvie, each member of the household, much as in the time after Edmund Foster's death, is affected. While Lucille questions Sylvie's strange housekeeping, Ruth is "reassured by her sleeping on the lawn, and now and then in the car, and by her interest in all newspapers irrespective of their dates, and by her pork-and-bean sandwiches" (103). She believes that "if [Sylvie] could remain transient here, she would not have to leave" (103). When a week-long absence from school extends into many weeks, Lucille and Ruth are made to live the life of transients; that is, their truancy is presented in terms of transience. Ruth remembers how during this self-imposed banishment "[t]he combined effects of cold, tedium, guilt, loneliness, and dread sharpened our senses wonderfully" (79). The very mechanism that attempts to keep the girls at school prevents their returning; similarly, it is the town's inability to tolerate transience that forces Sylvie and Ruth into becoming transients without shelter. As truants--significantly this word is derived from Old French meaning vagabond (Webster's)--Ruth and Lucille's life continues to be characterized by transience: "[w]here the train tracks

intersected the road [they] followed the tracks, which led to the lake and the railroad bridge" (95). The connection between their truancy and the life of transience is solidified further when Ruth explains that "[i]n all our trauancies, perhaps we never came to a place where [Sylvie] had not been before us" (110).

Ruth and Lucille's truancy also introduces a closer proximity to the tramps who have always populated Fingerbone. Ruth imagines that she and Lucille are related to the community of hobos who "built on the shore in the bridge's very shadow" (95). Although the hobos might drift away only to be replaced by other hobos, their communal place remains a stable structure throughout Ruth's narrative. She composes a number of narrative situations in order to make sense of their proximity:

We in our plaid dresses and orlon sweaters
and velveteen shoes and they in their suit
coats with the vestigial collars turned up
and the lapels closed might have been
marooned survivors of some lost pleasure
craft. We and they alone might have escaped
the destruction of some sleek train, some
flying shuttle of business or commerce.
Lucille and I might have been two of a
numerous family, of to visit a grandmother
in Lapwai. And they might have been touring

legislators or members of a dance band. (96)

Through these micro-narratives, a relationship is created between the hobos and Ruth and Lucille. And in the larger narrative of the novel, a further relationship exists between them, for, like the hobos, Ruth and Lucille too exist on the margins of Fingerbone. By incorporating the hobos into her narrative, Ruth also tells their lives. She makes the invisible visible by uncovering that which should remain covered up, at least according to the dicta of Fingerbone.

Thomas Foster, characteristic of the critics who refuse to read vagrancy as a palpable text in Housekeeping, completely disregards the vagrants that exist on the periphery of Fingerbone.¹⁹ For example, when Foster writes that the grandfather's "ghost is the only figure in the text offered to male readers to situate themselves in opposition to the sheriff, the law, with respect to the events and characters of the narrative" (89), he ignores "the transients [who] wandered through Fingerbone like ghosts, terrifying as ghosts because they were not very different from us" (178) and "the two men in plaid jackets and dusty black pants who were sitting on their heels under the bridge" (81). Without a "history," these vagrant men, in Foster's terms, are not "figures" which the "male"--but I would also add "female"--reader can identify with. Consequently, the male transients who populate the text are

not recognized.²⁰

Nevertheless, the male vagrants who populate the text are a palpable presence in Ruth's narrative of the town of Fingerbone. As in the novel's deconstruction of domesticity and vagrancy, the opposition between the tramps and the civil order is similarly deconstructed. The "hoboes," originally perceived by the Grandmother as "whisking children under their coats and carrying them off" (95-96), become the judges of society. As judges they "are nameless souls [who] looked into [the town's] lighted windows without envy," "finding nothing [there] to sustain [them]" (184). Conversely, the probate judge becomes the kidnapping hobo who whisks away children and breaks up families (68, 190).

Similar to the absent male vagrants in Foster's critical narrative, the transience of Ruth and Lucille does not figure into the criticism of Housekeeping, most likely because to include this would diminish the transience of Sylvie and Ruth, around which the critics' narrative is constructed. Further, while much is made of the changing status of the house, the changing perception of the outside is not as perceptible. Nonetheless, while the inside begins to look more like the outside, it is equally true that the outside begins to be figured in terms of interior space:

Set apart from the drifts and tides and
lucifactions of the open water, the surface
of the bay seemed almost viscous, membranous,

and here things massed and accumulated, as they do in cobwebs or in the eaves and unswept corners of a house. It was a place of distinctly domestic disorder, warm and still and replete. (113)

Robinson's analogies often work to domesticate nature and naturalize domesticity, as well as to domesticate vagrancy and to make domesticity a vagrancy.

During one of Ruth and Lucille's sojourns into the "wilderness," a sojourn that prefigures the journey that Ruth and Sylvie make, they stay out the entire night. However, this journey has as much to do with shelter as it does with homelessness. The activities of their day are concerned with the domestic freed from the dominant ideology. They catch perch and then make a fire to cook them over. Like their grandfather before them, and the vagrants hovering under the train bridge, they too construct a shelter:

We dragged driftwood halfway out on the point. We used a big stone in its side as one wall, we made back and side walls of driftwood, and we left the third side open to the lake. We pulled down fir limbs and made a roof and floor. It was a low and slovenly structure, to all appearances random and accidental. (114)

Lucille and Ruth's "hut" (115) takes on all the particulars of home: walls, floor, door, and a roof over their heads.

In an argument which echoes Fiedler, Martha Ravits suggests that shelter in all of its various formations serves to confine female development. Within this argument, Ravits views the make-shift shelter of Lucille and Ruth as "another version of the house, one that cramps and confines" and one that Ruth must "struggl[e] to get out of" (664).

However, in the text, Ruth "scrambles" and Lucille simply "stand[s] up through the roof" (115). Rather than viewing

the cumulative effect of these images [as] point[ing] to the house, the sacred home, the comfort and shelter of womanhood as confinement, a retreat from the larger arena of the world that the heroic individual must confront and learn to dwell in as the universal habitation of us all (Ravits 664),

I view these shelters--the house in Fingerbone and the hut, to name two--as places where domestic ideology can be refigured and where "universal habitation" extends beyond a patriarchal logos. The pairing of home and woman's confinement is so prevalent in criticism that this "fixed combination" has become what Bal identifies as a topos in narrative (97).

However, Bal further suggests that the topos of a narrative, "[t]he expectation that a clearly marked space

will function as the frame of a suitable event [,] may also be disappointed" (97). In Robinson's text the topos of home and female confinement collapses. When the house does contain what might be called their mobile identities, it is comparable to the body confining and limiting the senses. However, while the darkness and silence that accompany their evening meals enable them "to feel [their] proximity with [their] finer senses" (100), this absence of light and sound also covers up the disorder of the dissolving household. When the light is turned on, significantly by Lucille whose name is associated with light, they feel "disspirit[ed]," made "startled and uncomfortable" (101) by the surrounding disorder. This is one incident among many which serves to transfer Lucille's gaze to the social order.

While Ruth and Sylvie's flight from civilization occurs inside the house, Lucille's flight towards civilization, her desire "to make something of herself" (132), also begins there. She becomes increasingly like her friend, Rosette Brown, whom Ruth imagines saying, echoing Thomas Jefferson, "Ignorance of the law is the crime" (104). The "single consciousness" (98) shared by Ruth and Lucille is thus ruptured when Lucille begins to view her self and her life from the perspective of the town. The cold forces Ruth to return home after a day in the woods, whereas "the dark allowed Lucille to pass through the tattered peripheries of Fingerbone unobserved" (99). Lucille's progression away from

Sylvie's house is a movement towards an identity that will allow her to fit into the "proper" social order.

Lucille creates this identity by way of sewing patterns, fashion magazines, hair styles, and books about men that "she took to be improving" (132): Ivanhoe, Little Men, and National Geographic. Her diary entries associate her with previous self-improving male Americans: Benjamin Franklin and Jay Gatsby. With the diary, the concept of property and privacy is introduced into the household. At the same time, the very public nature of Ruth's larger narrative contrasts, contains, but also overrides, Lucille's notion of privacy. Lucille "writes" in order socially to construct an identity for herself; Ruth "writes" in order to escape social construction. Fittingly, Lucille eventually becomes the daughter of the childless Miss Royce, the Home Economics teacher and, as Joan Kirkby writes, "the custodian of civil order" (103).

While Lucille is traversing the border between Sylvie's house and the civil order, Ruth is becoming more like Sylvie. Ruth has no desire to pull herself into "some seemly shape and slip across the wide frontiers into that other world" (123). For, as Ruth realizes,

nothing I had lost, or might lose, could be found there, or, put it another way, it seemed that something I had lost might be found in Sylvie's house. . . . It seemed to

me that what perished need not also be lost. At Sylvie's house, my grandmother's house, so much of what I remembered I could hold in my hand--like a china cup, or a windfall apple, sour and cold from its affinity with deep earth, with only a trace of the perfume of its blossoming. Sylvie, I knew, felt the life of perished things. (124)

With Lucille gone, then, the relationship between Sylvie and Ruth changes. No longer Ruth's symbolic mother, Sylvie becomes her equal. Sylvie tells the town rescuers that Ruth "is like another sister to me. She's her mother all over again" (182). However, before this equality develops they journey, on a "borrowed" boat, into the mountains of Fingerbone and return on a freight train. During the journey there is a symbolic gestation as Ruth imagines Sylvie "could as well be my mother, [for] I crouched and slept in her very shape like an unborn child" (145), and there is also a symbolic birth: Ruth "crawled under her body and out between her legs" (146); but there is also an abandonment (161) and a realization that death is "the only true birth . . . which would free us from watery darkness" (162).

The journey by freight, the possibility that the town might be losing Ruth to the transient ways of Sylvie, causes a deluge of visits by the sheriff and the pious women of the town. These representatives of the social order put great

pressure on Sylvie's house, so much that she, for fear of losing Ruth, attempts to put up a good front by restoring the lost domesticity. Ironically, this restoration turns into a partial demolition of that order. Sylvie burns everything from newspapers, magazines, catalogues and library books; in effect, she burns the texts which have guided Lucille into the symbolic order. For a brief moment, Sylvie occupies what Luce Irigaray describes as mimicry: while attempting to destroy the language that has trapped them, she

reacted to her audience with a stage voice and large gestures. She kept saying, 'I don't know why we didn't do this months ago,' loudly, as if she thought there were listeners beyond the firelight, among the apple trees. Everything to which Sylvie imagined anyone might attach merit she did with enormous zeal and diligence and effort.

(200)

While conforming to the expectations of the social order, Sylvie "also remain[s] elsewhere" (Irigaray, This Sex 76). Eventually she attempts to burn down the house, but only after the realization that to stay in the shelter of the house would be to break up their household.

The attempt to restore and/or to destroy the lost domesticity of the grandfather's house fails. The town's

inability to tolerate transience ironically forces Ruth and Sylvie into becoming transients; Ruth makes quite clear that "Sylvie and I are not travelers" (216): "we are drifters" (213). They are not allowed to continue reconstructing the domestic within the ancestral/matrilineal home because of the larger order which surrounds that structure. But to live a life of transience, in the context of this text and in the context of sociological studies, does not result in a life that is free of social constraints. When Sylvie and Ruth cross the rail road bridge they are assumed dead by the townspeople of Fingerbone, and although many years have passed since the event of their "death"/escape, they do not return to claim their "identities." Even with the knowledge that "'After seven years they [the law] can't get you for anything'" they are aware also that "they could always get you for increasingly erratic behaviour" (213).

In her discussion of Housekeeping, Sian Mile aligns the reader with King Lear. "We may," she contends, "like Lear, feel compelled to ask for more--'Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again' (1.i.92)" (135). But what Lear wants to hear from Cordellia is hyperbolic convention, and thankfully Robinson refuses to give us a comfortable narrative. For it is Ruth, not Lucille, who is narrating the story of two daughters whose legacy is what they make of it. Lucille creates a subjectivity from the social order, whereas Ruth's subjectivity is contingent upon that which is

not. It is difficult to surmise what that "not" is, but in this negativity the self paradoxically expands; it does not diminish:

I learned an important thing in the orchard that night, which was that if you do not resist cold, but simply relax and accept it, you no longer feel the cold as discomfort. I felt giddily free and eager, as you do in dreams, when you suddenly find that you can fly, very easily, and wonder why you have never tried it before. For example, I was hungry enough to begin to learn that hunger has its pleasures, and I was happily at ease in the dark, and in general, I could feel that I was breaking the tethers of need, one by one. But then the sheriff came. (204)

The symbolic, in the form of the social and civil order, continuously challenges any possibility of a clean escape for Sylvie and Ruth: certainly, the "newspaper clipping" reporting their seeming death which Sylvie wears pinned inside her jacket is a constant reminder of the limits imposed on their transience. But these limits are also the means to the narrative Ruth Stone writes to a world that is constantly attempting to cover up that which is not. Similarly, the interdependence of vagrancy and domesticity, of imaginary and symbolic, is played out in the concluding

relationship between Ruth and Lucille. Ruth imagines that she and Sylvie are constantly in Lucille's thoughts: "[n]o one watching [Lucille] . . . could know how her thoughts are thronged by our absence, or know how she does not listen, does not wait, does not hope, and always for me and Sylvie" (219). But in Ruth's imagining, Lucille, likewise, remains a constant presence; for as Ruth earlier recognizes, loss is the precondition for presence (195). Robinson's characterization of Ruth Stone and Sylvie Fisher suggests that it is the larger of ideology of home, not the homeless, that must be remedied.

NOTES

1. Woolf's vagrant figure, as Kristin Brady has pointed out, is possibly a partial allusion to the female vagrant that roams through the many versions of William Wordsworth's Salisbury Plain poems. According to Brady, who identifies two types of wandering females in Wordsworth's poetry, abandoned women and vagrant mothers, "the figures are seen as victims of circumstances external to themselves" (4). While Wordsworth's abandoned women might very well have origins with the wandering woman depicted in the eighteenth-century anonymous poem, "A Winter Piece"--where the fallen woman, initially abandoned by her lover is then abandoned by her "disapproving" family--much of his poetry depicts also a vagrancy that is conditional upon "historical forces" (7). For instance, An Evening Walk features a vagrant mother who is widowed by the American Revolutionary wars (Brady 38).

2. Wolff offers a three-fold explanation for the absence of women in the literature of modernity: "(1) the nature of sociological investigation, (2) the consequently partial conception of 'modernity', and (3) the reality of women's place in society" (43). Wolff suggests that when women do appear in the city-scape, as they do in Baudelaire's texts, they are marginal figures: "none of these women meet the poet as his equal. They are subjects of his gaze, objects of his 'botanising'" ("Invisible Flaneuse" 42).

3. Joanne S. Frye argues that when the female character has control of the narrative, "she thus achieves a very immediate kind of agency and a capacity to renew our notion of plot. She is the agent by which events come into being as part of her . . . [and] she claims the capacity for a new understanding of her life" (56).

4. Ruth's name recalls the Old Testament Book of Ruth. By revisioning the loyalty of the daughter to the foster mother, who is in this case an aunt not a mother-in-law, Robinson creates a particularly feminized version of the biblical wanderer, one whose narrative does not end in marriage. In an interview, Robinson suggests that the central issue of the Book of Ruth--who to follow--creates the primary analogy with her own book:

the decision that [the biblical] Ruth makes is, 'Where thou goest I shall go; thy people shall be my people and thy God, my God.' It seems to me that in a certain way the Ruth in my book makes that kind of radical choice about whose terms of reality she will accept. When she follows Sylvie, she's passing from one civilization to another. (2)

This represents a marked difference from Keat's use of Ruth in "Ode to a Nightingale" where Ruth, in her homelessness and homesickness, is evoked as a solitary figure.

Robinson's Ruth also rewrites Wordsworth's "Ruth." Here

a vagrant. Ruth wanders through the countryside having been "slighted" (1. 4) by her father, who "took another mate" (I. 2), and then "[d]eserted" (32. 191) by her lover. Ruth, typical of the eighteenth century abandoned woman, goes "mad," and "is in a prison housed" (33. 194-95). Eventually she escapes to lead a life of vagrancy.

5. The other non-married females in the novel, potentially vagrants, are haphazardly sheltered in Dora's house of prostitution.

6. Stephanie Golden writes that

[i]ndustrialization also created a new type of migratory worker in the United States, but in a context that made him, briefly, a hero. For a long time the hobo tradition colored perceptions of skid-row alcoholic men, even though the hobo proper became virtually extinct by the end of the depression. Although quite a number of women were hobos, homeless women did not possess this tradition as part of a history, either in their own minds or in those of others. Thus, in a continuation of their typical state of existing outside accepted reality, they have always appeared in the United States as a shocking anomaly. (135)

7. Golden also makes a strong connection between women's homelessness and the larger ideology of "home":

For women, homelessness is not a function only of economics or of class but also of the image of Woman that a society holds, and thus is connected to the full scope of women's condition within that society. (132)

8. Donald Greiner is the latest critic to write about Housekeeping as a quest novel that "reshapes the canonical text" (67):

By concluding with the beginning of the quest as the family of new mother and daughter walks away from civilization, Robinson alters two established, not to say revered, canonical traits: the male expectation that the hero leaves the woman at home and the female expectation that the heroine closes with marriage or death. (71)

Other critics who have followed a similar line of argument are Maureen Ryan and Martha Ravits. It is almost impossible not to recognize the appropriation of this particularly American topos.

9. Greiner, Ravits and Ryan are three critics who read Housekeeping in terms of American literary history, while Kaivola, Mallon and Mile are three who read it in terms of female development and subjectivity.

10. To be fair, Mallon later argues that "Housekeeping says that transience, not fixity, is our natural human condition, and it offers us the opportunity to see that truth in a new way--not as a cause for sorrow or fear, though certainly sadness accompanies the realization, but as a constant source of power and possibility" (97-98). However, in her conclusion Mallon undermines the above argument by claiming that fiction is "what can be imagined but, we want to insist, definitely not lived. Like Fingerbone, we would much rather judge the radical terms of the act than grant Ruth and Sylvie the 'simple truth' of their ascension" (103). Throughout her article, Mallon aligns herself very firmly with the townspeople of Fingerbone.

11. This critical domestication moves beyond criticism into the milieu of popular culture. In a footnote Karen Kaivola makes an important observation on the process of domestication:

In addition to being claimed by feminists, Housekeeping has been appropriated by the very sort of conventionality Ruth and Sylvie escape when they flee Fingerbone. For instance, one of the text's promotional blurbs maintains that it represents what American politicians are fond of calling 'family values.' Describing the novel as 'a

stunningly moving story about a devastated family' and Sylvie as a 'misfit who flirts with suicide' but 'then finds her salvation in a tenuous family life' with Ruth, this blurb inscribes normative values and ideas, views many readers undoubtedly share. (I refer here to a quotation from People magazine in the 1989 Bantam edition.) In a similar gesture, the video version of the film based on the novel has been classified and marketed as a comedy. . . . The video's classification positions viewers by establishing in advance expectations that obscure its challenge to traditional assumptions about women's roles and behaviour. (673)

Although Kaivola has relegated these observations to a footnote (as I too have done), they mark a pivotal point in the criticism of Housekeeping.

12. Ryan argues that at "the end of Housekeeping, Ruthie and Sylvie, like the classic male American hero, abandon home and civilization and embark on an unknown journey" (85); Kirkby writes that after they attempt to burn down the house and cross the train bridge, "they begin their life of transience in earnest, having tested and found wanting the house estate bequeathed to them by their

fathers"(106); Heather Bohannon suggests "Sylvie and Ruth symbolically breach the enclosure of male culture when they cross the bridge and are considered dead by the town" (76); and, finally, Meese argues that "in a final gesture to the permanence of family relationships, one that stands in strict contrast to Kerouac's male fantasy of life on the road, Sylvie takes Ruth with her into transience" (64).

13. The similarities between Harman and Lerup are striking. Lerup, nodding towards Philip Slater's book The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at a Breaking Point, writes,

The family has been knocked about for some time; today its future seems so precarious that we may even conceive of its abolition. Yet, the family is tattooed on our minds, in our patterns of interaction as well as in our environment, and it will not be forgotten; the "pursuit of loneliness" that follows upon the collapse of a particular family often leads to disaster. But this trend may be turned around, if we realize that new socio-material situations are needed to take over the obsolete functions of the family. (Building 144)

The ghost of the family in Ruth and Sylvie's transience is apparent not only in the diad that makes up their life, but

also in the very real presence created by the absence of family members.

14. Paula E. Geyh's article uses the term father-house (originating with Mieke Bal) to define the "well-kept house," which

includes the house of the sheriff, who offers to take Ruth home the night she and Sylvie leave town, and the house of the home economics teacher, to which Lucille flees. It also includes the house Ruth's grandfather felt compelled to abandon in his youth, the one compared to a grave, with a horizon that did not seem to extend beyond its walls; and the house on the edge of town that he later built, where his wife and daughters and granddaughters lived after his death, and before his wife's death and the return of Sylvie. (108)

15. Much has been made of the merging between Sylvie and Ruth but to my knowledge no one has recognized that a similar merging takes place between Sylvia and her three daughters. There is also the merging consciousness between Lucille and Ruth.

16. For a more complete analysis between Julia Kristeva's essay, "Women's Time," and Robinson's Housekeeping, see Thomas Foster, who contends that

Housekeeping

provides us with a literary representation of the (nonidentical) dialectic development Kristeva's model follows and of an alternative, prefigurative practice that comes into contradiction with dominant social forms precisely through the performance of deconstructive strategies. (85)

17. Ruth's description of the "five serene, eventless years" (13) is similar to Adrienne Rich's description of when she and her children were freed, however briefly, from the demands of a conventional nuclear family:

I remember one summer, living in a friend's house in Vermont. My husband was working abroad for several weeks, and my three sons-- nine, seven, and five years old--and I dwelt for most of that time by ourselves. Without a male adult in the house, without any reason for schedules, naps, regular mealtimes, or early bedtimes so the two parents could talk, we fell into what I felt to be a delicious and sinful rhythm. It was a spell of unusually hot, clear weather, and we ate nearly all our meals outdoors, hand-to-mouth; we lived half-naked, stayed up to watch bats and stars and fireflies, read and told

stories, slept late. I watched their slender little-boys' bodies grow brown, we washed in water warm from the garden hose lying in the sun, we lived like castaways on some island of mothers and children. At night they fell asleep without murmur and I stayed up reading and writing as I had when a student, till the early morning hours. I remember thinking: This is what living with children could be-- without school hours, fixed routines, naps, the conflict of being both mother and wife with no room for being, simply, myself. Driving home once after midnight from a late drive-in movie, through the foxfire and stillness of a winding Vermont road, with three sleeping children in the back of the car, I felt wide awake, elated; we had broken together all the rules of bedtime, the night rules, rules I myself thought I had to observe in the city or become a "bad mother." We were conspirators, outlaws from institution of motherhood; I felt enormously in charge of my life. (194-95)

Like Thoreau's experiment in lifestyle, however, the experience described by Rich is limited by time, economic security, and the significance of the house as borrowed.

18. Gary Snyder attempts to renew the cliché "wild and free" by recovering its linguistic roots. He traces the meaning of the word wild:

The word wild is like a gray fox trotting off through the forest, ducking behind bushes, going in and out of sight. Up close, first glance, it is "wild"--then farther into the woods next glance it's "wyld" and it recedes via Old Norse villr and Old Teutonic wilthijaz into a faint pre-Teutonic gweltijos which means, still, wild and maybe wooded (wald) and lurks back there with possible connections to will, to Latin silva (forest, savage), and to the Indo-European root ghwer, base of Latin ferus (feral, fierce), which swings us around to Thoreau's "awful ferity" shared by virtuous people and lovers.

(9)

At the same time Snyder identifies how our dictionaries define wild by what "it is not." For example "Of animals--not tame, undomesticated, unruly" or "Of land--uninhabited, uncultivated" (9). He then proceeds to "turn it the other way": for example, "Of anima's--free agents, each with its own endowment, living within natural systems" or "Of land--a place where the original and potential vegetation and fauna are intact and in full interaction and the landforms are

entirely the result of nonhuman forces. Pristine" (9-10). For Snyder, "[t]o be truly free one must take on the basic conditions as they are--painful, impermanent, open, imperfect--and then be grateful for impermanence and the freedom it grants us" (5). Sylvia, derived from *silva*, is identified with the woods, but her name further identifies her with the trace of what once was, the forest/sauvage, and also with what eventually becomes "wild."

19. Joan Kirkby, Phyllis Lasner, Anne-Marie Mallon, Elizabeth Meese, Martha Ravits, and Maureen Ryan, for example, do not incorporate into their arguments, the other fe/male vagrants who populate the margins of *Fingerbone*.

20. Related to the (non)identity of male transients is the problem of Edmund Foster's identity. Although a few articles on *Robinson* posit Ruth and Sylvie in relation to the grandfather's transience (and dreaminess), most critics align Foster with patriarchy. Karen Kaivola writes that, "Like Edmund, Ruth and Sylvie leave what's familiar and constraining behind, and for them this means they must flee the circle of the mountains" (679). The non-identity of the grandmother's public person is often made explicit through her obituary--an obituary that recalls the death of her husband. But I contend that, more specifically, the obituary takes advantage of Edmund's part in the history of *Fingerbone*'s spectacular moment, to call attention to a larger history because it is "the derailment," not the life

of Edmund, which although "too bizarre in itself to have significance or consequence, was nevertheless the most striking event in the town's history" (40). While Sylvia Foster is only "pictured" through her husband, his identity is similarly effaced by the predominance of the train: the "black-bordered page in the Dispatch, featuring photos of the train taken the day it was added to the line, and of workers hanging the bridge with crepe and wreaths, and of, in a row of gentlemen, a man identified as my grandfather" (40).

Vagrant Shelters/Sheltered Vagrancies

Female vagrants/outlaws do have a history in American culture, however obscured. Over-shadowed by male myths of outlaws and beats, or subsumed by domestic ideology and stereotypic representations, potentially empowering acts of mental and physical vagrancy were in the past quickly neutralized. Maggie became the fallen woman; Hester needed rehabilitated, her transgressive acts were transformed into good works; the not "mother-woman" Edna Pontellier and the unmarried Lily Bart were refused a "habitable place" in the social organization. In the eighties, however, a number of socio-historical factors have converged to produce a thematic discourse of female vagrancy. Woman's roles, and the very constructions creating these roles, moreover, are now questioned; thus vagrancy as it is enacted in this second generation of feminist writing unsettles ideologies which create circumscribed positions for women.

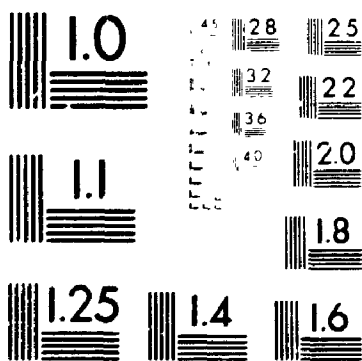
My thesis is largely concerned with domestic ideologies which provide a false sense of security, and with the myths which exclude women from a life "outside." My intention is not to glorify life "outside," since for real women

"outside" is often not a matter of choice but a socio-economic reality. However, I do propose that ideological practices which construct homeless women as needing rehabilitation--a consequence of our culture's continuing to view homeless women as either mad, abandoned or fallen--should be interrogated. At the same time, cultural narratives which challenge the status quo and suggest alternative representations should be recognized. Finally, a theorized vagrancy must avoid falling into the worn paths of male outlaws and beats. A simple gender-reversal is not enough.

In a 1993 essay called "On the Road Again," Janet Wolff observes that "vocabularies of travel seem to have been proliferating in cultural criticism: nomadic criticism, travelling theory, critic-as-tourist and vice versa, maps, billboards, hotels and motels." Significantly, "these metaphors" are not neutral, but "are gendered" and class-specific (115). Although my thesis has not been about travel per se, the same cautions and questions Wolff poses concerning the ideologies supporting these primarily male metaphors could, with some modification, be applied to vagrants and outlaws. Wolff argues that "[t]he ideological gendering of travel as male both impedes female travel and renders problematic the self-definition of and response to women who do travel" (127). Female vagrants and outlaws, however, test the boundaries of social identity, like

4 of /de 4

PM-1 3 1/2"x4" PHOTOGRAPHIC MICROCOPY TARGET
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PRECISIONSM RESOLUTION TARGETS

Simpson's Adele Diamond, or go into a kind of political exile, like Erdrich's Fleur Nanapush Pillager. In the case of Thelma and Louise, plans for a weekend get-away backfire when they overstep the bounds of their place in a world of male mobility and find themselves in a drama of escape.

To begin with, domestic ideology tends to prevent women from leaving home; once they are mobile, the terms of travel will keep them from continuing their journey unimpeded. If modes and metaphors of mobility are to be exploited by women, the ideologies which accompany and traditionally circumscribe female (non)space must also be unfixed. Problematizing the dichotomies of inside/outside and homeful/homeless, as certainly Robinson makes evident, is one strategy for destabilizing the structures that contain women. To move beyond the domestic narrative and at the same time to retain some kind of shelter--and by shelter I mean either a physical or narrative structure--is to create sheltered vagrancy and vagrant shelters. These shelters are comprised not of problematic ideologies but of domestic structures which "retain their old meaning" but also "signify a new order . . . where names and uses are no longer the primary force" (Lerup, Planned 91) behind, within, or beyond the domestic narrative.

My thesis has argued that these ideologies can be, at the least, questioned and re-arranged to make female mobility visible, and also to create a critical position

which permits a vagrancy that moves in and among the outdated ideologies that simply re-tell an old tale of female narrative limitation. Female transcience itself must not fall into what Irigaray calls dereliction but must be socially and thus symbolically motivated.

Put to use in American studies, the metaphors and modes of vagrancy might offer methods for recuperating those female characters excluded from the understanding of established critical discourses. This is not to imply that these figures should then be categorized simply as vagrants; rather, it is to suggest that theorizing vagrancy could unsettle the discourses perpetuating, among others, the myth of home, and make way for other discourses and other less confining myths.

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