Mother-Texts

Mother-Texts:
Narratives and Counter-Narratives

Edited by

Marie Porter and Julie Kelso

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For Andrea O'Reilly and Carole Ferrier –
dedicated feminists, activists, friends and colleagues

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INTRODUCTION

> If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man... it is time for her to dislocate this 'within', to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it into her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of.[1]

> Silencing disables agency, for the alternative to articulating your own experience and your own goals in your own way is to live someone else's version of you - to inhabit their definition of what you are like and their construal of what you think, feel and want and consequently to find yourself enacting their story of how your life should go.[2]

Every day, human beings tell and are told stories, sometimes in obvious ways, sometimes not. Most of our communication with each other, direct or indirect, involves narrative production and reception. To say that narrative is a distinctive human trait is hardly hyperbolic. In his famous essay, 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,' Roland Barthes (1966) declares that:

> The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's [sic] stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting…stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind [sic] and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative. All classes, all human groups, have their narratives, enjoyment of which is very often shared by men [sic] with different, even opposing, cultural backgrounds. Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.[3]

Narrative is constitutive of human *being*. However, as prevalent as it is, it is also hardly hyperbolic to claim that power imbalances arise concerning the questions of just who gets to produce narratives accepted as truth

("master", "meta", "grand", etc. narratives) or even as decisive for the majority ("official" or "hegemonic" narratives) and whose narratives actually get to be heard, if, indeed, they are audible at all. It may be tempting to ignore the gender-biased language in Barthes' statement ("…fit to receive *man's* stories", "it begins with the very history of *mankind*" and "enjoyment of which is very often shared by *men*"); tempting, but ill-advised. So much feminist critical analysis over the last fifty years (at least) concerns this very issue of the relations between language, knowledge, gender and power, particularly the question as to whether man-made and controlled language is a material fit, shall we say, to receive and convey woman's stories. And if the languages we have are heavily biased towards masculine living and expression, how do we make ourselves heard as women and as mothers? How do we cease producing narrative content that paralyzes the very creative gestures of production? In other words, in the act of telling story, producing narrative in a way that is counter to either the modernist predilection for "master" narratives or the related "official" narratives, how do we ensure that the words at our disposal are up to the task of honoring our desire to speak our experience as women and as mothers? These are very difficult questions, and in important ways the contributors here participate in this ongoing inquiry.

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There are significant reasons for research in which women's voices are heard. Historically, patriarchy has worked to silence women's dialogue. And, as Carol Gilligan claims, there are *certainly* good reasons for patriarchy to want to continue the silencing of women:

> A new psychological theory in which girls and women are seen and heard is an inevitable challenge to a patriarchal order that can remain in place only through the continuing eclipse of women's experience.[4]

Silencing of women's voices results in the maintenance of theories based on men's experiences. That is not the only effect of silencing on women. Because almost all women will try to live within the socio-cultural norms of their society, the lives they lead are somehow dictated to them by those who really do not have their best interests at heart, no matter what they may claim or even believe.

The discrediting of mothers' thought and knowledge has resulted in concepts of, and discourses about, mothering that emerged from centuries of almost exclusively male "experts" whose "knowledge" had been disseminated throughout society. Male knowledge, unsurprisingly, did not

describe the world of mothering. Those voices created and continue to create unrepresentative maternal narratives which lead to unreal expectations of mothers and motherwork. Mothers are judged, and usually judge themselves, against this impossible "ideal" mother. Hence it is not surprising that guilt is common amongst mothers as they compare themselves with an unattainable ideal.

Hegemonic narratives that constantly show positive images of happy mothers and babies and impose unreal expectations are eventually seen by mothers to be false stories when compared with the real experiences of motherhood. The workload, the need to learn new skills, the anxiety that being totally responsible for a new and precious life generates, and the lack of sleep (hopefully) ensures that mothers question the dominant narrative images because their experiences contradict the image of the mother created by these "official", seemingly legitimate narratives. No babies are perfect and no mothers are always calm and in control. Nor do mothers know how to cope with their new motherwork by instinct, a patriarchal myth *par excellence*.

Hilde Lindemann Nelson argues that it is possible to weave a "counterstory" from the stories that emerge from a group's own anecdotes, history and narratives.[5] She states: "The counterstory positions itself against a number of *master narratives…"* that misrepresent the group creating "an oppressive identity."[6] The counterstory, in its re-telling of the story of the oppressed group, reveals the members of the group as "respectworthy moral agents."[7] While the counterstory can alter the oppressors' perceptions of the group, more importantly, it can also alter the individual member's perception of her/his self so that individual members reject the harmful master narratives and see themselves as capable and valuable members of the society.

The stories we tell ourselves have an important influence on us. Daniel Stern writes that we are interested in history, not just for "facts", but because we are interested in stories. The stories of history reveal what we consider to be valuable. It is, therefore, disconcertingly significant for mothers that neither mothers nor their motherwork have been considered worthy of historical record; nor are historical records usually written from a mother's perspective. Hence the narrative research in this book is valuable.

In this book the contributors give recognition to motherhood, mothers and/or the work they do. It adds to the rapidly accumulating maternal research – research that is now available for the historical record. We are speaking up. The narrative research here is as diverse as are the methods of presenting it. The majority of the chapters explore a variety of written narrative texts (literary-fictional, autobiographical, legal, religious, popular cultural), but there is also research that uses maternal experiential stories gathered via interviews.

In Chapter One, Vivienne Muller uses Kristeva's writing on the 'abject' to explore a reading of Hartnett's *Of A Boy* (2002), a novel that also deals with lost children and imaginary mothers. However in its portrayal of children who are doomed to never achieve adulthood, *Of A Boy* enacts a haunting retrieval of the pre-Oedipal from the dark side of phallocentric representation, privileging the semiotic (Kristeva's concept) and the maternal as necessary disruptive checks on a patriarchal Symbolic Order. In reading the narrative in this way, Muller does not seek to foreclose on other interpretations which may more fully illuminate the material and historical contexts in which Hartnett's stories of abandoned and lost mothers and children are activated. Rather by examining the text using an aspect of psychoanalytic literary criticism, Muller acknowledges the centrality of the psycho-social to Harnett's delineation of the child subject in her narrative projects.

Wendy Green turns to a familiar fairy tale to explore a reworking of Luce Irigaray's essay *And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other* as a re-mythologisation of 'Snow White' in Chapter Two. Along with images of ice, mirrors and blood, Irigaray's text recycles other well-worn elements of Snow White, and other fairy tales. Narrated in short stilted sentences, and loose directionless phrases, *And the One Doesn't Stir Without the Other* painfully embodies one little girl's sense of entrapment as she oscillates between two equally undesirable alternatives: this daughter struggles to escape Mother's paralysing hold, even as she cries out of a maternal connection (she believes) she has never experienced.

In Chapter Three, Kyoko Taniguchi presents a psychoanalysis of motherhood as it is represented in a short story. While the story seems to be a nostalgic memory of a man's childhood, particularly his memory of his mother, just beneath the heartwarming, although not without a bittersweet sense of transience, narrative of the mother-son relationship lurks quietly but unmistakably the associations with cannibalism, death,

the bodily incorporation of food, the idealized fantasy mother, and the erotic image of the split half of the mother. This Chapter examines the representation of the mother in the short story, "Sushi," by Okamoto Kanoko, one of the prominent female authors in Japan, suggesting the ways in which eroticism of the maternal as well as the sense of transience run as an undertone. Kyoko highlights the inherently erotic aspect of motherhood and 'transient' mother-space in the story that is apparently about the incorporation of the "good" object and vomiting out of the "bad" object.

In Chapter Four, Julie Kelso explores Toni Morrison's novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977). In *Song of Solomon*, one of the principal characters, Pilate Dead, is born without a navel. This curious feature of Morrison's great character is usually understood as marking Pilate as an outsider: she is outside of civilisation, both black and white in middle-class, mid-twentieth century America. For most scholars, Pilate's featureless stomach casts her as an *ur*-mother, an Eve figure, the original mother of humanity. As such, Pilate and her belly can be read mythologically as origin. Pilate becomes, then, a reworking of the Jewish and Christian figure of Eve: she is origin and original mother of an authentic line of African Americans, a people who have lost sight of their cultural and social heritage. In other words, Pilate serves an important narrative function *vis-à-vis* the question of origins and identity. Kelso asks why this navel-less figure might arise, indeed perhaps *needs* to arise, in this novel that delineates the relationship between identity, history and the land. She suggests that the use of such a figure, while evocative of an Edenic purity of origins, problematically participates in what Luce Irigaray claims is *the* patriarchal "act" *par excellence*: the repression of maternal origination.

With Chapter Five, Ritva Nätkin considers Finnish mothers' autobiographies, writings that tell their stories of mothering from 1940s to the 1980s. These autobiographies are unpublished stories, gathered for research purposes, and stored in the Folklore Archive of Finnish Literature Society. The narratives are the basis for Nätkin's research into how Finnish mothers answered the invitation to be national agents and respond to the nationalist discourses in their narratives of motherhood. According to the population propaganda at the time of the Second World War and its aftermath, the country had to be both reconstructed and repopulated. Every family should produce 4-6 children so that the Finnish population would not decrease. The baby boom generations were born at the end of the 1940s. The nationalistic emphasis on the united population who survived was strong

at that time, and it can be regarded as the life-force of the welfare state which developed later. The population policy also includes a strong idealisation of motherhood and a glorification of the value of motherhood. Along with population policy, the mothers' welfare and well being became national property. Plot structure analysis reveals three narratives in the autobiographies written by Finnish women: familialist, maternalist and individualist narrative. They comprise a triadic balancing between the child's good, the woman's own welfare and the upholding of the couple relationship.

Turning to the genre of biography, in Chapter Six Deborah Jordan relates some of her experiences in writing a book, and subsequently self-publishing it, about her mother's life as a writer. Writing mothers/writing daughters is a theme explored in different contexts, and in different genres. One thinks of Drusilla Modjeska's *Poppy* or of the biography of Edna Ryan by her equally acclaimed daughter. Jordan addresses the making of *There's a Woman in the House, A 1950's Journey*, which is a self publishing venture to celebrate the life and work of her own mother, through her own voice, with a collection of her own writings as a freelance journalist in the 1950s. It addresses, some of the issues that arose in the process of re-discovery and publication and some of the methodologies and options of genre.

Following this, in Chapter Seven we move to research on the place of mothers in the ancient Indian pantheon. Victoria Grace investigates the representations of Goddesses in the *Ṛgveda* (RV), the earliest religious text of the Indian corpus comprising a collection of 1028 poetic hymns that date from the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. Her examination of the term "mother" (*mātṛ́*) and its associated words brings to light the diverse contexts in which such language is used: while the poets primarily invoke a variety of goddesses as mothers, they also use maternal terms to address women and objects such as cows and fire sticks. The specific instances of these words and the broader textual trends formed by them show what the concept of "mother" represented to the Vedic poets, as well as the religious and cultural construction of feminine divine and human figures.

The exploration of motherhood in ancient Indian texts continues as Tamara Ditrich considers the presentation of motherhood in the *Law Code of Manu.* The *Law Code of Manu* is one of the earliest Hindu legal sources and has been regarded as a great authority on most aspects of Hindu

society for about two millennia. This chapter is an extension of Ditrich's earlier research on mother-goddesses in the Hindu pantheon and the roles of women in ancient Indian society. It explores the intriguing contradiction between the veneration of mothers in both past and present Indian culture and the contrasting silence on motherhood in the most influential Hindu legal text, the *Law Code of Manu*. Not only is the absence of the mother's voice - which is common in most written texts of the past and present - investigated, but an attempt is made to identify some of the causes for the elusive silence from the side of its (male) authors on the topic of motherhood. Ditrich emphasizes the importance of examining the position of motherhood within the historical framework and aims to outline some of the parameters involved in the status given to mothers in ancient Hindu society.

In Chapter Nine, Tomoko Shimoda's narrative research explores the representation of motherhood in Japanese parenting magazines, comparing and contrasting the Japanese representations with those in English language parenting magazines. The results of her analysis of the most popular of these parenting magazines indicate that Japanese parenting magazines still portray a mother's role *vis-à-vis* her children as of overwhelming importance. Her role in any other non-parenting capacity, for example a previous or planned future role in the paid work place, is invisible and almost never mentioned. In contrast father's roles were portrayed as of decidedly secondary importance. Indeed, in the Japanese parenting magazines fathers were almost invisible, and when they were portrayed, they were depicted as narrow stereotypes of awkward and unnatural parents, particularly in relation to babies and younger children. Tomoko then examines why the portrayal of fatherhood in Japanese parenting magazines is so different from English language magazines. She considers the social factors - including Japanese corporate culture, media culture, and government policies - that contribute to the perpetuation of narrow gender roles in Japanese society and the Japanese media.

In Chapter Ten, Alison Bartlett looks at breast-feeding advice manuals from the 1970s to investigate the sexual liberation of maternal breasts as a cultural phenomenon, a phenomenon which has since been displaced. Bartlett argues that the 1970s, like the late 1990s, was a time in which motherhood manuals proliferated, largely due to a market demand by women to know more about their bodies and their maternities. The reading experience, however, is quite distinct. In the 1970s textual archives, breastfeeding is understood to include turn-ons as well as let-downs.

While largely the domain of heterosexuality and marriage, breastmilk is discussed as a novelty bonus for sexual practice in terms that are rarely encountered today. It is a discourse supported by medical narratives of hormonal and brain function; thus sexuality emerges as a form of breasted intelligence, but not for long. The difference between these narratives of eroticised breastmilk and today's circulation of stories of fear and loathing, failure and despair, are vast and suggestive. A different set of ethical relations between sexuality and babies may impinge on such discourses today, however the seventies archives are notable for the pleasure and agency imbued in the maternal subject and her generative and generous body.

Marilyn Anderson also examines the question of the fertile maternal body, but her research (Chapter Eleven) relates to a recent fertility drive in Australia. She argues that in the last three years the status of parenthood has been elevated through national pronatalist policies and ideologies in a bid to improve the fertility rate, newly-fashioning esteem for the stay-at-home mum. In a remake of the 1950s-style, breadwinner, nuclear family model, economic imperatives, both political and personal, dictate that, this time, mum is encouraged to work part-time as soon as the youngest is at school. In that same short period since improvements to family tax benefits in the federal budget of 2004, fertility has been positioned more strenuously as a limited resource ebbing with age, exhorted as a precious commodity not to be squandered. As a consequence, pregnancy has become *á la mode*, with the lump sum baby bonus adding endorsement – more so than incentive - to fulfil personal destiny and national duty. In this mix, young, adolescent women are set to acquire a most favourable impression that motherhood, especially young(er) motherhood, has society's approbation.

In the remaining six chapters, the focus is on texts that have been created directly from listening to mothers' experiences via interviews. Because these narratives result from mothers' experiences, they usually produce a counter narrative highlighting the inadequacy of the master narratives. The narratives at least reveal how problematic master narratives can be. For example, in Chapter Twelve, Lisa Raith explores narratives about mothering and work present in in-depth, ante- and post-natal interviews with ten first-time mothers from south-east Queensland. Using a feminist post-structuralist paradigm, dominant narratives of idealised mothering and a 20th century liberal ethic of individualism combined to undermine beliefs of mothering as being equal to paid work. Counter narratives about

mothering as work were present, but these were tentative and contradictory. The findings suggest that despite more than thirty years of maternal research, and attempts to recognise, valorise and rework notions of what motherwork is, contemporary mothers are still subject to, and swayed by, outmoded views of mothering and work.

Deborah Keys likewise focuses on becoming a mother, but her narratives emerge from the experiences of homeless young mothers and service providers. In Chapter Thirteen, Keys outlines both the difficulties and opportunities of this most powerful and life-changing experience. The key finding was that motherhood can be a catalyst for positive change in the lives of these young women. Narratives of redemption were common, whereby motherhood was understood as, not only a time for reflection about identity and lifestyle, but also as an opportunity for a new start with a new family. Motherhood was both an empowering and a disempowering experience. Social isolation and added barriers to education and employment were problematic but these were balanced by many positive changes. The imperative to achieve stability, particularly in regard to accommodation, and to take on the responsibility for a child was associated with changes in relation to self-perceptions and behaviours, which were conducive to exiting homelessness. Young women commonly reported improved self-esteem and a new purpose in life. They also reported changes in relation to family relationships; becoming a mother was a compelling factor in seeking family reconciliation. Many spoke of being more future-oriented. Whether they are able to realize their hopes for the future will in part depend upon the support provided by services to overcome the significant cultural, structural and personal obstacles.

Tammy Rendina's research, in Chapter Fourteen, examines the effect of prenatal expectations on the experiences of motherhood and the implication this has on the occurrence of postnatal depression (PND). The Australian-based literature showed that there is a gap in the research examining how realistic a woman's prenatal expectations are prior to having a baby. There is also a gap in the recent research that takes these expectations and experiences into consideration when investigating the rationale for the rising incidence of postnatal depression. Rendina's research attempts to go beyond the realism of motherhood and gain a clearer understanding of how these expectations are established and how women can be empowered to have a positive mothering experience. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with women recruited from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. Unrealistic expectations regarding the

experiences of motherhood include social support, emotional consequences of motherhood, sleep deprivation, breastfeeding and the pressure to be a "good mother." Such unrealisic expectations can have detrimental effects on the mother. The findings also suggest that the media and family and friends play an integral role in the way women establish their expectations of motherhood. Rendina concludes that there is a need for women to be given the appropriate knowledge and skills in order to make the transition to motherhood more positive and realistic.

In Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen, mothers challenge master narratives about disability. In both cases the mother has lived with her disabled son for many years and draws on her own experiences to underscore a different perspective on disability narratives. Each mother has created a text. While these texts cannot be taken as representative of situations that exist for mothers of children with a disability, they do create counter narratives that stimulate thought about the assumptions made by many people about people with a disability, their mothers and their families and friends.

Fiona Place questions the effect amniocentesis has on the attitude to a child with a disability. As the mother of a child with a disability, she shares what it is like for a family to live with Down syndrome. In relating the various mental and physical symptoms that can result from having an extra copy of chromosome 21, the chromosome that causes Downs, she notes that symptoms of Down syndrome can range from mild to severe and can cause slower mental and physical development, heart problems or other health problems. Place questions the repercussions of simply accepting such knowledge. She argues that tests such as amniocentesis could be reshaping the meaning of pregnancy and in the process deeply altering our perceptions of what is and what isn't an acceptable life. She relates the narrative of her own family who had to forge their own narrative, their own meaning of a life that in the shadows of genetic screening had been deemed less than perfect.

Marie Porter then narrates her own experience of being a mother coping with a child with disabilities. The disabilities were extensive resulting in health problems. When the child was born 39 years ago, there were only two options: put the child into an institution which usually was kilometres from the family home and usually had the problems that are found in such places where the patients are vulnerable, or try to cope with the child at home in which case the whole family shared the burden of disability. This

mother chose the latter path resulting in an incredible journey for all the family members. The costs were great, but so were the rewards.

Finally, in Chapter Seventeen, Jenny Jones and Eleanor Milligan have used a voice-centered relational method of analyzing texts created by interviews. As they point out, once a narrative has been collected, recorded and transcribed, a choice confronts researchers as to what analytical tool they should adopt in order to respectfully and thoroughly interpret the story that has been told. A range of methodological interpretive frameworks exist to assist researchers in exploring the meanings and interpretations of individual narratives. However, some of these methods can be limiting in that they are reductionist and may oversimplify or discount the multiple threads that can run through any individual account. One mode of narrative analysis which intentionally embraces the multifaceted, subjective and relational nature of narrative is the Listening Guide. Jones and Milligan carefully outline this method of maternal research.

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Notes

[1] Hélène Cixous. Laugh of the Medusa. *Signs* 1(4), (1976): p. 887.
[2] Diana Tietjens Meyers. *Gender in the Mirror*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, (2002): p.17.
[3] Roland Barthes. Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives, in *Image-Music-Text*, reprinted in Susan Sontag (ed.), *A Barthes Reader*. New York: Hill & Wang, (1982): pp. 251-2.
[4] Carol Gilligan. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, (1993): p. xxiv.
[5] Hilde Lindemann Nelson. *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, (2001): pp. 6-9.
[6] Nelson, (2001): p. 6.
[7] Nelson (2001): p. 7.

CHAPTER ONE

LOST CHILDREN AND IMAGINARY MOTHERS IN SONYA HARTNETT'S *OF A BOY*

VIVIENNE MULLER

In *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva writes about lost children.[1] These are what she calls "dejects,"[2] who, in the psychodrama of subject formation, fail to fully absent the body of the mother, to accept the Law of the Father and the Symbolic, and subsequently to establish "clear boundaries which constitute the object-world for normal subjects."[3] Dejects are "strays" looking for a place to belong, a place that is bound up with the Imaginary mother of the pre-Oedipal period. Kristeva's sketch of the deject as one who is unable to negotiate a proper path to the Symbolic is useful to a reading of Hartnett's *Of A Boy* (2002),[4] a novel that also deals with lost children and imaginary mothers. However, in its portrayal of children who are doomed to never achieve adulthood, *Of A Boy* enacts a haunting retrieval of the pre-Oedipal from the dark side of phallocentric representation, privileging the semiotic (Kristeva's concept) and the maternal as necessary disruptive checks on a patriarchal Symbolic Order. In reading the narrative in this way, this essay does not seek to foreclose other interpretations which may more fully illuminate the material and historical contexts in which Hartnett's stories of abandoned and lost mothers and children are activated. Rather, by examining the text using an aspect of psychoanalytic literary criticism, this essay acknowledges the centrality of the psycho-social to Hartnett's delineation of the child subject in her narrative projects.[5]

Of a Boy is set in 1977, a year in which, among other things on the global scene, "Queen Elizabeth celebrated her Silver Jubilee…and US President Carter officially pardoned those who'd draft-dodged the Vietnam War."[6] Against these weighty socio-political events indexing both tradition and change in the global context, is counterpoised a much smaller, more local event; 1977 is also the year in which Veronica, Zoe

and Christopher Metford, three children from an ordinary middle-class Australian suburb, walk to the local store for an ice-cream treat promised by their mother and are never seen again.[7] The story of the lost Metford children is the event with which Hartnett begins her tale, and one which evocatively converses with the main narrative of nine-year old Adrian, another "lost" child, who lives with his grandmother Beattie and her twenty-five year old son Rory (Adrian's uncle). Adrian, we are informed in compressed and sporadic moments as the narrative unravels, has lived for the first few years of his life with his mother Sookie and his father, followed by brief periods firstly with his mother then with his father after his parents separate. Finally, after Adrian's father declares that Sookie is not a fit mother (she suffers from an undisclosed illness which we are led to believe is depression fuelled by alcohol), his father delivers him to Beattie, Sookie's mother, with the dismissive words: "I can't take care of him and that's all there is to it. I need to be free." [8]

While these background details are only skimpily etched, they define a hegemonic patriarchal social order founded for its stability on the "good," protective and acquiescent mother, and the authoritative and dominant father. In this schema, women are essentially linked with the nurturing and domestic domain and men with the outside world of work and self-management. Middle-class suburbia is also implicated in this patriarchally gendered division of labour, spatiality and parenting. Duruz refers to the "feminization of the suburbs" that accompanied suburban expansion following World War II in which "ideologically at least, house, garden, woman and children" constituted a comforting "emotional centre." [9] Central to this script is the promise of successful rites of passage to self-definition, and an endorsement of the Oedipal psychodrama of identity formation. This patterning of family life was prevalent in 1970s Australia; Hartnett's dialogue with it in *Of A Boy*, probes beneath the façade to reveal more disquieting family formations: marriages fall apart, sons cannot grow up, mothers fail to "mother," children disappear or are disappointments, and grandmothers become "grand-monsters" (Adrian's private name for his grandmother Beattie). The home and the suburban space are represented either as dark and desolate places or as sites cluttered with compensatory material objects. While Hartnett's novel burrows beneath the family suburban dream, it also discloses, through Adrian's heavy emotional investment in it, the ways in which it exacts a weighty emotional toll, particularly on mothers and children.

Kristeva's portrait of the deject provides an instructive liminal position from which to grasp the processes by which some individuals struggle and fail to negotiate a subject position within a given social and Symbolic Order. Kristeva's concept is indebted to Lacan's contention that the process of becoming a "normal" subject involves the father figure splitting the dyadic unity between mother and child (the Imaginary of the pre-Oedipal period) and providing access to a place within the Symbolic Order. In his use of the term Symbolic, Lacan recognises the significance played by the language systems, ideology, law, intersubjective relations and the social and moral conventions in any given society. In entering the Symbolic Order, the child becomes subject to its rules, regulations, and linguistic templates and is thus enabled to transact with others. Lacan also recognizes that this process is never fully complete because it comes at a cost to the child, and that is the repression of its sense of wholeness with the mother experienced in the womb and in the Imaginary stage. Moi, explicating Lacan on this point, writes:

> The Law of the Father (or the threat of castration), thus come to signify separation and loss of the maternal body, and from now on the desire for the mother or the imaginary unity with her must be repressed. This first repression is what Lacan calls the primary repression and it is this primary repression that opens up the unconscious… the speaking subject only comes into existence because of the repression of the desire for the lost mother.[10]

Kristeva's description of the deject identifies a modality in which the child fails to fully repress the desire for the "lost mother." The deject therefore resides at the interstitial level between the subconscious and unconscious realms in the motivational drives towards identity formation; in this respect the deject complicates the ordered certainties of the Symbolic and performs in much the same way Kristeva claims the semiotic and the abject do, that is as disruptive accompaniments to the Symbolic.[11] Kristeva argues that while the separation from the maternal body is necessary for the development of individual identity, the mother/child dyadic relationship of the pre-Oedipal period has been dismissed in Freudian and Lacanian theory as having little if any teleological or linguistic value. In her re-working of Freud's and Lacan's Oedipal narrative, Kristeva seeks to valorise the pre-Oedipal (encompassed in her term "semiotic") and to argue for its ongoing dialogue with the symbolic in the negotiation of subjectivity. In *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva writes:

> The subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both. [12]

Kristeva uses the word "semiotic" in order to acknowledge the existence of a pre-verbal language in the relationship between the mother and child in the pre-Oedipal period. The deject lives in a state of uncertainty, unable to ratify the primary repression that would vouchsafe a secure place in the Symbolic Order, and constantly experiencing the fear of "his very own identity sinking irretrievably into the mother".[13] However, to read Adrian as deject, a captive of the semiotic, is not necessarily to condemn him to the prison-house of psychosis; rather it is to come to understand that the Symbolic Order is, in many ways, an inadequate substitute for the imaginary unity with the mother. It is this particular condition that Hartnett's novel can be read as redeeming and privileging.

Hartnett's reiterative use of opaque images in her psychological rendering of Adrian's perspective references his inability to purchase a concrete concept of the self in the familial and societal contexts in which he resides. Like the deject he is held in a kind of suspended animation, peering anxiously from the metaphoric womb which is both an abyss that threatens to collapse all meaning and a safe place in strong opposition to a world which denies him a secure identity:

> Everyone and everything exists in a world he cannot quite comprehend. He glimpses only the residue, scrapes the surface of happenings. He wonders if, when he's older, he will better understand things, or if he is doomed to live forever as someone struggling to see.[14]

Harnett makes it clear that Adrian's shaky self-image, his struggle to see, is induced in large part by the way others in the phallocentric Symbolic have seen him. In particular, he has overheard his father telling his grandmother he should not give her any trouble because he (Adrian) is tame and uninteresting. The passage denotes the ways in which the subject is (literally and symbolically) labelled by the Law of the Father,[15] and the ways in which this classification is internalized by the emergent subject:

> His father thought him boring. A thing to be rid of....He has spent what seems like his entire life being driven from person to person and place to place. Like the bundle that gets handed about in the game of pass-the-parcel, he's been unwrapped and made smaller as he's pushed from each to the next. He is haunted by the prospect of losing the last thin layer that protects him.[16]

Hartnett's description of Adrian as a "bundle" is highly evocative of the child in the womb while the reference to the "last thin layer that protects him" suggests the penultimate stages of the birthing process. Considered in this way, the passage articulates the ambivalence that denotes the deject-as-possible-subject's relationship with the Symbolic: at once anxious for positive self-affirmation, at the same time reluctant to leave the defensive enclosure of the maternal body. As Adrian's negative experiences in the material world (that is the Symbolic Order) accrue, his desire for the lost maternal realm exponentially intensifies.

The spatial is a component along with the linguistic in the constitution of self-image.[17] When Adrian is rejected by his friend Clinton, he comments to his uncle Rory, "'Everybody leaves me. I'm not allowed to be anywhere.'"[18] This statement echoes Kristeva's claims that the deject, "Instead of sounding himself as to his 'being,' does so concerning his place: '*Where* am I?' instead of '*Who* am I?'"[19] The "where" rather than "who" signifies Adrian's apprehension of the adult world and his related inability to gain a substantial sense of place within it. This fear is displaced onto other happenings and objects in his environment. The year in which the events in the narrative take place, a strange sea creature is caught by a Japanese fishing fleet in the Atlantic Ocean. Adrian is haunted by this image; it is another thing to add to the "list of things he finds disquieting."[20] Hartnett's description of the sea creature, angled through Adrian's lens, connects the shapelessness and fearfulness of its strangeness with his own self-perceived lack of definition: "Winglike flippers fold back from its cresting, cavernous body. It seems to possess a tattered rope of tail. The bones show through—sometimes break through—the white and waxy skin. The flesh looks melted, it is a thing in ruins."[21] Adrian is disappointed when the sea-monster no longer registers on the evening news. His identification with it and the fact that it cannot be defined as something in the known world, symbolises his fear of being different, of not being a unified self, in control of the cognitive and corporeal boundaries in the way that he perceives others to be; and his desire to find out what the sea-monster actually is, speaks of a deep need to see if he too can be explained and accounted for, to be something solid not "melted" or a "thing in ruins." This identification of the discontinuous self, of the self in layers is a repeated motif in the novel that approximates, according to Lacan, the first sense a baby has of its body when it moves beyond the secure anchorage to the mother within the womb.[22]

Kristeva writes, "For the space that engrosses the deject, the excluded, is never *one*, nor *homogeneous*, nor *totalizable*, but essentially divisible, foldable, and catastrophic."[23] Amongst other things that Adrian counts in his things to be afraid of are quicksand and spontaneous combustion, both representing his fear of disappearing, a slippage into nothingness, the space of the divisible ("unwrapped and made smaller") the foldable (the "bundle"), and the catastrophic ("quicksand"). The liminal position figured by his fears, is similar to that held by the deject. The local park, usually signified in suburban discourse as a "happy" and "safe" place where community can enact itself, is for Adrian a "forsaken place, a rejected one" in a "perpetual state of desertedness."[24] The disappearance of the Metford children also interlinks with Adrian's sense of his own insubstantiality and his strong desire for an acceptable identity. Hartnett weaves the disappearance of the children into the narrative fabric of Adrian's story, so that they countersign the tenuousness of identity that characterises Adrian's state, his fear that there is no secure and protected place for him in the material world. It also signals the ways in which the abject child cannot engage fully with a subject position in the Symbolic:

> It has never occurred to him that children can vanish. The Metfords have not been lost or abandoned—they have been made to disappear….
>
> Adrian has never thought that an ordinary child could be worth taking or wanting, a desirable thing. [25]

Adrian's inability to establish and maintain the "proper" borders of individuation is heavily pronounced in his perception of the children at nearby St Jonah's orphanage, some of whom attend his local school. His friend Clinton has no trouble situating the orphans in opposition to his own securely guarded realm of self-definition, his strong sense of place in the society of home and school. Clinton's grasp of these classifying borders allows him to constitute the orphans as "other" and "abnormal." Explaining them to a bewildered Adrian, Clinton confidently expounds that they are orphans because:

> Their parents are no good, that's why. Can't look after their children. Don't treat them very well. Maybe don't even want them. So the kids get taken away and put in the Home. But it's too late, usually. Some of them have already gone nuts. Nuts from not being looked after properly. Crazy like their mum and dad are.[26]

Clinton's identification of the child who is abject, denotes a Symbolic Order that privileges the "respectable" and arguably, in the social context of the novel, "white" middle-class nuclear family.[27] Adrian's reaction to