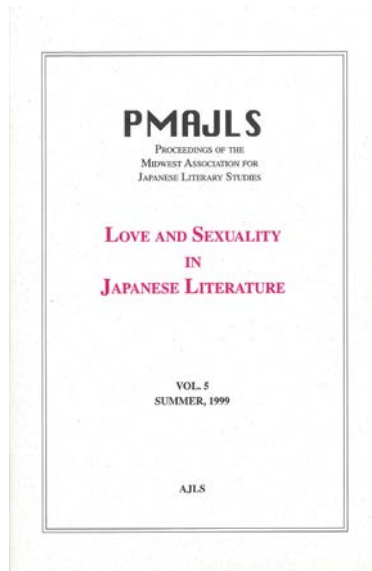


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**THE MOTHER, THE DAUGHTER,  
AND THE SEXED BODY  
IN ENCHI FUMIKO'S "FUYU MOMIJI"**

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According to Luce Irigaray, Western culture depends on the murder of the mother (cited in Whitford, 1991, 75). In Japan, too, the mother is subject to a range of phallogocentric mythologies which, while they may not result in her murder, certainly seek to erase any dimension of sexual desire in her representation. Enchi Fumiko is a writer whose work contests this decorous asexuality the patriarchy would inscribe on the mother, this cultural imaginary which refuses to symbolize the maternal-feminine in any manner other than that which suppresses active sexuality. Enchi is also a writer who foregrounds the mother-daughter, or older woman-younger woman, relationship as a site in which feminine sexuality might be inflected through the generations. Crucial elements of her narrative are constructed around the tension which exists between the mother and the daughter. This tension often arises from the older woman's struggle with her own sexuality in light of the sexual identity and experience she observes in the figure of the daughter.

In this paper, I want to examine Enchi's treatment of the mother, and the voice of the mother, particularly as it is mediated through the relationship with a younger woman in the daughter role, in the short story "Fuyu Momiji" ("The Autumn Leaves of Winter"), published in January, 1959. I will also consider the representation of the mother's body in this text. It should be noted that the mother daughter relationship in "Fuyu Momiji" is once removed, in that it is the bond between a niece and her maternal aunt. Nevertheless, although the relationship is not strictly a biological one, there is a strong symbolic maternal genealogy between the two women. In addition, Enchi's text has the mother of the younger woman, Kanako, call on her younger sister, Eiko, to help her child find a marriage partner (Enchi, 1959, 408). In other words, living outside the city as she does, Kanako's mother temporarily abrogates her maternal role to her younger sister.

"Fuyu Momiji" is an intricately constructed work dealing with the experiences of Eiko, an actress of late middle age, who transgresses the ultimate taboo boundary for an older woman, love for a younger man. The younger man, Tachibana, is the prospective fiancée of Eiko's niece, Kanako. The work opens with a declaration of love by Eiko. The declara-

tion is ostensibly from the text of a play which Eiko is rehearsing, a play which has a part written especially for her by a long-standing colleague, Fujiki. However, having articulated the words, Eiko realizes that the declaration reflects her personal feelings for her niece's future partner, not merely those of the role she is playing.

Michelle Boulous Walker (Walker, 1998) has thoroughly investigated the silence imposed on the mother and the manner in which phallogocentric forces conspire to deny her a voice, particularly a voice in which to speak as a sexed body. Eiko, successful actress though she is, is an example of this silence. Her own voice has been lost beneath the inscription of correct politeness regarded as appropriate for a matron of her age and standing. However, while she has no public voice, as an actress she is given another opportunity to speak, namely through the texts of her plays. For instance, as noted previously, her declaration of love comes not as an independent utterance, but as the voice from another text. As the story progresses, the reader becomes aware of the fact that Eiko's silence on this critical incident is representative of a more general suppression of voice.

In the play written for her by Fujiki Eiko recognizes resonances of her own life. Enchi summarizes the plot of the play as follows:

The play dealt with a mother, a widow born in the Meiji Era. During her long married life, she had not once enjoyed the pleasure of physical love. However, as she observed her daughter's involvement in relationships with men, she could feel an awakening of her own sexual desire. There was no jealousy or envy in her response. Merely an awareness of the fact that only through her daughter had she been able to experience the pleasure of being a woman, a pleasure which had been denied to her in her own right. (Enchi, 1959, 408)

In this extraordinary passage, Enchi takes us to the heart of the significance of the mother-daughter, or, in Eiko's case, the aunt-niece, relationship. It is through the younger woman that the older woman learns the pleasure of sexual passion. Enchi has thus inverted the Irigarayan notion of daughters seeking authenticity through the mother. The Irigarayan notion can only exist in something of a partial Utopia, in which phallogocentric structures have been, to some extent, disassembled. However, Enchi's work has no Utopian edge. It is a bleak wasteland from which, to use Phyllis Birnbaum's analogy, the eyes of women stare like the stark painting of a cat in "The Book of Cats," (*Neko no Sōshi*,

1974), "wide open, blurred, and gazing out into unknown emptiness" (Birnbaum, 1982, 25). In this wasteland, the daughter has been successfully isolated from the mother. On the part of the daughter, there is love for the mother tempered by a coolness, bordering on contempt, engendered by bewilderment at the mother's predicament. For with her limited knowledge of the father's texts, the daughter in Enchi's works would be autonomous. She has not, as yet, acquired the knowledge that she will ultimately repeat the mother's silence, and be subject to the same patriarchal processes, the results of which she so decries in the older woman she sees before her.

If Eiko comes to the reader as a representation of the publicly silenced mother, she is nevertheless capable of engaging in dialogue with herself. In particular, the declaration of love which opens "Fuyu Momiji" acts as a catalyst for Eiko to enter a phase of uncompromisingly severe self-examination. Important elements of the story center on the manner in which Eiko's aging body acts as a text onto which social designations have been inscribed by the phallogocentric forces which taboo the sexual coupling of the older woman and the younger man. After the opening declaration, the story continues with a prolonged account of Eiko's scrutiny of her body, or her face at least, in the mirror. It is a passage charged with self-loathing, redolent with the "threats of contagion, contamination, falling into sickness, madness and death," that Irigaray associates with the opening of the mother (Irigaray, 1993, 15). As if transfixed by her own corruption, Eiko massages the face before her and reflects. Enchi has her observe herself in the following manner:

Beneath the finely grained skin, the flesh of her cheek wavered like the blubber of some jelly fish, and she felt a chill as she noticed how the elasticity of her flesh had gone, leaving it flaccid and malleable beneath the tips of her fingers. She had lost or broken a number of back teeth, emphasizing the ambivalent grimace of her mouth. It could have been either pleasure or pain. And the narrow eyes, especially, their burning shine of passion so out of place in the sockets that had long lost their smoothness, under lids of sagging, wave-lined flesh. How ugly was the effect of unbridled sexual desire given by those eyes. (Enchi, 1959, 407)

The passage is highly reminiscent of Elizabeth Grosz's thoughts on the female body, demonstrating that it is not only Western thinking which has been dominated by fear of the feminine. Grosz suggests:

Can it be that in the West, in our time, the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence, but with more complexity as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid; as formless flow, as viscosity, entrapping secreting; as lacking not so much or simply the phallus, but self-containment . . . a disorder that threatens all order. (Grosz, 1994, 203)

Eiko's self-examination has been prompted by a telephone conversation with the young man of her desires, Tachibana. The conversation has concluded with Eiko throwing the receiver down on a small table by the mirror. The call has released the suppressed desire of a lifetime, and Eiko's longing for a return call from the young man is palpable in the text, recalling Helene Cicoux's thoughts on the telephone as an erotic aid. Cicoux muses on the telephone as the medium of "the most exquisite, the most intimate, the most delicate love, the most delicately loving . . . this passage of the most naked voice" (Cicoux, 1977, 48). However, for Eiko there is to be no reciprocation of naked voice or exquisite intimacy. Instead, upon replacing the receiver, she receives a call from her colleague, Fujiki, the author of the play she is rehearsing.

Fujiki is a central character to the text. In a sense, he and Eiko are opposite sides of the same coin, almost doppelgänger—veteran performers in the theatrical world. More importantly, Fujiki, who has a long history of sexual indiscretion, also has a romantic entanglement with a lover much younger than himself. His current interest is Tomoko, a young woman just graduated from university, almost thirty years his junior. The entanglement is no passing fancy, for, as yet unknown to Eiko, Tomoko is pregnant and her mother is demanding that Fujiki divorce his wife to marry the young woman. This fact provides a crucial device by means of which Enchi can highlight the sexuality of the mother by contrasting the differential treatment of the mother with that of the father.

Certainly, there are a number of significant contrasts. Reference has already been made to the silence imposed on the mother, especially her sexed body. As has been discussed, Eiko is an example of this embodied silence. Fujiki, on the other hand, has no qualms about appropriating a voice with which to speak his sexuality. He has transgressed a number of significant social norms. Nevertheless, unlike those of Eiko, his transgressions will be feted. And while Eiko is suffused with shame at her predicament, a shame which ensures she maintains her stoic silence to the very end in the face of her passion, Fujiki celebrates his transgression. For him, there is none of the self-doubt or self-loathing to which Eiko is

a prey. And this is in spite of the fact that, just as Eiko's love is unreciprocated, Fujiki too, upon being questioned about his new love by Eiko, openly concedes that his young lover may be more enamoured of his fame as an actor than of his own self, and that there is little chance of the relationship enduring. When Eiko suggests that Fujiki consider the possibility of Tomoko's being "more attracted to your name rather than to you," Fujiki responds, in a barely audible voice:

Would that really matter? . . . I don't expect Tomoko to hang around for the rest of my life. But it's now that I need her. It's as if something in her can bring me back to life. I can feel myself changing already. (Enchi, 1959, 413)

The passage is also significant in that the desire that Fujiki voices is untempered by any attempt to justify the relationship in terms of social benefit, such as is required of the sexuality of the mother. His need is purely carnal and purely his own, and he has no compunction about speaking his desire or demanding social approval. Unlike Fujiki, Eiko has no confidante with whom she can share her ordeal. Wracked though she is by passion, the shame and loathing she feels prevent her from voicing her experiences. But while the sexuality of the mother is silenced, Fujiki will speak his sexual imperative, confident in the cultural affirmation of the power of his seed. But Eiko has no language with which to speak her passion, not to the young man, not to her niece, not to her niece's mother, Eiko's older sister, not to her friend, Fujiki. Regardless of the passion building to a crescendo within her, she is enclosed in a maze of silence from which she has no escape.

A second important difference is that of bodily inscription. Following theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz, I have already discussed the manner in which Eiko's aging body acts as a text upon which phallogocentric standards are socially inscribed. Fujiki's body, too, is aging. He is, in fact, a year older than Eiko. However, for him there is no fear of contamination or decay, rather an anticipation of rebirth. In spite of the fact that Eiko's objective eye has noticed the slightly absurd effect of the stage make-up Fujiki wears even when going about his every-day business (Enchi, 1959, 412), the man himself appears to have few doubts about his body image. In fact, the reader receives the distinct impression that he would be extremely self-satisfied with the distinguished effect of the deeply-lined Western visage which has surely assisted his theatrical career.

However, the most telling point is the difference in reproductive powers. It is the sickening awareness of this difference which strikes Eiko like a thunderbolt and quells the passion within her.

Enchi's "Komachi Hensō" (1965) also deals with the sexed body of the aging woman. However, as Eileen B. Mikals-Adachi (Mikals-Adachi, 1997) has noted, in this work Enchi overcomes the implications of aging for a woman designated as beautiful by phallogocentric standards, by having the protagonist, Reiko, opt for a dream world, and, ultimately, death. In such a milieu, both Reiko and her lover, Shigaraki, are able to avoid confronting the corrupting implications of old age. However, in "Fuyu Momiji," there is no such escape. In the latter story Eiko must accommodate herself to the lived experiences of these phallogocentric inscriptions, particularly as they relate to her reproductive body.

At the conclusion of the exchange between the two discussed above, the infatuated older man reveals, "Eiko, she's about to have a child." If this news has regenerated Fujiki, it is like a death knell for Eiko. Throughout the discussion, she has been reminded of her own feelings, unspoken though they are, for Tachibana. However, the revelation of the impending birth of a child drives home the knowledge that the "two relationships are wildly different." Eiko ponders the manner in which Fujiki's ability to impregnate the young woman, in spite of the thirty year age difference, has not wilted. She, on the other hand, has suddenly "wilted," (the Chinese character used for both Fujiki's reproductive power and Eiko's response is identical), with the realization that, regardless of the age of her lover, she could never have a child.

The passage is constructed around the respective reproductive powers of the mother and the father and, more importantly, the social significance accruing to these powers. The implication is that perhaps this is the source of the social censure practiced against the mother. Her fertility is limited. Unlike the father, whose seed remains active into old age, the mother has a limited life. And if the notion of the mother as sexed body is appalling when she does possess the power to reproduce, how all the more shocking to the patriarchy when she has lost this power, the only power through which she is permitted use value. The irony arises that, in spite of the male's ability to procreate indefinitely, he remains free of the restrictive social expectations to devote himself to the care of the child which delimit the mother.

Sunami Toshiko (1988) has discussed the manner in which the loss of her womb to uterine cancer in 1946 at the age of 41 impacted on Enchi's writing. This discussion is particularly significant in any examination of the body in the text of "Fuyu Momiji," given the foregrounding

of the trope of infertility in that work. According to Sunami, it is the removal of the womb and the concomitant demise of the power of reproduction that activates Enchi's discovery of physical passion and desire (Sunami, 1998, 28). Sunami's discussion probes the intimation in Enchi's texts that fertility, the defining element of the traditional earth mother figure and the generally accepted rationale for the celebration of this ancient symbol of femininity, is, in fact, a restricting element in the expression of feminine desire and the experience of pleasure. In other words, for Enchi the reproductive mother is an asexual being lacking the potential for passion. Such a position can be regarded as a perverse inversion of the patriarchal demands regarding maternal sexuality. In the patriarchal discourse the reproductive woman is permitted limited procreative sexuality, while loss of fertility results in sexual annihilation.

However, according to Sunami's interpretation, Enchi's texts turn this discourse on its head. Rather than the loss of fertility leading to the sexual annihilation of the mother, this loss becomes the very point at which the passion of Enchi's mother is manifested in its full force. And it is a manifestation which parodies the reproductive force in its insinuations of death, redolent in visions such as those of Eiko's own "loose flesh hanging from the nape of the neck with its dyed hair" (Enchi, 1959, 411), which fitfully menace her as she sleeps. In Sunami's words:

In spite of the fact that the loss of her womb savagely deprives her of a sense of identity as a woman to whom a man might be attracted, her feminine desire becomes all the more powerful, and she continues to seek to lure men to the womb which is now a passage to death. . . . Regardless of her ability to bear children, or indeed the actual existence of an object of desire, (Enchi's women) continue wantonly seeking out men until their death. (Sunami, 1998, 29)

The nexus in Enchi's texts between the loss of reproductive power, the lure of death and a mother's sexual appetite is repeatedly emphasized by Sunami, who also notes that in Enchi's sexual cosmology:

When a woman is old, even if she still has a womb, far from giving birth, she seeks to devour life, transforming her womb into a pathway leading to the Realm of the Dead. (Sunami, 1998, 29)



For Enchi, then, the locus of desire is the non-reproductive body, the body which, while it certainly belongs to the mother, has lost the ability to bear life. It is the same body which the patriarchal order seeks to obliterate, or at least to deny the right of sexual expression. And it is perhaps this sexually avaricious, yet non-(re)productive, being to whom Grosz was referring when she noted the Western constructions of the female body which go beyond the traditional interpretations of "lack or absence," to the "leaking, uncontrollable seeping liquid" becoming the "disorder which threatens all order." Eiko, her barren womb a metonym for death, consumed with a shudder of pleasure merely in anticipation at the sound of the voice of the young man, Tachibana, through the telephone, surely exemplifies this threat to order.

The final exchange between Eiko and Fujiki reactivates the notion of body as text. The news of the pregnancy has drained the blood from Eiko's face, leaving it "white, without lustre, like a cherry blossom before it falls." Fujiki expresses his concern, but then comments that lately Eiko herself has been looking young and rejuvenated and that perhaps she too is involved in a similar liaison. Eiko demurs:

That's not true. Well, nothing of substance, anyway. I just made myself a statue of David to have some fun with for a while. I'm like a mad dog barking at its own shadow. (Enchi, 1959, 413-4)

With that, Eiko cures herself of her "irrational passion." The poignancy of the conclusion is overwhelming. Silenced by society, in a classic act of self-governance, she finally silences herself, dismissing her passion in bestial terms. The phallogocentric forces, with which she herself consorts, have triumphed to the extent that the passion which consumed her totally is not given one avenue for expression, either with her body or her voice. The only forum in which she can give legitimate expression to her feelings is the fantastic space of her own creation.

In this respect Eiko is similar to other of Enchi's more well-known protagonists, including Tomo from *Onnazaka* (*The Waiting Years*, trs 1971), and Chigako, the protagonist of "Yosei" ("Enchantress," trs 1958). Sunami Toshiko has noted the manner in which acquiescence with patriarchal norms, and the simultaneous expression, often through fantasy, of a shamanistic eroticism which contravenes those norms, is a feature of many of Enchi's women (Sunami, 1998, 15). For instance, regardless of her abandonment by her husband, Shirakawa, for younger, more pliant women, Tomo continues, initially, at least, to maintain the patriarchal order of her household with a zeal approaching the missionary.

This is in spite of the fact that, even prior to his dispatching her to procure a concubine from Tokyo, his lecherous dealings with other young women made her feel as though "her flesh and blood were being devoured by maggots" (Enchi, 1971, 35). There are, nevertheless, a number of notable passages in that work in which Enchi seeks to represent Tomo as a clearly sexual identity, and in a manner which also positions her in opposition to her husband and the patriarchy. Such an identity is implied in Enchi's discussion of Shirakawa's gaze in the famous section of the text in which Tomo dispatches the snake her husband discovers settled on his upper body (Enchi, 1971, 15–16). However, this implication is unambiguously expressed after Shirakawa's return from a raid on a secret meeting of his political opponents. Her husband has long since abandoned any practice of visiting the bed Tomo nevertheless lays out for him beside her own each night. However, it is to her room that he returns after narrowly escaping a mortal wound in a raid on a Liberal Party meeting. Regardless of the fact that Tomo's contempt for her husband has been overtly declared a number of times previously in the text, her passions, too, are aroused and a sexual encounter ensues. But even as Shirakawa leaves her quarters, Tomo recants with an renewed expression of hatred, mainly for her husband, but also for herself. Her sexual identity, and her ambivalence concerning that identity, is clearly expressed in the following passage:

Shirakawa went back to the new wing at dawn. . . . And the knowledge that she had betrayed a certain passion with the husband who had rushed to her when he was wounded only heightened the hatred she felt for him, heightened it to the point where she could have clawed to shreds the face that seemed to sneer its perception of her foolishness. (Enchi, 1971, 46)

Her desperation becomes even more dire with her discovery through a newspaper report that Shirakawa had actually killed a man during the raid. She is appalled to think that their tryst had assisted his giving vent to his "murderous mental and physical excitement" (Enchi, 1971, 46).

"Yosei"'s Chigako, too, like Tomo, simultaneously upholds the patriarchal discourse which structures the text of her life, while pitting her will relentlessly against the desire of her husband, Kansaki. In spite of the wretched state of their relationship, she, like Kansaki himself, is most anxious to maintain the appearance of harmony. As Enchi notes:

Both wished to avoid anything that looked ill in the eyes of others. There was a tacit pledge between them that to this extent at least the claims of duty and vigilance would be observed. (Enchi, 1958, 348)

However, even as she observes these requirements of duty and vigilance, Chigako contests them through, for instance, her callous rejection of Kansaki's clumsy overture to reconcile upon the departure of their daughter for the United States. Instead, she constructs a fantasy world for herself as she lies in the "coffin," Enchi's word recalling Sunami's discussion of the older woman's womb as a harbinger of death, that is her bed beside the hill which looms throughout the text, simultaneously threatening and comforting.

Like Chigako, "Fuyu Momiji"'s Eiko also constructs a fantastic space, in which her illegitimate desire is given full rein, while she simultaneously upholds structures which would suppress that desire. She dreams of sexual experiences with a variety of partners, none of whom is her husband, the only man with whom she has ever had a real life sexual experience. These dreams have a masochistic edge. She imagines herself, for instance, as the heroine in the Tanizaki crime of passion drama "Otsuyagoroshi," being murdered by one man "with the name of another on her lips" (Enchi, 1959, 411). In this fantastic space Eiko is able to whip herself into a frenzy, her breast aching as if constrained, in anticipation, as mentioned previously, at the mere thought of hearing the sound of Tachibana's brusque young voice through the telephone. However, even as she does so, she simultaneously seeks to defend the very structures which impose the taboo she violates, namely the passion of the older woman for the younger man. She is dismayed, for instance, at the "prosaic" manner in which her niece wishes to engage in courting ritual with Tachibana, seeing it as indicative of an unfortunate disregard by the younger generation for sexual decorum. Eiko's attitude sometimes even borders on the absurd, particularly in the light of her own fantasy experiences. Considerable comic tension is generated, for example, at her priggish distaste for the calculating manner in which the modern young woman plans the birth of her child to coincide fortuitously with school entry dates (Enchi, 1959, 411).

And what of the nexus between the older woman and her younger counterpart? As implied above, Enchi is under no romantic illusion regarding these mother-daughter relationships, biological or symbolic. In the text discussed here, Eiko, the mother figure, and Kanako, the younger woman, are positioned in considerable opposition to each other, with

their relationship often a site of conflict, most notably with regard to sexuality. In "Fuyu Momiji" the older woman's assumptions are often rejected by the younger, or at least regarded as passé and out of date. The older woman, on the other hand, while seeking to establish a bond with her younger counterpart, is nevertheless often shocked by what she regards as the girl's forwardness, and her contestation of the patriarchal norms to which the older woman ultimately subscribes. This conflict is highlighted in a discussion which takes place after Eiko first introduces Kanako, a pharmacist at a large hospital, to the young man, Tachibana. When Eiko asks Kanako for her impression of the prospective suitor, Kanako comments that she doesn't believe Tachibana has any interest in marriage. She explains to her aunt:

"How can I put it? It sounds a bit rude, but the older nurses at work say it's like they're in season. Over the past year or two, I've felt it myself. It's not that they do anything unpleasant, but when you pass them in the corridor it's as if they somehow try and get close to you or something. But this one's not like that."

For the first time Eiko saw something sinister beneath the smooth porcelain that was Kanako's complexion. (Enchi, 410)

Eiko is shocked at Kanako's youthful nonchalance about things concerning which she herself has such meager first-hand knowledge. She chides the younger woman:

"Kanako, don't be so vulgar. You sound like someone my age."

Eiko had meant to chastise her niece light-heartedly, but instead she felt her face flush red. (Enchi, 410)

The exchange is significant in that it gives a good representation of the ambivalence which pervades the mother-daughter bond. Michelle Boulous Walker tells us that the mother-daughter bond, "with its rich prehistory of tensions, offers an alternative to the one-sided story of patriarchal relations" (Walker, 1998, 162). However, as she points out, the continuity of the bond is fraught with a harrowing intensity, which, as the exchange above amply demonstrates, cannot be read in terms of an "undifferentiated fusion" into which both mother and daughter are subsumed. Rather, as Boulous Walker recognizes, and as Enchi's texts make clear, like the maternal body itself, the mother-daughter bond is an experience

of contradictions: "of love and hate, of mutuality and estrangement, of anger and desire, of separation and continuity" (Walker, 1998, 162).

"Fuyu Momji"'s Eiko is a woman whose body ultimately is unable to escape the phallogocentric structures which impinge upon it. Nevertheless, merely by acknowledging, if only to herself, the nature of her feelings for her niece's prospective partner, she does transgress. In this regard, like Enchi Fumiko herself, she can be regarded as an example of the Deleuzian *anomal*, defined by Colombat as:

the extraordinary or unique individual, the Outsider, at the same time inseparable from her or his group. Not really an individual, the *anomal* defines a fringe or borderline at the limits of the multiplicity such as a pack, a gang, or a constellation of forces. (Colombat, 1997, 583)

Colombat, again, tells us that Deleuze, like Rimbaud, asserts that the writer is a seer, a sorcerer who tells what she or he has seen in her or his encounter with the Outside (Colombat, 1997, 594). Certainly, this is true of Enchi Fumiko, a woman with a gift for pushing the power of language to create new visions and new enunciations. In "Fuyu Momiji," the reader is privy to the new visions that Enchi creates through Eiko's contestation of the boundaries that the patriarchy would impose on both the maternal form and the affiliating potential of the mother-daughter bond.

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