

ABSTRACT

The *Fantastic* and Related Subgenres in Three Contemporary Novels:
the *Uncanny* in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), the *Fantastic* in Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), and the *Marvelous* in Cynthia Ozick's *The Puttermesser Papers* (1997)

Rebecca Hall

Thesis Chairperson: Ronald E. Thomas, Ph.D.

Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), and Cynthia Ozick's *The Puttermesser Papers* (1997) manifest the *fantastic* and related subgenres. According to structuralist critic Tzvetan Todorov, prose fiction of the *fantastic* genre dramatizes an intrusion of the supernatural into the rational world, causing the reader to hesitate. Erdrich's *uncanny* stories show that the healthy self must embody conflicting ideologies. The *fantastic* in Tan's novel clears a space in which Chinese tradition and Western modernity can coexist through writing. Ozick's novel manifests the *marvelous* to distinguish between divine creation and human idolatry. Each of the central characters in these novels must justify her disparate selves (the American and Native, or Chinese, or Jewish self); the *fantastic* is ideal for this purpose because the supernatural intrusion catalyzes the construction of a world in which logic cannot prevent the coexistence of opposites.

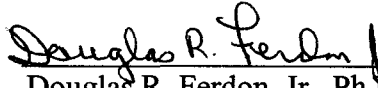
The *Fantastic* and Related Subgenres in Three Contemporary Novels:
the *Uncanny* in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), the *Fantastic* in Amy Tan's *The
Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), and the *Marvelous* in Cynthia Ozick's *The Puttermesser
Papers* (1997)

by

Rebecca Hall, B.A.

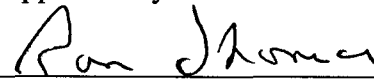
A Thesis

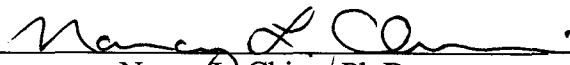
Approved by the Department of American Studies

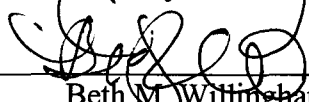

Douglas R. Ferdon, Jr., Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

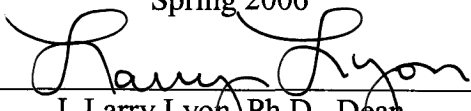
Approved by the Thesis Committee


Ronald E. Thomas, Ph.D., chairperson


Nancy L. Chinn, Ph.D.


Beth M. Willingham, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
Spring 2006


J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Copyright © 2006 by Rebecca Hall

All rights reserved

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
CHAPTERS	
1. Introduction	1
2. <i>Love Medicine</i> and the <i>Uncanny</i>	6
<i>Love Medicine</i> and the Definition of the <i>Uncanny</i>	10
Structuralist Unity in <i>Love Medicine</i>	18
Themes of Self and Other in <i>Love Medicine</i>	29
3. <i>The Bonesetter's Daughter</i> and the <i>Fantastic</i>	43
<i>The Bonesetter's Daughter</i> and the Definition of the <i>Fantastic</i>	47
Structuralist Unity in <i>The Bonesetter's Daughter</i>	60
Themes of Self and Other in <i>The Bonesetter's Daughter</i>	66
4. <i>The Puttermesser Papers</i> and the <i>Marvelous</i>	75
<i>The Puttermesser Papers</i> and the Definition of the <i>Marvelous</i>	78
Structuralist Unity in <i>The Puttermesser Papers</i>	95
Themes of Self and Other in <i>The Puttermesser Papers</i>	103
5. Conclusion: The <i>Fantastic</i> Is Subversive Language	111
WORKS CITED	116

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank my advisor and committee. Dr. Ron Thomas, professor and advisor, first introduced me to all three of the novels I use. He helped me develop my ideas about the paper, he furnished me with my committee, and he condoned my nonstandard timeline; without his assistance, I would have no thesis. Dr. Nancy Chinn and Dr. Elizabeth Willingham both agreed to work with me even though we only just met. I thank Dr. Chinn for her valuable time and her attention to detail. I thank Dr. Willingham for her constructive criticism and her enthusiastic encouragement. The conscientious support of my committee provided me with the ideal model of academic professionalism.

I would also like to recognize some other faculty members around Baylor's campus who took an interest in my academic career. Dr. Rob Ray in the English department provided me with a research assistantship for the spring semester, introducing me to the department before my actual enrollment. Dr. Douglas Ferdon, chairperson of the American Studies department, promptly responded to each of my requests toward the completion of my degree. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Kate Edwards, visiting assistant professor in the art department, who demonstrated the interdisciplinary nature of critical theories that can only prove more useful as I continue my education; she also read a very early version of my prospectus.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984), Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001), and Cynthia Ozick's *The Puttermessa Papers* (1997) manifest the *fantastic* and its related subgenres. In *The Fantastic A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1973), structuralist critic Tzvetan Todorov defines the *fantastic* genre as prose fiction that dramatizes an intrusion of the supernatural into the rational world. According to Todorov, this intrusion causes the reader to hesitate. The *uncanny* subgenre resolves the reader's hesitation with a rational explanation, and the *marvelous* subgenre resolves the reader's hesitation by supporting the mystical or supernatural intrusion. The *fantastic* subgenre never resolves the reader's hesitation.

Todorov only applied his definitions to books written in the nineteenth century; according to his genre definitions, psychoanalysis made the *fantastic* obsolete because now, readers and authors can blame anything strange or evil on the dark intricacies of the human mind. This argument presupposes a contemporary secular society—literature from religious societies can be expected to reflect a spiritual impulse that demands access to the realm beyond the empirical and the rational. It is true that World Wars I and II contributed to the nihilism and angst characteristic of twentieth-century fantasy, but the twenty-first-century American *fantastic* fictions of Erdrich, Tan, and Ozick move beyond nihilism to embrace the contradictions inherent in the postmodern treatment of the multiplicity of the self.

The concept of multiple selves is an oxymoron; this thesis uses two terms to discuss the unity of opposites—*paraxis* and the third-space. *Paraxis* is a term Rosemary Jackson uses in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), her psychoanalytic addendum to Todorov's theory of the *fantastic*. In the study of optics, from which Jackson borrowed the term, *paraxis* describes a location where image and object seem to coexist, but nothing is really there. In literary terms, the *fantastic* is located in *paraxis*; the *fantastic* is neither real (object) nor unreal (image) but it appears to be both (Jackson 19). *Paraxis* lies along either side of the dominant discourse: for example, the dominant discourse in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is defined by Western secularism science and evangelical Christianity at one pole and traditional Chinese ancestor worship at the opposite pole. The *fantastic* rises out of the nowhere space between the two poles when a Chinese ancestor's ghost seems to intrude in an American kitchen—the ghost *seems to* intrude, and this uncertainty is crucial to *paraxis*, which thrives on ambiguity because, although it seems to be the impossible locus of image and object, it actually contains nothing. The other term used to describe *paraxis* is the third-space, which evokes the image of a bridge between opposites more than the no-man's land of *paraxis*, but the concept is the same: the *fantastic* creates a space where opposites can coexist.

This thesis locates and explores *paraxis* in each of the three novels with the same methodology and structure throughout; the novels are different, and each represents a different aspect of the *fantastic* by manifesting a different subgenre, but the object of this thesis is not to reduce the novels to their common denominators. Applying the same methodology to each novel will elucidate the differences among the novels, and the nature of those differences is the focus of this genre study. Each novel subverts reality

through its manifestation of its genre; this thesis wonders how the structure of the novels accomplishes this subversion. Speculation as to why these novels subvert the mimetic reality they establish is reserved mostly for the conclusion—these chapters do not ask *what* the novels mean, they ask *how* the novels mean.

Each chapter begins with an explanation of how the novel conforms to the genre definition. If a story manifests the *fantastic* or its subgenres, it establishes a mimetic version of reality—one that corresponds to the world outside the text; then violates that reality with a supernatural intrusion—an object, character, or event that does not conform to the rules of the universe in the text. The second component of the definition requires the reader's hesitation; it does not assume a specific type of reader. The presupposition of individual readers will undoubtedly lead different readers to different conclusions about the supernatural intrusion. When the supernatural intrudes, and the text delays explicit explanation, the text *can* lead the reader to hesitate between explanations for the supernatural intrusion—the definition requires the availability of hesitation, not the guarantee of hesitation in every reading. In the *fantastic*, no explicit explanation ever resolves the reader's hesitation. In the *uncanny* subgenre, the text explicitly provides a rational explanation for the supernatural intrusion; in the *marvelous* subgenre, the text upholds the supernatural explanation. Some aspects of each novel deviate from Todorov's definition, but these deviations still support the genre's primary function. For example, in *Love Medicine's* "Saint Marie" the reader's hesitation is very brief because a rational explanation precedes the supernatural intrusion; however, the questionable reliability of the narrator counters her apocalyptic imagery to sustain the reader's hesitation until the story's resolution.

The second section of each chapter discusses each novel's structuralist unity. According to Todorov's articulation of structuralist unity, each aspect of a novel should support the novel's overall structure. Three aspects of a text show structuralist unity: the utterance, the act of speech, and the composition. The utterance is the word on the page, including dialogue and narration (Todorov 76). The act of speech is the source of the narrative. A speech act can be described as the first-person, the second person, or the third person; the first-person is the preferred speech act for the *fantastic* and its subgenres. When "I" is the narrator and a character, the reader can only understand the events of the story as "I" reveals them, so although the reader can identify with "I," the reader cannot entirely trust what "I" says (83). Each of the novels deviates, at least partially, from the first-person speech act; in each chapter I will show how the narrative mitigates the authority of the third-person speech act in order to maintain the delicate balance of credibility and skepticism necessary for the novel to support the structure of a genre more or less reliant on the reader's hesitation. The third aspect of structuralist unity is the composition—the arrangement of the story's events. With the *uncanny* and the *marvelous*, the composition must present the events of the story in an order that supports hesitation up to the explicit explanation for the supernatural intrusion—a supernatural explanation for a *marvelous* story and a rational explanation for an *uncanny* story (76). The story often focuses gradually, from vague to direct, to describe the supernatural intrusion and resolve it (86-87). The composition of the *fantastic* is the same, except that direct confrontation with the supernatural intrusion does not yield an explicit resolution; an open ending best suits the composition of the *fantastic* story (89).

The final section of each chapter addresses the novel's themes, divided into themes of the self and themes of the other. Themes of self are those that concentrate on the internal systems of awareness, autonomy, and perception. The other is the not-self. Themes of the other express the character's desire to eliminate alterity by uniting the self with the external other. Cruelty, violence, death, murder, sex, and love all express this desire, and are therefore themes of the other (Todorov 139). Sometimes, as in *The Puttermessa Papers*, motifs develop into themes of the self and the other, as with Puttermessa and creation—the line between theme of self and other blurs because Puttermessa creates alternate selves throughout the novel, particularly in “Puttermessa and Xanthippe.” Creation, a theme of the other, is used toward the multiplication of the self; the meaning of the themes emerges where the lines between themes of self and other blur, in *The Puttermessa Papers* with the theme of creation as in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* with the theme of language.

Subjecting each novel to the same methodological approach should yield startling differences among the novels in the way they manifest, or seem to deviate from, the genres to which they are justified—these differences and deviations are the goal of the analysis because they will show *how* and *what* the novels mean when they establish, then subvert, mimetic reality. What is it about the world outside the text that deserves to be recreated, and then destroyed, within the text? What is the discourse that splits the subject into a bundle of opposites, and how does the narrative subvert the discourse?

CHAPTER TWO

Love Medicine and the *Uncanny*

Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984) manifests the *uncanny* to subvert the contemporary Native American cultural dichotomy which sets as opposites male and female, Catholic and Ojibwe¹, life and death; this dichotomy deprives the subject of a healthy self, and the *uncanny* subverts these dichotomies to give the subject those things the dichotomy denies. This series of short stories is worked into a unified novel about interrelated families on a reservation in North Dakota. "Saint Marie (1934)" and "Crown of Thorns (1981)" are the stories in *Love Medicine* that clearly manifest the *uncanny* genre. First, this chapter will apply the definition of the *uncanny* to these two stories. The supernatural intrudes on "Saint Marie" when Marie's Ojibwe-Catholic-hybrid vision quest comes "true" and the convent nuns worship her as a saint. Marie, and the reader along with her, hesitates between Catholic and Ojibwe symbolism; then Marie resolves this hesitation by leaving the convent. She is not unchanged—she keeps the scar on her palm and the power of the vision—but she repudiates the deprivations Leopolda offers and chooses a life based on providing for, not depriving, the ones she loves. After applying the definition of the *uncanny* to "Saint Marie," this chapter will apply the same definition to "Crown of Thorns." The supernatural intrudes on "Crown of Thorns" when Gordie, the story's central character, kills June with a tire iron. A murder is not ordinarily a supernatural intrusion, but in this case, Gordie murders June once she is

¹The Ojibwe, historically known to themselves as the Anishinabe, are recognized by the American federal government under the name Chippewa (Hafen 8). This paper will use Ojibwe to designate the ethnic, cultural, and spiritual tradition of the characters in *Love Medicine* because it is the more contemporary, less anglicized term.

already dead. The reader knows that Gordie has been blind drunk for days before the apparition, so the reader hesitates as to whether June has come back so Gordie can murder her or whether the ghost is a hallucination induced by alcohol and grief. While driving away from his house to escape the ghost, Gordie hits a deer and puts its body in the back of his car. Later, convinced the deer is June, Gordie drives up to the convent to confess his sins. Sister Mary Martin believes Gordie killed his wife and put her in his car. Because both Gordie and Sister Mary Martin believe that June lies dead in the back of Gordie's car, the reader hesitates: is a dead deer in the back of the car, or did the dead deer turn into June? When Sister Mary Martin sees the dead deer in the car, she resolves the reader's hesitation, and her own hesitation, in favor of the natural explanation that June's apparition and her conflation with the deer was Gordie's drunken hallucination.

With the definitions established, this chapter will evaluate *Love Medicine* for structuralist unity to show that each of the three aspects of the text mourns absence and deprivation, and that the *uncanny* creates a third-space in which the subject can experience the love he or she lacks. This chapter will show that the near-repetition of imagery from Marie's vision throughout the novel creates the *uncanny* utterance originating in "Saint Marie." Each repetition comes close to the original vision, but the initial vision is gone forever; the vision is Marie's source of power, but her power to control the ones she loves as an adult will never equal the power she has as an adolescent when she triumphs over Leopolda by leaving the convent. The *uncanny* utterance in "Crown of Thorns" is the repeated use of liquid imagery. Water, always mutable, never stable, runs through the entire novel to echo the *uncanny* utterance. The act of speech is the source of the utterance, and according to Todorov, the first-person speech act is ideal

for maintenance of the hesitation and ambiguity characteristic of the *fantastic* and its subgenres (76). This chapter will show that the first-person speech act of “Saint Marie” supports hesitation and ambiguity, but the multivocal quality of the entire story cycle sustains that hesitation and ambiguity even in those stories—like “Crown of Thorns”—that employ a third-person speech act. The story-cycle structure also supports an *uncanny* composition, arranging events from most ambiguous to most explicit. The composition of both “Crown of Thorns” and “Saint Marie” moves from an unfocused image of the supernatural to a direct confrontation with the possibly supernatural event, and both stories conclude with a rejection of the supernatural explanation. The novel as a story cycle also supports this pattern of composition in relation to June, by introducing her after her death, describing her obliquely through the memories of other characters during the novel, then bringing her home with her estranged son Lipsha to resolve her absence at the end of the novel.

Finally, this chapter will discuss themes of the self and the other in *Love Medicine* in terms of the deprivations and absences that can only be satisfied in the third-space. Themes of the self in “Saint Marie” and “Crown of Thorns” show how the choice between a symbol-oriented Catholic identity and an earthbound, miserable Ojibwe identity is a false choice, and that healthy selfhood in a postcolonial environment demands a balance between the two cultures or the creation of a third space in which both cultures can coexist within the self. The other is the not-self; themes of the other express the character’s desire to eliminate alterity by uniting the self with the external other. Cruelty, violence, death, murder, sex, and love all express this desire, and are therefore themes of the other (Todorov 139). “Saint Marie” and all the other stories that revolve

around Marie Kashpaw carry love as a theme of the other. Marie's love is capable of great compassion and great violence. Leopolda, the violent nun, illustrates how love becomes cruelty through the creation of an external Devil, and the belief in Satan combines with the Ojibwe myth of the Windigo to express this theme of cruel desire in the novel in both Native and Euroamerican contexts. Gordie's guilt is another facet of frustrated desire; his guilt hangs around the narrative in "Crown of Thorns," and can best be understood as a theme of the other. Love as a theme of the other in *Love Medicine* is a symptom of deprivation—the subject loves what she is not, and her love drives her to death and madness. This pattern is true of Leopolda, Gordie, Marie's husband Nector; and, most importantly, June, the absent center. Identity formation is the root of this endless deprivation; the novel expresses the need for a holistic sense of self, unfettered by externally imposed either-or dichotomies like Catholic-Ojibwe or male-female cultural constructs. Without an identity forged in *paraxis*, the characters are doomed to falter, fail, and die. With such an identity, characters like Marie, Lipsha, and Lipsha's estranged father Gerry can protect, heal, and regenerate the rest of their community.

Love Medicine blurs the line between supernatural intrusion and natural fact because many of the characters in the book adhere to the Ojibwe religion, which maintains that magic is a part of the natural world. Other than the miracles of Christ and the saints, Christianity relegates magic to the realm of the supernatural (Sanders 133). The conflict between these two traditions invokes the *uncanny* because the *uncanny*, like other subgenres of the *fantastic*, exists in *paraxis* on either side of the dominant modes of thought. In *Love Medicine*, the Catholic religion opposes Ojibwe spirituality, but the religions are only part of the two cultures in conflict. Many of the characters, including

Marie, have European and Native American ancestry. Adherence to only one religion or set of cultural mores denies the other side of the character's identity, creating psychological tension in the character and in the community. This tension kills June, Marie's adopted daughter, and drives Nector Kashpaw, Marie's husband, into senility. Marie thrives because her identity comes from *paraxis*—she is flexible, neither one nor the other, but both.

Love Medicine *and the Definition of the Uncanny*

The supernatural intrudes on “Saint Marie (1934)” when Marie believes that her vision of sainthood has come true; in the context of the reservation, a vision quest is not a supernatural intrusion because the Ojibwe culture accepts the vision quest as a rite of passage—it is not exactly common, but certainly not impossible.² The “stigmata” is not the supernatural intrusion because, while Marie is dazed from Leopolda's assault, the reader knows that Leopolda is the source of the wounds on Marie's hands. The supernatural intrudes because Catholic violence and Ojibwe vision-quest combine, parodying sanctification and contaminating the vision quest. Marie Lazarre, age fourteen, goes up the mountain to join the convent. After Sister Leopolda cruelly burns Marie with boiling water in a sadistic attempt to drive the devil out, Marie has a vision in which she appears as a naked golden statue, walking through glass, followed by Leopolda who eats the glass shards in Saint Marie's wake. The glass inside Leopolda grinds the nun to dust, and she disappears as a cloud of dust and a black rag. Marie is a Saint, worshiped and holy, in her vision. After the vision recedes, Leopolda puts a salve on

²In “Vision Quests and Spirit Guardians” Annette Van Dyke observes that Marie, at fourteen, is “the right age for a vision quest” (137); in *Imagine Ourselves Richly*, Christopher Vecsey identifies puberty as the typical age for the vision quest for an Ojibwe boy, but offers no information about Ojibwe girls and vision quests (87).

Marie's burns to ease the pain.³ In the kitchen, Marie's vision returns, and it gives her the strength to try unsuccessfully to shove Leopolda into the oven. In retaliation, Leopolda stabs Marie's hand and hits Marie's head with the poker (Erdrich 43-57). After this duel, the supernatural seems to intrude. Marie wakes up to find that her vision has come true: "I was being worshiped. I had somehow gained the altar of a saint" (Erdrich 57). The reader cannot believe in Marie's sanctification. The battle preceding her ascent is slapstick, and her declaration of sainthood is parodic. According to Todorov, the *uncanny* event or supernatural intrusion is strange or shocking enough to disturb the reader (Todorov 46-47). Many aspects of "Saint Marie" are shocking or disturbing—Leopolda's abuse of schoolchildren, her belief in a corporeal Satan, her torture of Marie with boiling water, and her assault on Marie's head and hand. These events surround the supernatural intrusion to support the *uncanny* event, but the supernatural intrusion in "Saint Marie" is the jarring blend of the Chippewa coming-of-age vision quest with the mystical images and institutions of Roman Catholicism, resulting in the exaltation of an Indian girl from the reservation. In her vision, Marie is a saint, and when she awakens from Leopolda's attack, the nuns kneel and bow to Marie as if she were a saint. The nuns crowd around her bed, trying to see the mark on her hand. These simple-minded French nuns believe Marie's hand is bloody with the stigmata, a miraculous manifestation of the hand-wounds inflicted on Christ. Considering the reader's knowledge of Leopolda's assault on Marie, Marie's sanctification is hard to believe; but Marie has authorial control, and she presents the nuns' worship as a phenomenon so strange that it can qualify as a supernatural intrusion.

³In a later novel, *Tracks*, Erdrich reveals that Leopolda is Marie's biological mother, but only Leopolda knows. The maternal relationship might explain Leopolda's brief lapse into mercy.

The supernatural intrusion in “Crown of Thorns” is June’s haunting and subsequent reanimation in the form of a deer; the supernatural intrudes to create a third-space between life and death so that Gordie can continue to punish himself for his role in June’s absence. June’s ghost, like Marie’s vision, does not qualify as a supernatural intrusion in a textual universe that supports the existence of ghosts and the immortality of the human spirit; the supernatural intrudes when Gordie kills June on the road. Gordie cannot kill June because June is already dead, but the text describes Gordie bludgeoning June in terms so explicit that the event is a supernatural intrusion. The story is set in 1981 soon after June’s death. Gordie, drunk in his house, accidentally conjures June’s ghost by saying her name out loud: “There were no curtains in the bathroom, and something made him look at the window. Her face. June’s face was there. Wild and pale with a bloody mouth” (Erdrich 217-18). The lights go out, and June comes in through the bathroom window, disarranges their bedroom, and pursues Gordie as he runs through the house. Gordie drives away, still drunk, and hits a doe with his car. He loads the doe into his car, hoping that he can sell the animal for more alcohol. While Gordie drives down the road with the deer in his car, the deer wakes up, having only been stunned by the impact, so Gordie beats the deer to death with a tire iron. Here, in explicit terms, is the supernatural intrusion into “Crown of Thorns”: “In that clear moment it came to his attention that he’d just killed June. She was in the backseat, sprawled, her short skirt hiked up over her hips” (222). She “was” in the backseat. She even wears a skirt. The text presents June clearly as a dead body in the back seat, but the reader knows from the previous stories that June is already dead. The cognitive dissonance between June, dearly departed, and June, dear-turned-dead-deer, can cause the reader to hesitate.

The second component of the *uncanny* is the reader's hesitation; the story must allow for a rational and a nonrational explanation for the supernatural intrusion, and the reader hesitates as to which explanation to attribute to the supernatural intrusion (Todorov 46-48). Briefly, the reader must wonder if Marie's vision is prophecy fulfilled. This explanation is nonrational, considering Leopolda's assault on Marie, but even Marie does not immediately know why she is being worshiped. Even after Leopolda explains, implicitly, how she fabricated a story about the stigmata to conceal her guilt, Marie hesitates: "And then, after a moment, I understood" (Erdrich 59). During that "moment," she did not understand. The reader learns the story through Marie, and Marie tells the story through the filter of her past adolescent confusion and misapprehension. Because Marie hesitates, the narrative hesitates, and the reader hesitates, however briefly. The reader's hesitation in "Saint Marie" is the product of two possible explanations for the nun's Marie-worship. The first explanation is the rational explanation imparted immediately before the supernatural intrusion: Marie tries to push Leopolda into the oven. Leopolda pops out brandishing the poker and the bread fork. Marie narrates, "That was when she stabbed me through the hand with the fork, then took the poker up alongside my head, and knocked me out" (57). When Marie awakens, she cannot remember what happened to cause the nuns to worship her. Marie briefly lacks the cognitive capacity to link Leopolda's assault to the silly nuns' worship because the poker to the head renders Marie unconscious. Then Marie provides a rational explanation for the nuns' worship: "The last thing I remembered was how she flew from the oven and stabbed me. That one thing was most certainly true" (59). The rational explanation

posits that Marie's sainthood is Leopolda's lie. The French nuns worship her for her stigmata, which is actually a stab-wound inflicted by Leopolda.

The second possible explanation is the supernatural explanation Marie initially supports. The nun-worship scene is a parody of sanctification, but adult-Marie narrates the story in retrospect and adult-Marie imparts young-Marie's exhilaration. Young-Marie believes in miracles, sainthood, and the power of her vision. According to Marie, the vision is prophecy, so she becomes a saint: "I couldn't tell why they were praying to me. But I'll tell you this: it seemed entirely natural. It was me. I lifted up my hand as in my dream. It was completely limp with sacredness" (Erdrich 58). Marie incorporates sainthood and worship into her sense of self almost immediately. Her belief that she has found her niche as a saint enables the reader to consider the situation plausible. Marie sees Leopolda trying to speak, so she orders Leopolda to kneel beside her. Leopolda also seems to support the supernatural explanation: " 'I have told my Sisters of your passion,' she managed to choke out. 'How the stigmata. . . the marks of the nails. . . appeared in your palm and you swooned at the holy vision. . . '" (59). To hide her abuse of Marie from the other nuns, Leopolda elevates Marie to sainthood. The reader hesitates only briefly before attributing a rational explanation to "Saint Marie," but the hesitation in "Crown of Thorns" is more protracted.

In "Crown of Thorns" the reader hesitates as to whether to attribute June's resurrection (and subsequent murder) to the existence of ghosts or to the effect of grief and alcohol on Gordie's mind. The first scene in the story establishes the validity of the rational explanation—Gordie drinks beer in Eli's kitchen. Eli is Nector's brother, Gordie's uncle, and June's adopted father. Eli expresses concern for Gordie while he

unknowingly foreshadows the rational explanation for the events of the night to come:

“The way the light fell it was as though the can were lit on a special altar. ‘I’m contaminated,’ Gordie said. ‘You sure are.’ Eli spoke from somewhere beyond sight. ‘You’re going to land up in the hospital’” (213). The rational explanation for June’s reanimation in the form of a deer is Gordie’s drunkenness.

The text presents the supernatural explanation in equally definite terms after Gordie beats the deer to death with the tire iron: “In that clear moment it came to his attention that he’d just killed June” (222). In this moment, described ironically as a moment of clarity, Gordie comes to wholeheartedly believe a thing that cannot be true because June is already dead—this cognitive dissonance creates hesitation. Sister Mary Martin’s role in the story further sustains the reader’s hesitation. The narrator leaves Gordie at his car, clutching the tire iron, to introduce Sister Mary Martin, who takes a bath, wakes up from a dream, and plays the clarinet. Her activities, dull by comparison to Gordie’s, take up almost three pages during which the reader wonders whether to doubt Gordie’s sanity or death’s finality. The two characters meet when Gordie goes to the convent to confess; and because Mary Martin is the only one awake, and despite her fear and reticence, she agrees to hear his confession: “A low humming tension collected in the dark around Mary Martin as she sorted through his jumbled story. He could not stop talking. He went on and on. Finally it became real for her also. He had just now killed his wife” (226). Gordie convinces Mary Martin that his delusion is reality, but the text does not employ words like “convince,” or “delusion.” According to the text, Gordie just killed his wife; the murder “became real” for Mary Martin. The narration focuses on the thoughts and actions of Sister Mary Martin and Gordie, which forces the reader to

consider the possibility that Gordie did kill June with a tire iron somehow, even though the novel's first story shows June's death on foot in a snow storm. The story eventually forecloses the reader's hesitation by explicitly providing a rational explanation, but until Sister Mary Martin feels the deer and the police come to remove Gordie from the orchard, the reader hesitates.

In "Saint Marie" the reader cannot hesitate long because Marie as narrator provides a rational explanation for her sainthood immediately after Leopolda tells Marie about her "passion." Lying on the couch, surrounded by reverent nuns, Marie provides the final explanation for the supernatural intrusion: "And then, after a moment, I understood. Leopolda had saved herself with her quick brain. She had witnessed a miracle. She had hid the fork and told this to the others. And of course they believed her, because they never knew how Satan came and went or where he took refuge" (Erdrich 59). According to Todorov, predispositions of the reader or the predispositions of the character can sometimes suggest a supernatural explanation for the anomalous event, but the *uncanny* text explicitly provides a rational explanation (Todorov 48). Marie's explanation for her "sainthood" is explicit: Leopolda stabs Marie through the hand, and then she lies to the other nuns.

"Crown of Thorns" also provides a rational, natural explanation to resolve the reader's hesitation. Gordie tells Mary Martin that June is in his car, so they go to the car together. Mary Martin's shock accompanies the rational explanation: "Mary Martin had prepared herself so strictly for the sight of a woman's body that the animal jolted her perhaps more than if the woman had been there" (Erdrich 228). Mary Martin snuggles up to the deer in the backseat and cries, while Gordie runs out to cry in the orchard until the

police come to arrest him, presumably for being so drunk. Mary Martin reacts so intensely to the rational resolution because the world violates her expectations—she expects a dead woman and she finds a dead deer. Surely she would prefer a dead deer to a dead woman, but she is so resigned to the fact of the dead woman that her mind is unprepared for the deer. The reader, however, is not entirely prepared for the presence of either the doe (deer) or June (dear) in the backseat. When the text describes a ghost capable of “pulling the sheets off the bed and arranging [June’s] perfume bottles” (218), the reader must consider the possibility of a corporeal ghost. Could this ghost become a deer? Could Gordie then kill it? When the text explicitly answers this question in the negative through the experience and actions of Sister Mary Martin, the reader’s hesitation is resolved in favor of a more natural reality, one in which, if there are ghosts, the ghosts are ghosts as opposed to dead deer. “Crown of Thorns,” like “Saint Marie,” presents a supernatural intrusion which causes the reader to hesitate until the text explicitly supports a natural explanation, manifesting the structuralist genre definition of the *uncanny*. Manifesting this genre subverts a discourse predicated on absence and deprivation; in “Saint Marie” the Catholic-Ojibwe discourse would deny Marie one of those aspects of her self, and in “Crown of Thorns” the life-death discourse would deny Gordie access to June. However, the ultimate characteristic of this genre is rational resolution, in which the third-space is closed off. In *Love Medicine* absence reigns: June remains in the grave and absent from Gordie’s life, and Marie walks back down to the reservation to deprive herself of the symbolic order she briefly experiences at the convent. Each aspect of the novel momentarily subverts the discourse then upholds this structural absence and deprivation in the subject.

Structuralist Unity in Love Medicine

The concept of structuralist unity dictates that the utterance, the act of speech, and the composition of the “Saint Marie” and “Crown of Thorns” should support the structure of the *uncanny*. The structure of the *uncanny* causes ambiguity and hesitation, then resolves the ambiguity with a rational explanation; each of the three aspects of the novel should also cause the reader to hesitate, and each aspect should eventually sustain the rational explanation. In story-specific terms, the utterance, the act of speech, and the composition of each story and the whole novel will subvert the female-male, the Native-Colonial, or the life-death, discourse; but eventually each of these will support the discourse by perpetuating whatever deprivation the discourse initially caused.

The utterance manifests the *fantastic* by exaggerating the unreal into reality (Todorov 77). An *uncanny* utterance must also telegraph the forthcoming rational explanation, either with foreshadowing or with ambiguity sufficient to prevent the reader from foreclosing his belief. The foreshadowing begins on the first page of her story when Marie says, “And they never thought they’d have a girl from this reservation as a saint they’d have to kneel to” (Erdrich 43). The statement prepares the reader for Marie’s “saintly” triumph, but it also contains the first seed of doubt that will grow into the rational resolution of her “sainthood.” Leopolda never thinks Marie will become a saint, and at the climax of this story, Leopolda is right. Marie’s explanation of her decision to join the convent also casts doubt on her motivation to achieve sainthood: “The real way to overcome Leopolda was this: I’d get to heaven first. And then, when I saw her coming, I’d shut the gate. She’d be out! That is why, besides the bowing and the scraping I’d be dealt, I wanted to sit on the altar as a saint” (48). The humor and

pettiness in this passage show that Marie's desire for sainthood comes from a hyperbolic adolescent vendetta. Furthermore, the convent offers young Marie an environment with more nutritious food, a better (European/American) education, and a more stable and predictable lifestyle. Although not explicitly stated in the story, the nuns at the convent lived in considerable comfort compared to the residents of reservation. Marie, an adolescent, has less-than-pious motivations for joining the convent. At this point in the story, sainthood reads like a metaphor for Marie's triumph over reservation poverty and over Leopolda.

Marie approaches a more serious concept of sainthood after Leopolda scalds her with water from the kettle: "She'd gotten past me with her poker and I would never be a saint. I despaired" (54). Marie is correct—she never is a saint, although she is momentarily worshipped as a saint. She prepares to leave the convent when she has her vision. During the oven incident Marie's vision revives her faith in her power over Leopolda. Marie's expresses sainthood as a certainty: "One kick and Leopolda would fly in headfirst. And that would be one-millionth of the heat she would feel when she finally collapsed in his hellish embrace. Saints know these numbers" (57). Marie knows these numbers; therefore, Marie must be a saint. When Leopolda rebounds from the oven, Marie describes their confrontation in mythic terms: "Her face turned upside down on her shoulders. Her face turned blue. But saints are used to miracles. I felt no trace of fear" (57). The belief in her destiny to become a saint begins as a fantasy Marie concocts to preserve some sense of power and selfhood throughout her interactions with Leopolda, but it grows into Marie's assertion of divine knowledge and miracles. This *uncanny*

utterance exaggerates metaphor into reality. In *Love Medicine*, hyperbole comes true through parody when Saint Marie gets her “stigmata.”

Imagery from Marie’s vision recurs throughout the novel; the repeated utterance produces an *uncanny* effect because it mimics the mind’s tendency to find patterns. The reader expects each echo to be the same. Then, slight differences among the echoes violate the reader’s expectations, creating a stylistic feeling of the *uncanny* (Lloyd-Smith 8-9). “Saint Marie” repeats the description of Marie’s vision. The repetition of Marie’s imagery from Marie’s vision begins on the first page of the story: “And I’d be carved in pure gold. With ruby lips. And my toenails would be little pink ocean shells, which they would have to stoop down off their high horse to kiss” (Erdrich 43). In her first vision, Marie is “rippling gold” (54). Then, standing in front of the oven, preparing to cook Leopolda, Marie says, “My skin was turning to beaten gold” (56). When the nuns worship Marie and Leopolda fumes at her defeat, Marie is not satisfied: “My skin was dust” (60). First, in her coming-of-age vision, she sees that she would be gold in the future. Then, when she fights back against Leopolda, Marie is gold. When she swallows Leopolda’s lie and receives the “bowing and scraping” she once longed for (48), Marie is not gold, she is dust. The changing image of Marie’s skin supports the structure of the *uncanny* by mirroring its form and its effect. This repeated utterance is first phrased in the hypothetical future, foreshadowing the supernatural intrusion. In her vision and during the oven incident, the echo of this utterance is more affirmative, supporting the forthcoming mystical explanation of the supernatural intrusion just enough to create an ambiguous space in which the reader can hesitate. The final echo of the utterance contradicts the original utterance—she is not gold, she is dust—like the explicit rational

explanation contradicts any mystical interpretation of the supernatural intrusion.

Ultimately the utterance shows Marie without the golden power of her vision. As the vision recedes and the sainthood evaporates through the *uncanny* utterance, Marie is once again deprived of the power of the symbolic order she almost achieves in *paraxis*.

Water provides the *uncanny* utterance in “Crown of Thorns” and elsewhere in *Love Medicine*. Water metaphors refer to the dual roles of water in traditional Ojibwe beliefs and stories, in which water can create, destroy, or recreate life (Hafen 20).⁴ Repetition of water imagery—water as liquid, solid, and vapor, deep water, moving water, shallow water—creates the same *uncanny* effect as the repetition of gold imagery in “Saint Marie.” Saint Marie’s gold imagery signifies power, but the water utterances circle around the concept of love. The way in which the water utterance changes shows how love blesses or curses the character, depending on the event under inspection. Water is also a recurrent motif in Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*. Because she is its absent center, June Kashpaw is *Love Medicine*’s white whale (Matchie 483). Water imagery describes June’s death in that first chapter, “The World’s Greatest Fishermen (1981)”: “The snow fell deeper that Easter than it had in forty years, but June walked over it like water and came home” (Erdrich 7). This early development of the water motif invokes non-Native symbolism. June is absent like the whale from a story in the white canon. The image of June walking over water is Christian symbolism and occurs on Easter, a Christian holiday. Water also references Ojibwe beliefs; it is another hybrid, like gold for Marie, in that it describes both Native and Euroamerican symbols.

⁴Hafen illustrates the dark half of the water duality: water must represent death if it can represent rebirth through baptism. For Gordie Kashpaw, Henry Lamartine Junior, and Lyman Lamartine, water indicates drowning (34).

“Crown of Thorns” provides June’s *uncanny* resurrection, also described with water images. Drunk and afraid in his house by the lake, Gordie hears water before June appears: “He turned on the lights. He locked each window and door. Still he heard things. The waves rustled against each other like a woman’s stockinged legs” (217). When the deer wakes up in Gordie’s backseat, the narrator associates the deer with June by describing the deer’s gaze with water imagery: “Her look was black and endless and melting pure” (221). Then, when the dead deer becomes June, the water imagery continues: “Her hair was tossed in a dead black swirl” (222). At the end of “Crown of Thorns” when the police come to collect Gordie, “they heard him crying like a drowned person, howling in the open fields” (229). Then at the end of the novel in “Crossing the Water (1985),” Lipsha discovers that he is June’s son. Her other son, King, bought a car with June’s insurance money, and Lipsha drives that car home in the novel’s final story:

I’d heard that this river was the last of an ancient ocean, miles deep, that once had covered the Dakotas and solved all our problems. It was easy to still imagine us beneath them vast unreasonable waves, but the truth is we live on dry land. I got inside. The morning was clear. A good road led on. So there was nothing to do but cross the water, and bring her home. (367)

The ancient ocean in this passage, like June throughout the novel, is a myth. At its beginning and at its end, June crosses water to return home, both times in death. These waters are peaceful, unlike the dark rustling waves that signal the approach of her ghost in “Crown of Thorns.” Both concepts of June maintain that she is dead; although “Crown of Thorns” momentarily creates a third-space where Gordie can be with June, Gordie uses this opportunity to kill her again. Then, at the story’s resolution, the text shows that she was never a deer to be killed in the first place. The life-death discourse is upheld, and June crosses the water in death, still absent.

When June is a deer, and when the deer becomes June, the waters are black, deep, vast, and threatening. The utterance here describes an understanding in the deer's eyes: "She looked through him. She saw into the troubled thrashing woods of him, a rattling thicket of bones. She saw how he'd woven his own crown of thorns. She saw how although he was not worthy he'd jammed this relief on his brow" (221). In the "melting" eyes of the deer, Gordie also sees this Christian imagery—a recognition of his guilt and self-imposed exile from humanity. The water motif continues when it threatens to drown Gordie in the orchard behind the convent. When love crosses the water, love leads home, as it does for June before she dies, and for Lipsha after her resurrection. Love can also melt, consume, and drown the guilty and the penitent, as it does for Gordie with his deer and in the convent orchard. Water, as the *uncanny* utterance in "Crown of Thorns" and elsewhere in *Love Medicine*'s stories of June, shows the healing and the hurting power of love. To sustain the unified structure, the utterance always subverts then upholds the inevitable: death, separation, absence, and exclusion. Just as the utterance eventually maintains this inevitability, the vehicle that delivers the utterance—the speech act—will also balance subversion of the discourse with support of the deprivation the discourse causes.

In the *uncanny* genre, the speech act must be one that supports ambiguity without losing all credibility because the balance between belief and skepticism is crucial for maintaining the hesitation that characterizes subgenres of the *fantastic* (Todorov 83). *Love Medicine* has no one speech act—it is a story cycle, told by several speakers through two different speech acts, the first person and the third person.⁵ In *Writing*

⁵According to Thomas Matchie in his essay "*Love Medicine*: A Female Moby Dick," many critics disparaged *Love Medicine* for its lack of unity. Matchie argues that *Love Medicine*'s similarity to

Tricksters, Jeanne Rosier Smith characterizes Erdrich's multivocal storytelling as a means by which to draw the reader into the story. The reader is part of the storytelling community as one voice among many (Smith 90-91). The reader can change perspectives to integrate the disparate narrations into a coherent narration. The reader actively assembles the story into a unified narrative. The process of integrating the many stories of the many narrators creates intimacy between the reader and the narrators (Sands 35).⁶ Multivocal narration balances credibility and incredulity to create an atmosphere of intimacy and distance between storyteller and reader. These conditions support the hesitation and uncertainty characteristic of subgenres of the *fantastic*.

Love Medicine as a novel is multivocal, but "Saint Marie" as a story employs a first-person speech act. The first-person speech act provides an identifiable, human narrator; in this case, the narrator is the adult Marie Kashpaw, telling the story of her time at the convent when she was fourteen. The reader may identify with this narrator because the narrator, like the reader, calls herself "I." However, the narrator is not omniscient and therefore can misread the supernatural intrusion. The narrator and the reader are restricted to the narrator's perceptions; and since the narrator can misconstrue or misrepresent events, the reader can doubt the narrator (Todorov 82-84). The speech act of "Saint Marie" further supports hesitation because Marie expresses doubt and confusion while the nuns worship her at the height of the supernatural intrusion: "All holy hell

Melville's *Moby Dick* makes *Love Medicine* a unified structure (478-491). Structuralism argues that every novel is a unified structure, with or without comparison to some other novel. Feminism and other discourses of equality provide another objection to Matchie's premise: use of a nineteenth-century white man's novel to prove the unity of a novel written by a late-twentieth-century half-Indian woman is incompatible with the political themes of Erdrich's novel, such as the need for a holistic cultural identity un-dominated by white patriarchy.

⁶In her article "*Love Medicine*: Voices and Margins" Kathleen Sands recognizes the intimacy of multivocal storytelling but also maintains that this narrative style distances the reader. The reader is the one excluded as the many narrators get their opportunities to tell their stories (35).

broke loose when they saw I'd woke. I still did not understand what was happening" (Erdrich 58). The reader remains confused and ignorant because Marie is confused and ignorant. She says, "I couldn't tell why they were praying to me" (58). Marie cannot tell, and since Marie controls the narrative, the reader also cannot tell. An intimately close narrator, limited in her understanding by her own admission, provides the ideal act of speech for the *uncanny*; this speech act sustains the reader's doubt until the rational explanation is provided.

By contrast, "Crown of Thorns" employs a third-person speech act. The unknown narrator's focus shifts from Gordie's perceptions and actions to those of Sister Mary Martin at a crucial point in the story for the maintenance of hesitation. The narrator leaves Gordie at the peak of the supernatural intrusion, just when Gordie thinks that the deer is June and that he has killed her. The shift in focus hides Gordie from the reader—neither the reader nor Sister Mary Martin knows what Gordie is thinking when he goes to the convent and makes his confession. Unlike the reader, Mary Martin does not know that June died a month or more before, and that she is buried, not sprawled out on Gordie's backseat. Gordie's guilt-driven divorce from reality and Mary Martin's ignorance allow the reader to hesitate. This narrator has access to Gordie's and Mary Martin's thoughts and feelings, but the focus is split, so the range of the reader's knowledge is limited. This limitation distances the reader enough to allow the hesitation necessary to sustain the *uncanny*, despite the third-person speech act.

The syntactical aspect of the text, also called the composition or the story, must support the overall structure. In this *uncanny* text, the composition must present the events of the story in an order that supports hesitation up to the rational explanation at the

conclusion (Todorov 76). According to Todorov's explanation of the *uncanny*'s composition, the story often focuses gradually, from vague to direct, to describe the supernatural intrusion and resolve it (86-87). The composition of "Saint Marie" conforms to Todorov's definition. Marie's divine calling begins as a vague, childish desire to thwart Leopolda. She decides to stop defying Leopolda with "wickedness" because "holiness" might irritate Leopolda even more. According to Marie, "That is why, besides the bowing and scraping I'd be dealt, I wanted to sit on the altar as a saint" (Erdrich 48). The vision also begins in vague terms, then in its reprisals it becomes more direct. Marie's narration of her first vision hesitates: "I could walk through panes of glass. I could walk through windows" (54). She expresses her second vision in the affirmative, "I was walking through windows. She was chewing up the broken litter I left behind" (55). The major battle of the story catalyzes direct confrontation with the fulfillment of Marie's prophecy. During the oven incident, Marie refers to herself as a saint with certainty.⁷ After Leopolda tells Marie the lie about the stigmata, Marie understands why the nuns are kneeling, and the hesitation is resolved. The story proceeds from Marie's vague desire to be a saint to Marie's bloody confrontation with Leopolda and Marie's ultimate rejection of the lie of her stigmata. Through "Flesh and Blood," the composition of the novel provides an *uncanny* echo of the composition of "Saint Marie." In both stories, Leopolda is unnaturally strong, and at both times, Leopolda eats dust. Adult Marie in "Flesh and Blood," like adolescent Marie in "Saint Marie," pities Leopolda too much to revel in her apparent triumph over the old nun. In both stories she

⁷Marie's language is definite, not ambiguous, as she describes her "divine" perceptions during the battle with Leopolda: "And that would be one-millionth of the heat she would feel when she finally collapsed in his hellish embrace. Saints know these numbers. . . . Her face turned blue. But saints are used to miracles. I felt no trace of fear" (Erdrich 57).

walks away from Leopolda, toward a critical encounter with Nector: “Both days are thus double crises, pivotal in her relationship with the adversarial nun and with the man to whom she is married for almost fifty years, both relationships intimately bound up with her self-esteem” (Barton 93). Nector’s estrangement ends with another *uncanny* echo of “Saint Marie.” Zelda rescues Nector from LuLu’s burning house, but according to Nector, “I see Marie standing in the bush. She is fourteen and slim again. . . . Her breast is a glowing shield. Her arm is a white-hot spear. When she raises it the bush behind her spreads, blazing open like wings” (Erdrich 145). When the apparition calls him Daddy, the reader knows the girl is Zelda, not Marie transformed; but the conclusion of the episode in which Nector leaves Marie invokes Marie’s *uncanny* experience at the convent, as a child and later as an adult. The composition of the novel as a whole develops and revisits the supernatural intrusion into “Saint Marie.”

“Crown of Thorns” also develops a suggestion of the supernatural into a confrontation with the supernatural, and the subsequent resolution of the reader’s hesitation. Erdrich engages the senses, in order from the more easily deceived, like sight and sound, to the most reliable, touch and smell. In the beginning, Gordie’s perception of the ghost could be hallucination because the narrator describes the way it looks and the way it sounds. Sister Mary Martin perceives the story of the June-deer through her ears, but she comes to understand and unravel the supernatural intrusion through her nose and her hands. The story foreshadows the coming supernatural intrusion with the ears, then intimates the reality of the ghost through emotion, then directly presents the ghost through sight. Gordie, in his drunken grief, calls out June’s name. “He wanted to take it back as soon as he said it. Never, never call the dead by their names, Grandma said.

They might answer” (Erdrich 217). After this aural foreshadowing, the text narrates Gordie’s uncomfortable feelings: “He felt as if a bad thing was pushing against the walls from outside” (217). This emotional implication of a supernatural something then develops into a clear apparition. When Gordie looks out the bathroom window, he sees June. The text describes the way she looks, with bloody mouth and boney hands. Then June acts; she breaks the bathroom window and enters the house. She disturbs objects in the bedroom. She pursues Gordie, but he escapes. She is present (in the house) and active (in her disarrangement of the bedroom), but he does not confront her yet. Gordie runs away, forestalling confrontation with the ghost until he assaults the June-deer. The reader, without Gordie, faces the reality of the June-deer through the nun Sister Mary Martin, and the story culminates with her relief and Gordie’s further agony. Gordie confronts the supernatural directly at the peak of its intrusion, after he kills the deer, just when the text reveals that the deer, to Gordie, is June. Sister Mary Martin’s interlude sustains hesitation without further developing Gordie’s dilemma. The text follows Mary Martin and Gordie as they walk to the car, further prolonging Mary Martin’s confrontation with the dead object she believes, sight unseen, to be June. Mary Martin sees the deer, but cannot really believe what she sees until she touches the animal. The narrator describes how Mary Martin had to touch the deer to really believe that it is a deer: “There was no mistake—dun flanks, flag tail, curled legs, and lolling head. The yard light showed it clearly. But she had to believe. She bent into the car, put her hands straight out, and lowered them carefully onto the deer” (228). To believe the deer after hearing about the woman, Mary Martin had to see the deer, then feel the deer and smell the deer: “The smell hit her—the same frightening smell that had been on the man—

some death musk that deer give off, acrid and burning and final” (228). Her sense of smell deceives her—she believed the smell of death on Gordie supported his murder story—until her other senses, sight and touch, reveal that the dead is a deer, not a deer. The composition of the story progresses through the senses to build toward a direct confrontation with the supernatural intrusion; Gordie hears the rustling, then he sees June in his house, then he sees June in his backseat. Mary Martin hears that June is in Gordie’s backseat, then she “thought she smelled the blood on him” (226), then she sees the deer, then smells the deer and feels the deer. This sensory development of the composition, from sight, which can be deceived, to touch and smell, the most concretely rooted in the animal parts of the brain, supports the unreliability of perception and the mystery of consciousness that thematically underlie the *uncanny*.

Themes of Self and Other in Love Medicine

Themes of the self, like perception and consciousness, deal with the internal processes of cognition, understanding, and selfhood; themes of the self in *Love Medicine* express the danger of rigid or nonspecific selfhood in a postcolonial environment. The healthiest, most successful characters in the novel, like Marie and Lipsha, achieve a dynamic selfhood, flexible enough to allow the individual to adapt to changing conditions without violating community traditions. This dynamic selfhood is the defining characteristic of the trickster, a recurring figure in Native American myth. The trickster’s identity is fluid or sometimes multiple, resisting foreclosure and rigidity without utterly dissolving (Smith 16-17). The trickster’s flexible identity will bend under strain but not

break.⁸ Euroamerican hegemony devalues and negates Chippewa culture, creating tension within those individuals who identify with both cultures or live domestically in one cultural setting but earn their living in the other cultural setting. In *Love Medicine*, a healthy identity requires balance between the two cultures (Sanders 153). The cultural divisions in *Love Medicine* create a system of binary oppositions that clearly favor white people over Native Americans: Native Americans are associated with wildness and wanton sexuality,⁹ while white people are associated with power, money, and bureaucracy.¹⁰ The novel provides multiple examples of characters who fail to live up to their racial stereotypes, like Lyman, Nector's son by LuLu, with his ability to generate capital, and Albertine, who pursues her education off the reservation without abandoning her friends and family. This complication of identity almost always results in a more positive sense of self.

Marie's identity is the excluded middle, neither "white" nor "wild"—she formed this identity in the *uncanny* event that occupies *paraxis*, somewhere between Catholic and Ojibwe, between motherly love and sadism, between fantasy and reality, and between childhood and womanhood. In "Saint Marie," the ideal self of Marie's vision is a composite of Native American and European Catholic images. Her vision blends the traditions that contribute to her cultural and biological heritage (Jaskoski 28). In the vision she has "little pink ocean shells" for toenails (Erdrich 43), reminiscent of sacred objects in Native American religious observations. The rest of her body, made of gold

⁸According to Karla Sanders in her article "A Healthy Balance," *Love Medicine* shows that either/or positions do not contribute to positive identity formation in a postcolonial culture.

⁹According to Albertine, one of Marie's grandchildren, in "The World's Best Fishermen": "I know, because I worked with them, that to these types an Indian woman's nothing but an easy night" (9).

¹⁰According to Lyman in "The Tomahawk Factory (1983)": "I don't like to say this, nobody can believe it, but here's the way it is with us Indians—Uncle Sam taketh away and Uncle Sam giveth" (299).

and diamonds, invokes the biblical image from Revelation of the woman cloaked in the sun (Jaskoski 30). Her mixed-blood vision fuels her struggle against Leopolda, and when achieving “sainthood” leaves Marie unfulfilled, she leaves the convent.

At age thirty-five, Marie draws power from the identity that triumphs over Leopolda when Marie is fourteen. As an adult Marie abandons the symbols in her vision to become an everyday saint, taking in unwanted children and helping her less fortunate neighbors. However, the scar from her experience at the convent still hurts, “a scar that was tight and cold in [her] palm, a scar that ached on Good Friday and throbbed in the rain” (Erdrich 146).¹¹ She abandons the empty symbols of the convent in favor of a more authentic sainthood, but she retains the scar on her hand as a symbol of her attempt to triumph in that symbolic realm. Marie visits Leopolda at the convent when Leopolda is close to death to show Leopolda that, although Marie chose to leave the convent and marry an Indian, she is not living on charity with a family of brats, as Leopolda had warned. Leopolda, however, cannot admit her mistake because she is completely insane in her advanced age. Waxing her floor that night, brooding over Leopolda’s derision and Nector’s extramarital affair, Marie revives her identity as Saint Marie: “But I would not care if Marie Kashpaw had to wear an old shroud. I would not care if Lulu Lamartine ended up the wife of the chairman of the Chippewa tribe. I’d still be Marie. Marie. Star of the Sea! I’d shine when they stripped off the wax!” (165). Her pragmatic, fluid identity, picking and choosing its symbols and incarnations based on Marie’s immediate

¹¹Examining the interconnections between the stories reveals details that enrich Marie’s characterization. In “Wild Geese,” the story that directly follows “Saint Marie,” Nector encounters Marie as she walks down the hill, away from the convent, still wearing makeshift bandages on her head and hand. According to Nector, this occurs on a Friday—the same day of the week Christ received his wounds (Barton 86-87).

needs, allows Marie to maintain her sense of self despite changes in her role in the community and her closest interpersonal relationships.

While Marie shows that healthy identities can be formed in the flexible middle-space, June shows what disasters come from an undefined identity. June's selfhood is too nebulous. Throughout the novel, descriptions of June alternate from Christian resurrection allusions to Native American familial ghost allusions. These two codes conflict with each other; June's self in the text vacillates between opposites, between Catholic and Ojibwe symbols, without creating a middle space in which to embody her contradictions (Rainwater 166-67). Her death, at such a young age, is evidence of her failed identity. If she had established a life and a self, she would never have entered the bar to proposition a white man: "He peeled an egg for her, a pink one, saying it matched her turtleneck. She told him it was no turtleneck. You called these things shells. He said he would peel that for her, too, if she wanted, then he grinned at the bartender and handed her the naked egg" (Erdrich 2). The Easter eggs are a Christian symbol of the resurrection, extended to refer to June in her shell. The concept of resurrection contradicts the Chippewa concept of the immortality of the spirit because the immortal spirit never dies; if it never dies, it cannot be resurrected. Resurrection implies death; immortality of spirit rejects death. Rather than resolving this contradiction by asserting one code over the other or synthesizing both into one code, Erdrich sustains both codes within June (Rainwater 167); most of the novel takes place before June is born or after June freezes on Easter, but June is also neither alive nor dead, even as a child. She does not take on characteristics of ghosts *and* characteristics of the living; she adopts *neither* and implies *both*. As children, her adopted siblings pretend to hang June, but June directs

the hanging. Marie scolds June for tying a noose around her neck. Mary underscores the seriousness of the play-hanging, saying, “I could almost have sworn she knew what was real and what was not real, and that I’d still ruined it” (Erdrich 90). June attempts suicide in a strange manner—she wants to be hanged, but she does not want to hang herself. She wants her new adoptive family to hang her, as if in a perverted homage to Christian sacrifice. Rather than being sacrificed at the hands of her persecutors for their own redemption, she tries to convince her new siblings to sacrifice her for her own mysterious purposes. While she is alive, she seeks death. And when June is dead, she functions in “Crown of Thorns” as a living character.

In life, June also fails to adopt any beneficial aspect of a gender role, male or female. She alternately chooses the male or the female, unable to perform either role to anyone’s benefit. June fails in the public sphere when she undertakes typically female occupations. Albertine uses June’s work history to outline June’s decline:

When she was studying to be a beautician, I remember, word came that she had purposely burned an unruly customer’s hair stiff green with chemicals. Other secretaries did not like her. She reported drunk for work in dimstores and swaggered out of restaurants where she’d waitressed a week, at the first wisecrack. Sometimes she came back to Gordie and they made the marriage work for a while longer. Then she would leave again. As time went by she broke, little by little, into someone whose shoulders sagged when she thought no one was looking, a woman with long ragged nails and hair always growing from its beauty-parlor cut. (9)

June cannot nurture herself or anyone else. June’s niece, Albertine, narrates: “Then, too, June had no patience with children. She wasn’t much as a mother; everyone in the family said so, even Eli who was crazy about his little girl” (Erdrich 8). June leaves her son King with his father, Gordie, and she leaves her son by Gerry Nanapush, Lipsha, with Marie Kashpaw. Lipsha grows into a hero in the novel, eventually responsible for

bringing June back home. He inherits a trickster's mutability from his father, and he learns how to nurture and love from Marie, his (and his mother's) adopted mother. King, however, is one of the more despicable characters in the novel. He beats his wife, terrorizes his family, and betrays Gerry, the reservation hero, to the police. Lipsha's mysterious origins lead to a healthier selfhood than King's well-known lineage, even though June failed as a mother to both her sons. King's violent relationship with his young family is one of many illustrations of the way that an unhealthy sense of self translates into violence against the other.

Themes of the other in *Love Medicine* express the characters' desire to absorb the other into the self; the subject responds to alterity, the quality of being the other, by eliminating it. The subject tries to eliminate alterity by incorporating the other into the self, leaving only self, without other. In "Saint Marie" and "Crown of Thorns" the other is not necessarily another human person: "This exists as one of the constants of literature of the fantastic: the existence of beings more powerful than men" (Todorov 109). The powerful being in "Saint Marie" is Satan, and Leopolda responds to Satan's perceived supernatural alterity by trying to eliminate him. Satan is not an abstract symbol of evil for Marie and Sister Leopolda. He is the "he" to whom Leopolda refers when she says, "I think he is gone now," after emptying the kettle of boiling water onto Marie. His presence fails to constitute a supernatural intrusion because no one actually sees him, and he never says or does anything himself. He is a theme, not an actor, in the story.

Although Satan belongs to Christianity, Marie and Leopolda's concept of Satan comes from Windigo stories. According to Marie, Satan speaks Cree. Marie's belief that Satan speaks the languages of her ancestors *and* the languages of the church indicates that Satan

has positive and negative traits. He is not an abstract symbol of evil as defined by the Catholic Church; for Leopolda and Marie, he is evil personified (Sanders 143). He represents the other that has more power than the self. For Marie, he represents her Native heritage, the aspect of her identity she rejects when she goes up to the convent and reclaims on her walk back down.

Marie first personifies Satan early in her story, before she reaches the convent, as she describes Leopolda as a teacher at the convent school:

The other Sisters had long ago gone blank and given up on Satan. He slept for them. They never noticed his comings and goings. But Leopolda kept track of him and knew his habits, minds he burrowed in, deep spaces where he hid. She knew as much about him as my grandma, who called him by other names and was not afraid. (Erdrich 45)

The fact that Marie comes to the convent with a ready-made concept of Satan, which Leopolda reinforces, supports the notion that Leopolda and Marie share independent concepts of the devil, as opposed to the contention that Marie only believes in the devil because of her indoctrination at the hands of Leopolda. Leopolda, for her part, uses Satan as an excuse for her own sadistic outbursts. Leopolda wields an oak pole for opening windows and abusing students: “She used this deadly hook-pole for catching Satan by surprise. He could have entered without your knowing it—through your lips or your nose or any one of your seven openings—and gained your mind” (Erdrich 46). Leopolda believes that Satan wants Marie more than he wants most people. She blames the Devil for distracting Marie and making her drop the good cup under the stove while Marie and Leopolda bake bread. The Devil is Leopolda’s excuse for sadism; because of Satan’s presence in Marie, Leopolda pins Marie to the floor under her foot and scalds Marie.

The Windigo and the Devil are analogous entities in *Love Medicine* (Jaskoski 29). In Native American folklore the Windigo is a giant village-eating cannibal made of ice; sometimes the Windigo possesses an individual of the village, compelling that individual to eat human flesh. The heroine of the Windigo tales is often a young girl, and in some stories, she becomes a Windigo to fight the monster. Marie's battle with Leopolda resembles these Windigo stories. In the folklore, a moving kettle foreshadows the Windigo's appearance. When Marie hears the kettle moving above her as she reaches for the cup under the oven, she interprets the rattling kettle as an omen of something bad to come. The hero in traditional stories drives out the monster with boiling water or tallow, like Leopolda's attempt to drive Satan out of Marie with boiling water from the kettle (Jaskoski 30-31). To Leopolda, Marie is the Windigo: Leopolda tries to drive the Devil out of Marie, as if Marie is the one possessed by evil.

To Marie, Leopolda is the Windigo. Traditional Chippewa cultures used the Windigo myths to teach children about the importance of sharing and self-sufficiency (Mermann-Jozwiak 45). Leopolda rejects these values; even as a nun, she is miserly. In "Saint Marie" Leopolda denies Marie any of the priest's cheese she keeps locked up in the convent pantry. Leopolda then decides to give Marie a piece of cheese, but only as an incentive for good behavior: "If you're good you'll taste this cheese again. When I'm dead and gone" (Erdrich 50). Leopolda uses cheese to bribe Marie—one slice of cheese for a lifetime of devotion to the Catholic church—in her only moment of magnanimity. In "Flesh and Blood (1957)" Marie tells Leopolda, "'You're the one. So proud of shredding your feet! Getting worshipped as a saint! While all the time you're measly and stingy to the sick at your door'" (Erdrich 155).

Leopolda associates the Windigo-Devil with sex. Todorov identifies sex as a theme of the other in subgenres of the *fantastic*. The devil either incites sexual desire in a character or desires the character sexually. Sexual desire symbolizes the character's desire to understand or possess some unknown evil (Todorov 125-28). All descriptions of icy blood, heart, or body implicitly describe the Windigo (Jaskoski 31) hence Leopolda's description of lust as cold. Before scolding Marie, Leopolda says, "'You're cold. There is a wicked ice forming in your blood. You don't have a shred of devotion for God. Only wild cold dark lust. I know it. I know how you feel. I see the beast... the beast watches me out of your eyes sometimes. Cold'" (Erdrich 52). Leopolda associates the Windigo-Devil with lust, as opposed to any of the other seven deadly sins.¹² In *Uncanny American Fiction*, Allan Gardner Lloyd-Smith contends that American fiction manifests the *uncanny* to deal with sexual repression (Lloyd-Smith ix). Sex and Satan are inextricably bound for Leopolda, and she pursues him relentlessly with the intent to kill him. Sexuality is not the only aspect of selfhood Leopolda denies herself. Louise Erdrich's novel *Tracks* reveals that Leopolda is actually Marie's mother. Leopolda knows but Marie does not. Leopolda denies motherhood and sees in her child the cold lust she despises in herself. Leopolda's Windigo-Devil embodies all the aspects of selfhood Leopolda denies, including, but not limited to, sex. When she sees the Windigo-Devil in Marie, she tries to kill it. Leopolda hurts Marie to get the Devil out because that is the only way she knows to love her daughter.

¹²In her article "'His Grandfather Ate His Own Wife': Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* as a Contemporary Windigo Narrative," Elisabeth Mermann-Jozwiak identifies the Windigo myth as palimpsest for Lulu Lamartine's story, "The Island." Lulu, like the little girl in the myth, becomes a Windigo to fight the Windigo, in this story, Moses Pillager. She melts him down to the human inside, and he acts like a child during their time together. Unlike the myth, however, Lulu maintains the sexually-based mental powers she gained as a Windigo, rather than reverting to her original childlike state. Throughout the novel, she uses sex to control, manipulate, and overpower men like Nector Kashpaw and Bev Lamartine.

Marie, once grown and a mother herself, adopts June, the daughter of Marie's sister Lucille and a Morrissey man, after Lucille dies. Marie identifies with June—"She was like me, and she was not like me" (Erdrich 87)—but not enough to see the Devil in June as Leopolda saw the Devil in Marie. "There was no Devil in her. If there was I would have seen. She hardly spoke two words to anyone and never fought back when Aurelia pinched her arm or Gordie sneaked a bun off her plate" (88). Marie sees no Devil in June despite the fact that Leopolda taught Marie to associate the Devil with wildness, and June had been raised wild in the woods. Cree Indians gave June holy beads, not for her protection, but to protect themselves from her and the spirits they believe had raised her. June, despite her association with wildness and the old Manitou spirits, lacks the meanness and lust Marie saw in herself through Leopolda. This theme of the Windigo-Devil as the supernatural other is closely related to another theme of the other, which can be understood generally as a theme of power in the novel.

Themes of power—the amount of force a character can exert over the other—show the complex effects of hegemony and cultural coercion on Marie. Throughout the novel Marie draws power from her vision quest and her battle with Sister Leopolda. Marie's vision is a holistic blend of tribal tradition and Roman Catholicism, "an integration of past and present" (Barry and Prescott 127). Karla Sanders describes the darker aspects of the intersection of Roman Catholicism and Chippewa culture. According to Sanders, "This fusion of religious emblems presents the ambivalence inherent in a people who have been forced to accept the validity of the colonizer's beliefs, and on a more personal level, shows Marie's desire to embrace a beautiful, powerful identity" (134). The Chippewa religion values magic's ability to serve the community in

tangible ways while Catholicism emphasizes the symbolic, like the Virgin Mary, the symbol of pristine, virginal, divine womanhood (Sanders 136). After the nuns worship Marie for her spurious stigmata, Marie rejects Catholic symbol worship and leaves the convent (136). Marie's power over others, especially her biological and adopted children, comes from her role as mother and provider for her entire community; she is not a symbolic mother like Mary, she is a real mother. Immersion in a world of symbolic womanhood and fake miracles help Marie triumph over Leopolda because Marie's vision inspires her to fight back, and because the other nuns' worship, and Leopolda's corresponding defeat, failed to fulfill Marie. Marie's ability to adapt brings her to a position of tangible power on the reservation, with her family, and her power over her community and her loved ones gives her real fulfillment.

Neither June nor Gordie develops any sense of personal power from their battles with each other. The narrator in "Crown of Thorns" describes this futility as Gordie speaks aloud to the ghost of June: "They knew each other better than most people who were married a lifetime. They knew the good things, but they knew how to hurt each other, too. 'I was a bastard, but so were you,' he insisted to the room. 'We were even'" (217). While they were married, June had affairs with other men (8), and Gordie beat June (213). Their cruelty trickles down into their son King's relationship with his wife, Lynette. Albertine demonstrates the similarities between Gordie's relationship with June and King's relationship with Lynette, saying, "And even now, King was saying something to Lynette that had such an odd dreaming ring to it I almost heard it spoken out in June's voice. June had said, 'He used the flat of his hand. He hit me good.' And now I heard her son say, ' . . . flat of my hand . . . but good . . . '" (17). Because Gordie

tries, ineffectually, to consume and control June with violence while she is alive, King tries to control his own wife with violence after June dies. Gordie's guilt after June's death drives him to lose what little power he has left after the dissolution of their marriage.

While June lives, neither she nor Gordie gains anything from their battles and their mutual cruelty. June does not triumph over Gordie until after her death when he kills himself with his guilt. Gordie and June gain nothing from their struggle for power, unlike Marie, whose power seems to come directly from her triumph over Leopolda. Love is just another facet of the struggle for power in the novel. When these characters hurt the ones they love, they do so in response to the alterity that separates the self from the other. June and Gordie hurt each other because they love each other; likewise, in a perverse way, Leopolda tortures Marie because she loves her. Leopolda uses her power over Marie in an attempt to twist Marie into Leopolda's perverse image. Marie uses her power over others for their own good. These characters respond to the separateness of people by attempting to absorb or engulf the object of their affection like the Windigo eats his village.

This connection between love and ingestion runs throughout the novel, from the *uncanny* stories to the stories that manifest other genres. The most powerful love medicine in the book comes from eating the hearts of two geese; unfortunately, Lipsha does not invest the time and effort necessary to get real geese hearts. To rekindle the love between Marie and Nector, Lipsha serves the hearts of two frozen turkeys. Nector chokes on his heart and dies, and even though the hearts were not the real love medicine, Nector comes back from the dead to visit Lipsha, Marie, and his old lover LuLu (230-

258, 295-297). Nector's ghost is an intrusion of the supernatural, but according to Todorov's definition, the stories with Nector's ghost belong to the *fantastic* genre or the *marvelous* subgenre. The *fantastic* relies on uncertainty and hesitation, which is difficult to sustain. Sometimes the resolution of the supernatural intrusion comes too soon and the book manifests a subgenre like the *uncanny* or the *marvelous*, or the book manifests a different genre entirely (Todorov 42-43). Some aspects of *Love Medicine* do support different genres, but the structure of the novel is non-linear. Stories that manifest the *fantastic* are interspersed throughout more realistic stories that double back to stories already told, which helps to sustain the *uncanny*'s ambiguity. "Saint Marie" and "Crown of Thorns" can stand alone as *uncanny* stories with their own discrete structure, and they can be considered within the structure of the multivocal story cycle.

When a story recognizes the unknowable, indefinable, illogical aspects of human existence, that story subverts orthodox reality; however, the *uncanny* upholds the orthodox when a rational explanation closes off *paraxis*. The subject in *Love Medicine* can draw from *paraxis*, like Lipsha when he brings June home, but the third-space that would allow June's actual presence disappears. In the *fantastic* the third-space remains open because orthodox rationality never supercedes the unorthodox supernatural. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* the subject creates and maintains *paraxis* through language; the subject literally creates the third-space through writing. *The Puttermessaer Papers*, which manifests the *marvelous* subgenre, also uses the written word to create a third-space through the continuous blending of author, narrator, and character—all of whom create a third-space with words. *Love Medicine* lacks writers. The *fantastic* subject and the *marvelous* subject recreate the story by writing it, and the subject permanently subverts a

discourse predicated on separation; the *uncanny* in *Love Medicine* perpetuates the subject's separation from the object within the discourse, but its *uncanny* hints at the possibility of subversion by providing a glimpse of the third-space maintained through language in the *fantastic*.

CHAPTER THREE

The Bonesetter's Daughter and the *Fantastic*

Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* (2001) manifests the structure of the *fantastic* genre to show how language and communication create a third-space in which the subject can subvert a dualistic discourse that sets life and death as mutually exclusive opposites. First this chapter will establish the definition of the *fantastic* genre and show how the novel fits the definition. *The Bonesetter's Daughter* establishes a mimetic reality by describing the quotidian aspects of Ruth Young's conflicted life. Ruth is neurotic, her relationships are complicated, and her work is disappointing; she is a three-dimensional character in a textual universe that resembles the world outside the text because it is both complex and mundane. The supernatural intrudes on *The Bonesetter's Daughter* when the novel flashes back to Ruth's childhood when her mother LuLing uses Ruth to contact the spirit of LuLing's mother, Precious Auntie.¹³ The supernatural intrusion in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is sand-writing; Ruth seems to channel the spirit of her dead grandmother Precious Auntie. Ruth's mother, LuLing, asks Precious Auntie questions, and Ruth answers for Precious Auntie by writing her answers with a chopstick on a tray of sand. The reader hesitates to ascribe an explanation for the seemingly supernatural events; this hesitation is the final and most central aspect of the *fantastic*. In the *fantastic*, the text sustains the reader's hesitation by never explicitly providing a natural or a supernatural explanation (Todorov 25). The reader hesitates because Ruth does not know

¹³LuLing usually refers to her mother as Precious Auntie, or *Bao Bomu* in Chinese. Toward the end of the novel, LuLing mistakenly remembers that her mother's name is *Liu Xing*, Shooting Star (Tan, *TBD* 394). GaoLing later discovers that Precious Auntie's name is *Liu Xin*, Remain True (399).

if the ghost guides her hand or if she uses the sand-writing as an opportunity to communicate with her obstinate mother. Sometimes LuLing asks Precious Auntie about stock tips. Some of these stocks perform very well, so Ruth, as an adult, again wonders about Precious Auntie's ghost. She wonders, but she never knows, and the text never resolves the reader's hesitation.

Structuralist unity indicates that all parts of the story support the story's structure. As Precious Auntie tells LuLing, "*A person should consider how things begin. A particular beginning results in a particular end*" (Tan *TBD* 173). For a text to manifest the structure of the *fantastic*, each aspect of the text (utterance, act of speech, and composition) must maintain unresolved hesitation and ambiguity. The utterances that best sustain ambiguity and hesitation in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* are the descriptions of silence. The use of muteness in the novel shows how the subject needs her voice to affect her world; without her words, she becomes a ghost. This pattern of not speaking and not listening initiates the curse for Precious Auntie in China, and the curse continues through LuLing's life and manifests itself as annual aphasia in Ruth, starting in her childhood. Ruth permanently finds her voice at the end of the novel when she begins to write her intergenerational story into one unified structure. Descriptions and passages about the written word show how writing can supercede speech, but only if the intended reader receives the written text. The second aspect of structuralist unity discussed in this chapter is the act of speech, and according to Todorov, the first-person is the preferred speech act for the *fantastic* and its subgenres because an identifiable narrator is intimate and credible but, because the narrator is not omniscient, the reader can hesitate to believe what the narrator says. This balance of narrative control and reader skepticism makes the

first-person speech act ideal for the maintenance of hesitation, the defining characteristic of the genre (82-84). *The Bonesetter's Daughter* employs both first-person and third-person speech acts, but alternating between speech acts effectively sustains the reader's hesitation because the third-person speech act of Parts One and Three is sufficiently ambiguous, and Part Two's first-person speech act establishes a worldview that accepts the existence of the supernatural as part of causality's environment; however, the ambiguous third-person speech act has the last word in the novel, and that last word never explicitly explains the supernatural intrusion. The *fantastic* composition in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* sustains hesitation by moving from vague description of the supernatural intrusion in Part One to direct confrontation with the supernatural through a flashback to China in Part Two, without ever explicitly supporting a supernatural or a natural explanation when Ruth writes her intergenerational story in Part Three. The story resolves the curse without making any ontological claim about the ghost, so the third-space is maintained. As a unified structure, each aspect *The Bonesetter's Daughter* creates and sustains the *paraxis* in which Ruth can use language to subvert the boundaries of death, time, and distance; this subversion gives Ruth the power to lift the intergenerational curse of silence.

Themes of the self and other in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* address the role of silence and words in Ruth and LuLing's coming-of-age stories. The novel treats uncertainty, language, and interpretation in a thematic bundle through the characters' use of the Chinese language. Chinese allows for multiple interpretations and multiple conclusions, and the mistranslations and misunderstandings about names and words create obstacles and conflicts throughout the novel. Language and interpretation serve as

themes of the self and themes of the other in the novel; the mistranslation of Precious Auntie's name distorts her selfhood. This same mistranslation is a theme of the other when LuLing loses Precious Auntie's name, and for the rest of her life, searches her memory in vain. *The Bonesetter's Daughter* explores themes of the other through language and ghosts. Speech and communication facilitate communication with the cultural other in the novel. Ruth's speech allows her to assimilate into American culture, positioning her as the American other to LuLing's Chinese self. Sand-writing, as communication with the dead other, provides a connection between Ruth and LuLing, closing the gap between them and reducing their mutual alterity. This use of language to communicate with the ghost of Precious Auntie also closes the gap between the living and the dead, creating a third space in which all can coexist in the story Ruth writes at the end of the novel.

This novel follows three generations of women as they move from nineteenth-century China to twentieth-century California; the intergenerational immigrant story enables the reader to compare two seemingly opposed discourses, the Chinese and the American. Reading the text in the context of the *fantastic* genre also shows the intersection of two discourses, the rational and the nonrational. Women writers, particularly Asian-American women writers, engage in the process of disrupting, reinventing, and revising established genres: "Generic disruption in this manner constitutes a form of transformation and transgression of traditional, patriarchally-informed discursive codes, and also occurs with some frequency in this corpus of writing" (Grice 16). Transcendentalist theory of the *fantastic* emphasizes the genre's role in escapism and wish-fulfillment. Consequently, this genre is ignored or dismissed by

many literary critics. However, the *fantastic* can also subvert the dominant discourse, and therefore has a political effect (Wang 150-51). Tan's contribution to the *fantastic* is doubly subversive: she subverts the conventions of a traditionally male-dominated genre, a genre used to subvert the dominant discourse by allowing for non-rational possibilities. The book's dominant language motif—speech and speechlessness, writing and (not) reading, English and Mandarin—is most clear at the moments that make the book the *fantastic* because, in order to challenge a reader's assumptions about the meaning of language (and the language of meaning), the text must undermine the most basic assumptions about the divisions between past and present and life and death.

The Bonesetter's Daughter *and the Definition of the Fantastic*

The Bonesetter's Daughter establishes a mimetic reality, then the supernatural intrusion of the sand-writing subverts that reality to create a *paraxis* in which the rules of the life/death and past/present discourses are held in question; the *fantastic* never answers these questions, and the subject in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* maintains *paraxis* through multiple narrators, languages, meanings, times, and places. The novel first establishes mimesis with LuLing's appeal to reality: "These are the things I know are true" (Tan, *TBD* 1). This appeal comes from LuLing's Chinese past, the setting that will become the locus and originator of all supernatural events in the novel. It continues with a foreshadowing of the uncertainty characteristic of the *fantastic* when LuLing says, "I know all this, yet there is one name I cannot remember" (1). The forgotten name, lost in the narrator's birthplace in China, drives the story—the lost name ushers in the supernatural intrusion, it sustains the reader's hesitation, and it is not revealed until the end of the novel. The narrator of this prologue reveals herself at the chapter's end and

establishes the coming of the supernatural intrusion: “Precious Auntie, what is our name? I always meant to claim it as my own. Come help me remember. I’m not a little girl anymore. I’m not afraid of ghosts. Are you still mad at me? Don’t you recognize me? I am LuLing, your daughter”(6). The novel’s first chapter contains a claim to truth, grounding the novel in an empirical reality constructed by an identifiable narrator, but it also contains ghosts, foreshadowing the eventual supernatural intrusion.

Because the novel is grounded in an empirical reality, the supernatural intrusion can cause the reader to hesitate between a rational and a non-rational explanation for the intrusion. Because Part One of the novel is entirely mimetic, the reader is unprepared for the surprise of the coming ghost. The third-person narration of Part One centers on the thoughts and actions of Ruth Luyi Young, LuLing’s American-born daughter. Her life is hectic: she has a job as a ghostwriter for self-help books, an annual bout of neurotic laryngitis, and a live-in boyfriend with two teenage daughters. Ruth regards her mother’s lifelong preoccupation with ghosts as a morbid superstition, further establishing the rationalistic tone of Part One: “To her mother, just about anything was a sign of ghosts: broken bowls, barking dogs, phone calls with only silence or heavy breathing on the other end” (10). The story recalls a time from Ruth’s youth when LuLing forbade her from growing her hair long which demonstrates the extent of LuLing’s beliefs and the impact of those beliefs on Ruth: “‘Long hair look like suicide maiden,’ LuLing had said. And Ruth knew she was referring to the nursemaid who had killed herself when her mother was a girl. Ruth had had nightmares about that, the ghost with the long hair, dripping blood, crying for revenge” (23). LuLing’s beliefs and her inconsistent grasp of the English language also impair her understanding of Ruth’s profession. According to the

narrator, “Most people called her a ghostwriter—she hated the term. Her mother thought it meant that she could actually write to ghosts” (31). A flashback further explains LuLing’s belief that Ruth can write to ghosts. When Ruth is six, she breaks her arm at the playground. Because she remains silent despite the pain, her mother, her schoolmates, and her aunt’s family pay her an unprecedented amount of attention, and Ruth fears that her voice could destroy all the benefits of her injury: “She thought about making a little sound so small no one would even hear. But if she did, then all the good things that were happening might disappear” (80). LuLing gives Ruth a tray covered with sand on which Ruth can practice writing with her left hand, since her right arm was broken, and Ruth communicates with her mother on the sand tray.

The sand-writing ushers in the supernatural intrusion. Ruth writes “Doggie” to request a pet, which LuLing interprets as a communication from Precious Auntie, who called LuLing “Doggie” as a child. LuLing directs Ruth to ask Precious Auntie if the curse is lifted, and Ruth accidentally writes the Chinese character meaning “mouth,” so LuLing promises Precious Auntie that she will go to China to return Precious Auntie’s bones to the Mouth of the Mountain. Because this scene is set in America, LuLing’s interpretation is superstitious,¹⁴ but Chinese culture and tradition would not deny the possibility that a dead grandparent could speak through her grandchild. LuLing interprets Ruth’s broken arm as a consequence of the curse; Ruth feels afraid, and her fear is the source of the supernatural explanation for the sand-writing: “Ruth dropped the chopstick. The lady with bloody hair was trying to kill her! So it was true, that day at the playground, she almost died. She had thought so, and it was true” (Tan *TBD* 87). The

¹⁴In her article “A Case of Double Logic in Amy Tan’s *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*,” Lina Unali describes LuLing’s interpretation as a “superstitious chaining of cause and effect” (231).

first supernatural intrusion into *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is LuLing's communication with Precious Auntie's ghost through Ruth.

Part Two of the story includes no supernatural intrusion but the chapter's supernatural content maintains the hesitation characteristic of the *fantastic*. In China, where Part Two is set, traditional ancestor worship requires a belief in ghosts. Some of the novel's Chinese events, like the blind beggar girl who gives LuLing a poem supposedly dictated by the spirits, are predicated on the belief in ghosts but are not utterly supported by the tenets of ancestor worship. However, the culture of LuLing's China embraces the overarching concept that ghosts are a part of the living world, so in her cultural context, communications from beyond the grave are justified. The *fantastic* lures readers into the story with a semblance of realism then introduces the weird without justification (Jackson 3). Part Two's China is indeed realistic, but part of that reality explains and justifies the presence of ghosts. LuLing's story embraces the supernatural—it does not intrude; it is invited. However, the ghost story in Part Two still supports the structure of the *fantastic* by maintaining the reader's hesitation as to whether or not to accept the presence of the ghost in Ruth's story.

The *fantastic* does not resolve the reader's hesitation; if the text explicitly gives a rational explanation, the story manifests the *uncanny*, and if the text demands a supernatural interpretation, the story is the *marvelous*. With the *fantastic*, the reader never really knows—the characters' responses are the reader's only evidence as to how to characterize a supernatural intrusion: "If the fantastic narration plays on the character's innocence compared with the narrator's control over the fantastic events, this is because the reader's horizon of expectation usually relies on the character's reaction after the

supernatural intrusion” (Chen 247). Ruth reacts to the ghost with confusion and fear, so the reader can expect any explanation in a wide range of possibilities: “Ruth wondered what she had written. How could a square mean all that? Was there really a ghost in the room? What was in her hand and the chopstick? Why was her hand shaking?” (Tan, *TBD* 87). Throughout Ruth’s childhood, LuLing occasionally made Ruth write for Precious Auntie. Ruth establishes the reader’s “horizon of expectation” (Chen 247); either Precious Auntie writes to LuLing through Ruth,¹⁵ or Ruth just writes what she thinks LuLing wants to hear. Ruth does not foreclose her belief in either direction, so the reader also hesitates.

The text provides a rational and a nonrational explanation for the sand-writing. LuLing’s mental health provides the possible rational resolution of the ghost’s intrusion. As an adult, Ruth learns that LuLing suffers from Alzheimer’s, and that she may have exhibited symptoms for years: “Ruth had been too stunned to ask any questions at the time, but she now wondered what the doctor meant by ‘years ago.’ Twenty? Thirty? Forty? Maybe there was a reason her mother had been so difficult when Ruth was growing up, why she had talked about curses and ghosts and threats to kill herself” (107). Blaming the ghost and the curse on dementia supports modern Western systems of empirical reasoning. Part Two presents the other extreme on the possibility continuum: LuLing’s story, set in China, provides evidence from LuLing’s point of view and LuLing’s memory. Her story does not constitute a supernatural intrusion according to

¹⁵The narrator presents evidence that Ruth channels the spirit of her grandmother: “Yet Ruth had also gone through times when she believed that a ghost was guiding her arm, telling her what to say. Sometimes she wrote things that turned out to be true. . . .” (Tan *TBD* 127). The text also provides a rational explanation for the sand-writing: “Most of the time she thought the sand-writing was just a boring chore, that it was her duty to guess what her mother wanted to hear, then move quickly to end the session” (Tan *TBD* 127).

Todorov's definition, but it does contextualize Precious Auntie's role in Ruth's childhood, and it also presents a possible supernatural explanation about which the reader must wonder.

The Bonesetter's Daughter creates a universe split between two worlds (the United States and China), three time periods (the present, LuLing's past, and Precious Auntie's past), and three women (Ruth, her mother, and her grandmother); the frequent change from one narrator to another, and from China past to America present, unbalances the reader.¹⁶ The world of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is uncertain because it is three worlds—the United States, China, and the United States as Ruth understands it after she learns about her mother's life in China from the translated journal. The reader can choose between the rational explanation provided by the American doctor and the supernatural explanation provided by LuLing. Part Two unbalances the reader by changing the act of speech, the time period, the continent, the cultural and historical context, and changing the narrator twice. LuLing's childhood is set in China during the early twentieth century, a time characterized by civil war, anti-imperialist rebellion, and major cultural and economic changes like the decline of Confucian education and an increase in non-arranged marriages.

The geology of Part Two emphasizes this instability. LuLing's family, the Liu clan, lives on a moving precipice that ultimately swallows up the house. Past mining activities and ongoing erosion cause the cliff behind the Liu house to recede gradually

¹⁶The reader's confusion, not the character's confusion, is the source of the *fantastic*. The text unbalances the reader, sometimes by drawing the reader into the character's confusion, but not always. If the world within the text is uncertain, the reader is uncertain, regardless of the character's interpretation of textual events (Todorov 31).

into the ravine. LuLing explains that the village uses the ravine as a garbage dump and repository of all things frightening and unholy:

The moving cliff gave us the feeling we had to look behind us to know what lay ahead. We called it the End of the World. Sometimes the men of our family argued among themselves whether we still owned the land that had crashed down into the ravine. One uncle said, “What you own is the spit that travels from your own mouth to the bottom of that wasteland.” And his wife said, “Don’t talk about this anymore. You’re only inviting disaster.” For what lay beyond and below was too unlucky to say out loud: unwanted babies, suicide maidens, and beggar ghosts. Everyone knew this. (Tan, *TBD* 180)

The certainty in Tan’s description of the presence of ghosts in the End of the World would deny the *fantastic* if not for Part One. Part One grounds the reader in a mimetic version of reality before the explication of Part Two’s China, which tends toward magic realism.¹⁷ The combination of Part One’s contemporary secular skepticism and Part Two’s integration of magic and reality yields the hesitation and apprehension characteristic of the *fantastic*.

Apprehension is central to the *fantastic* because so much of the (fictional) world is unknown and unknowable. The character leads the reader to regard the world, objects, and other characters with apprehension or fear (Jackson 49). LuLing fears Precious Auntie’s curse, which is explained during Part Two. The curse is not the supernatural intrusion, but the text offers the curse as a possible explanation for the intrusion, the sand-writing. When LuLing relates Precious Auntie’s story, the reader already knows that Precious Auntie’s face is covered with scar tissue. The story leads up to an event the reader expects to be grisly and tragic, which contributes to the reader’s apprehension.

¹⁷Definitions of magic realism vary; for the purposes of this chapter it is most useful to distinguish it from the *fantastic*. Roland Walter does so in *Magical Realism in Contemporary Chicano Fiction* (1993): “The main difference between the two modes... is the way the narrator and the characters react to and perceive the magical standards. In magic realism they accept the real and the unreal circumstances on an integrated level” (19).

Chang, the abusive coffin-maker, and Hu Sen Liu, also called Baby Uncle, both seek to marry Precious Auntie when she still lives with her father, the bonesetter. Precious Auntie rejects Chang and accepts Baby Uncle, so Chang attacks and kills the bonesetter on the wedding party's way to the Liu clan's house. Hu Sen melodramatically fires a gun into the air, startling his horse, which kicks Hu Sen and kills him. No one in Hu Sen's family listens to Precious Auntie's account of the murder and the accident because they need Chang's wood for their ink-making business. Because the family fails to listen to her, Precious Auntie swallows the flaming black ink resin that permanently disfigures her face and prevents her speech. The curse begins here: the subject loses her voice because no one receives her words. Baby Uncle's ghost tells Great-Granny that if the Liu clan sent Precious Auntie (and his love child, conceived before their wedding day) out of the Liu house, he will haunt the family.

Then, Precious Auntie remains in the household as a nursemaid to her own daughter, LuLing. LuLing and the rest of the village believe that LuLing and GaoLing are both daughters of Hu Sen's oldest sister, when in fact they are cousins. When LuLing is fourteen years old, Precious Auntie dreams that her father's ancestor has cursed the family because her father took his ancestor's bones from the mountain to use as medicine. "Dragon bones," often used in traditional Chinese medicine, were sometimes the remains of human beings, much sought after by archaeologists. Precious Auntie returns all but one of her dragon bones, but then she hears that Chang sold some bones to archaeologists, and she infers that those were the bones Chang stole from her dowry on her wedding day. She thinks the curse will persist until all the bones are returned. A matchmaker arranges for LuLing to meet with the Chang family and possibly marry

Chang's fourth son, Fu Nan. Precious Auntie writes her story and gives the pages to LuLing so LuLing will not marry the Chang son, but LuLing stops reading it before she gets to the final pages that say Precious Auntie is her mother, so she tells Precious Auntie she will marry the Chang son anyway. Believing that LuLing has read the whole narrative, Precious Auntie assumes that LuLing has rejected her as a mother in the decision to marry Fun Nan. Precious Auntie sends a letter to the Chang family, threatening to haunt them if LuLing marries Chang's son, then Precious Auntie kills herself. Here the curse continues: LuLing does not receive Precious Auntie's words, so Precious Auntie loses her voice by suicide. The letter ruins the prospective engagement. When GaoLing's mother hears about the letter, she has Precious Auntie's body thrown into the End of the World. Then LuLing finishes reading Precious Auntie's story and discovers the secret of her origins. LuLing cannot find her mother's body at the End of the World. In dreams her mother says she will be cursed forever. The Liu family ink shop burns, and they blame it on Precious Auntie's ghost.

All the characters in Immortal Heart village, including LuLing, believe unquestioningly in the existence of ghosts. The text, however, leads the reader to hesitate as to the supernatural nature of the events. The role of Precious Auntie's ghost in the fire that destroyed the Liu ink shop is highly suspect according to its description in the text:

Father swung out his arm to chase her away and knocked over the oil lamp, which was not in his dream but on a table next to his cot. When Big Uncle heard the crash, he sat up and lit a match to see what had spilled onto the floor. Just then, Little Uncle said, Precious Auntie knocked the match out of his fingertips. Up burst a fountain of flames. Big Uncle shouted to Little Uncle to help him douse the fire. By Precious Auntie's trickery, Little Uncle said, he poured out a jar of *pai gar* wine instead of the pot of cold tea. The fire soon jumped higher. (246)

The belief in ghosts is so strong that it becomes part of causality's environment—when the subject believes in ghosts, any strange or unpleasant event can be interpreted as supernatural. A reader already accustomed to believing in ghosts may take this explanation as truth, but a more skeptical reader would likely believe that the Lius blame the fire on the ghost to excuse their clumsiness. These characters deeply believe in ghosts and the supernatural, even when faced with more rational possible explanations. The family goes to town to spend the rest of the family's money before they lose it in a lawsuit about the fire. LuLing and GaoLing encounter a beggar girl with no eyes, who says she has a message for LuLing from a ghost. The beggar girl tells LuLing that the ghost is “[s]omeone who was like a mother to you” (250). For a coin, the girl writes a poem with a chopstick in silt she pours on the ground. This is the first (chronologically) incident of sand-writing; LuLing will later show her daughter how to perform this same trick. GaoLing says the poem does not make sense. LuLing explains the poem, and her interpretation is colored by her guilt over Precious Auntie's death. GaoLing, skeptical, suggests that there might be other possible meanings to the vague words, but LuLing rejects these possibilities.

Driven from the household because of the curse, LuLing goes to an orphanage that introduces Western thought and ideology to Part Two. Christian missionaries and Chinese converts run the orphanage. The mission aspect of the orphanage is treated with cynicism; the orphan girls are directed to act in plays, in the style of silent movies, about how they should save other Chinese women from opium, bound feet, and charms: “In the end, they thanked God and bowed to the special guests, the foreign visitors to China, thanking them as well for helping so many girls overcome bad fate and move forward

with their New Destiny. In this way, we raised a lot of money, especially if we could make the guests cry” (264). LuLing falls in love with and marries Kai Jing, a geologist, the son of Teacher Pan from the orphanage school. Pan Kai Jing is as close as Part Two comes to a rationalist. At the very beginning of their courtship, he talks to LuLing about aesthetics (276-78). Just after they marry, he joins her in honoring Precious Auntie at the altar LuLing made, but he rejects the idea of the curse as superstitious, and he tells LuLing that Precious Auntie only believed in the curse because she never went to a university or learned about science. He says that there is no fate, no luck, and no way of heaven—he says that bad things happened to Precious Auntie for no reason (293-94). GaoLing joins LuLing at the orphanage because her husband, Fu Nan, the Chang son LuLing almost married, is an opium addict. Sister Yu, one of the converts helping to run the orphanage, bonds with GaoLing because both women were victimized by opium addicts. Yu rejects one of the major tenets of traditional Chinese society: ““Why must those who suffer also be quiet? Why accept fate? That’s why I agree with the Communists! We have to struggle to claim our worth. We can’t stay mired in the past, worshipping the dead”” (289). Then the Japanese invade, which corresponds to the historical Japanese invasion of 1937. Japanese officers shoot Kai Jing because he will not betray the location of Chinese Communist troops in the area. The adults in the mission gradually send the orphans to Peking to avoid Japanese aggression. GaoLing, LuLing, and two teachers from the orphanage open an ink shop in Peking. GaoLing goes to San Francisco with Miss Grutoff, an American from the orphanage, and LuLing goes to Hong Kong to wait for GaoLing to send for her. LuLing joins GaoLing after years of working in Hong Kong and avoiding GaoLing’s opium-addict husband. She has to sell

the dragon bone Precious Auntie left for her in order to pay for her passage to America. Despite the introduction of rational thought and rational explanations during LuLing's time at the orphanage, she still maintains her magic-realistic mindset, even after she goes to America.

LuLing blames all her misfortunes, from Precious Auntie's suicide to Kai Jing's execution, on the curse. The curse follows her to America, kills her second husband, and breaks her daughter's arm. A reader inclined to believe in curses, or a character from the same time and place as LuLing, might credit LuLing's bad luck to the fact that she never found Precious Auntie's body to give her a proper burial, and she never gathered all the dragon bones to return them to the Mouth of the Mountain. A more skeptical reader, or any reader grounded in the Western set of discourses and ideologies, would reject this mystical pan-determinism in favor of a more rational explanation. Such a reader would cite the evidence of LuLing's early-onset Alzheimer's disease (although dementia does not preclude the presence of ghosts), or any other readily-available psychological or cultural evidence, to relegate the ghost and the curse to the realm of irrational belief and superstition. Any reader could determine that the curse is directly related to bad relationships and bad communication—Chang originally commits his crime because Precious Auntie rejects him, then Precious Auntie mutilates herself because the Lius reject her words, then she kills herself because she thinks LuLing rejects her love (when really she rejects Precious Auntie's words), and Ruth breaks her arm because she rejects her mother's love and concern on the playground. The text supports all these explanations. Readers of either predisposition can hesitate between the two explanations,

the rational and the supernatural, as the story hovers between two worlds, the Western world and China.

The text never explicitly resolves the reader's hesitation in favor of a rational Western explanation or a supernatural Chinese explanation for the sand-writing. Part Three returns to present-day America. Ruth moves in with her mother to take care of her. An elderly Chinese linguist, Mr. Tang, translates LuLing's manuscript, from which Ruth learns the truth about her mother's life. The text offers more evidence to indicate that Precious Auntie may have interacted with her family from beyond the grave, but the text refuses any definitive explanation for the supernatural intrusion. At GaoLing's birthday party, GaoLing tells Ruth about LuLing's stock portfolio. GaoLing had invested the money LuLing inherited from her second husband's death. LuLing had periodically directed Ruth to ask Precious Auntie which stocks to buy and sell, and the messages in the sand were usually right:

Ruth now recalled the many times her mother had asked Precious Auntie for stock tips via the sand tray. It never occurred to her that the answers mattered that much, since her mother didn't have any real money to gamble with. She thought LuLing followed the stock market the way some people followed soap operas. And so when her mother presented her with a choice of stocks, Ruth chose whichever was the shortest to spell out. That was how she decided. Or had she? Had she also received nudges and notions from someone else? (381)

In this passage the rational explanation is phrased as an assertion, that Ruth did choose the shortest name when she, not the ghost, chose the stocks. The supernatural explanation is tentatively phrased as a question, suggesting the possibility that the ghost chose the stocks through Ruth. Neither explanation gains supremacy over the other. The reader's hesitation is not foreclosed.

Ruth and Art move LuLing into a comfortable assisted-living home as her dementia makes her more unpredictable, and Ruth moves back to Art's house (and at some point Ruth and Art are married). In the last chapter of the novel, on a date with Mr. Tang, Ruth, and Art at an Asian Art museum, LuLing finally remembers her mother's family name, *Gu*. Ruth thinks LuLing is mistaken, because *gu* means bone and Precious Auntie's father was a bone doctor, but then GaoLing's investigations indicate the family name is a different *Gu*, one with many potential meanings, including one that translates to the English word for character. Precious Auntie's first name is Liu Xin, which sounds like the Chinese for shooting star, *liu xing*, but actually translates to Remain True in English. In the epilogue, Ruth writes her story, Precious Auntie's story, and the story of the little girl who would become LuLing, her mother. The epilogue describes Ruth's writing process as a collaboration between Ruth and Precious Auntie, although the prose seems to treat this phenomenon as a metaphor, not a supernatural event. Either way, the text never explains the source of Ruth's sand-writing.

Structuralist Unity in The Bonesetter's Daughter

Since the structure of the *fantastic* causes hesitation and denies resolution, each aspect of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* supports this hesitation and open-endedness; the primacy of writing over speech, the blending of an unknown and a known point of view, and the dynamic progression of setting and characterization each contribute to creation and maintenance of *paraxis*. The utterance in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* fits Todorov's definition of structuralist unity because Tan's characters literally use written words to usher the supernatural into the text. The act of speech only fits Todorov's strict definition during Part Two, but the aberrant speech acts of Parts One and Three still support the

structure of the *fantastic*, while drawing attention to the differences between Western and Eastern concepts of mystery and the other. The composition of *The Bonesetter's Daughter* develops the supernatural intrusion in accordance with Todorov's definition; it builds through Part One, sustains hesitation through Part Two, then fails to resolve into an explanation in Part Three.

In *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, the *fantastic* utterance manifests is not uttered: the absence of the spoken word and the power of the written word introduce the source of the supernatural intrusion, provide the supernatural with an opportunity to intrude, and facilitate the sustained oxymoron only possible in *paraxis*. Precious Auntie never speaks out loud during LuLing's life. According to LuLing, "[Precious Auntie] had no voice, just gasps and wheezes, the snorts of a ragged wind . . . She wrote about the world on my carry-around chalkboard . . . Hand-talk, face-talk, and chalk-talk were the languages I grew up with, soundless and strong" (Tan, *TBD* 2). Precious Auntie cannot speak so she writes on a chalkboard in Mandarin, the world's oldest written language. Her words are written words, and her voice has no sound. This inability to speak out loud prevents the communication with LuLing that could avert Precious Auntie's suicide (241-43); likewise, LuLing's failure to read Precious Auntie's written words provides the obstacle to their communication that allows the rest of the novel, curse and sand-writing included, to unfold. Ruth breaks her arm because she ignores her mother's spoken words telling her not to go down the slide face-first, or possibly because of Precious Auntie's curse, and Ruth cannot write with her left hand on paper, so she writes on a tray of sand. LuLing treats Ruth like an oracle, and Ruth's answers are eerie enough to cause the reader to hesitate as to whether or not Precious Auntie communicates through her (84-

88). In the epilogue, the figural and literal aphasia is over: “Ruth still has her voice. Her ability to speak is not governed by curses or shooting stars or illness. She knows that for certain now” (401). In this utterance, the narrator rejects both explanations for Ruth’s former muteness: the supernatural explanation, the curse, and the rational explanation, illness. These words deny explanation and foreclosure, sustaining the reader’s hesitation past the end of the novel.

To sustain hesitation, the reader must be able to identify with the narrator, but must not believe the narrator completely. For this reason the first-person speech act is ideal for the *fantastic*. The narrator is intimate and believable, but because she is limited in her access to the world around her, the reader can doubt the narrator and hesitate to believe everything she says (Todorov 82-84). The fantastic genre is “generally defined and received aesthetically on the basis of Todorov’s seemingly strict or ‘pure’ definition” (Chen 239).¹⁸ Fanfan Chen concludes that, since some authors of the *fantastic* narrate through the third-person, this speech act can also serve the structure of the *fantastic*.¹⁹ In such stories the reader knows no more than the character, as with first-person narrations (240-42). This sort of mysterious third-person narration supports the hesitation and ambiguity characteristic of the *fantastic* structure. *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* employs both speech acts: the focused and mysterious third-person in Parts One and Three and the intimate, yet unreliable, first-person in Part Two.

¹⁸According to Chen, traditional Chinese fiction and myth, despite thematic similarities to the French *fantastic*, fail to meet Todorov’s strict definition, in part because they employ a third-person speech act. Likewise, some French authors, whom Todorov identifies as writers of the *fantastic*, occasionally use heterodiegetic, as opposed to homodiegetic, narration.

¹⁹As evidence, Chen cites Chinese stories that use a third-person speech act, but limit the scope of the narration to one character.

The Bonesetter's Daughter, like many of Tan's novels, has autobiographical attributes beyond her use of the narrative "I" in LuLing's story.²⁰ In an interview with Bel Mooney, Tan says that her mother "had an eclectic background of beliefs which I call 'ultimate pragmatism'. She went to a Catholic girls' school but also believed in Buddhism, ancestor worship, ghosts, curses, whatever worked" ("Mixing It" 28). The mother Tan describes in this interview bears a resemblance to LuLing—LuLing also accepts and rejects a variety of contradictory beliefs, which will be discussed later in this chapter with the novel's themes. The fact that LuLing resembles Tan's real-life mother is remarkable because it explains the care and intimacy with which Tan depicts this character. LuLing is three-dimensional, dynamic, and flawed but sympathetic. As a narrator, she draws the reader into the story and subjects the reader to all the uncertainty she experiences. The reader knows only what the author reveals about her life, which supports the reader's hesitation and the structural unity of the novel.

The composition of a novel in the *fantastic* genre should support the reader's hesitation by building gradually from an indirect or vague description of the supernatural intrusion to a more direct confrontation, but at no point can the composition of the story privilege one explanation, rational or supernatural, over the other.²¹ Ghosts enter the novel in the prologue, but LuLing fails to explain what she means by her former fear of

²⁰Contemporary women writers use an autobiographical voice for several reasons: it is more personal and more real, it denies male authority and authorship, it encourages solidarity between woman writer and women readers, and it demonstrates the illusion of a division between personal and political. Autobiography, with its focus on real life, and fantasy, with its rejection of the boundary between real and unreal, support each other despite apparent contradiction because both depend on first-person narration (Walker 20-22).

²¹According to Todorov the story builds gradually, from vague to direct, to describe the supernatural intrusion. For this reason the *fantastic* is only effective when read from beginning to end (86-89).

ghosts until she gets another turn as narrator in Part Two. Ghosts exist for Ruth in nightmares and in her mother's stories. In the second half of the third chapter, the story flashes back to the incident in Ruth's childhood when she first wrote for Precious Auntie in the sand. At the close of that scene, Ruth tells her mother that Precious Auntie is gone and the curse is over (Tan *TBD* 86-88). This scene introduces Precious Auntie as a character capable of interacting with her living relatives in America, but the full import of this development cannot be realized until LuLing tells Precious Auntie's story and explains her curse in Part Two. In Part Three, Ruth learns about LuLing's success in the stock market, forcing her and the reader to confront the possibility—not the certainty—that Precious Auntie influenced Ruth's sand-writing.

The composition arranges events so that the reader can watch the characters in their struggle to obtain a common goal, the quest for their name and the end of their curse. According to Kath Filmer, characters in fantasy literature work toward a goal that is either unattainable or disappointing, but the ending is often optimistic (9). *The Bonesetter's Daughter* follows three generations of women cursed by their own failure to communicate to the people they love. The characters work toward ending the curse, which Ruth realizes at the end of the novel without resolving the supernatural intrusion. LuLing first describes the curse during the initial supernatural intrusion, Ruth's sand-writing. Ruth does not consider the possibility of a ghost until LuLing mentions the curse (Tan *TBD* 87). Because the narrator characterizes LuLing as superstitious in Part One, the story of the curse and its origins seems more real in Part Two. When Precious Auntie returns the bones to the Mouth of the Mountain, LuLing suggests selling the bones to the recently-arrived archaeologists, but Precious Auntie protests. LuLing says, "Suddenly

Precious Auntie slapped the side of my head. *Stop this talk!* Her hands sliced the air.

You want to add to my curse? Never go back . . . She grabbed my shoulders and rattled

me until a promise fell out of my clacking mouth” (204). Precious Auntie dies before

she can return to their resting place the bones Chang stole, LuLing and GaoLing become even more entangled with the Changs, and LuLing leaves China without giving Precious

Auntie a proper burial, and she even sells the last dragon bone to pay for her passage.

Yet somehow LuLing sails to America, a rational place for her, believing that she can

leave the curse behind: “I sailed for America, a land without curses or ghosts” (338).

LuLing brought the curse and the ghost with her, and the curse remains until she forgets:

Ruth remembers how her mother used to talk of dying, by curse or her own hand. She never stopped feeling the urge, not until she began to lose her mind, the memory web that held her woes in place. And though her mother still remembers the past, she has begun to change it. She doesn’t recount the sad parts. She only recalls being loved very, very much. She remembers that to Bao Bomu she was the reason for life itself. (401)

Ruth accepts the curse without providing the reader with a supernatural or a rational

explanation. For Ruth, the curse is an obstacle to communication—not reading, not

hearing, not speaking, not writing, not remembering, and not having a name. She has to

accept the curse to accept the story of her mother and her grandmother: “They taught her

to worry. But she has also learned that these warnings were passed down, not simply to

scare her, but to force her to avoid their footsteps, to hope for something better. They

wanted her to get rid of the curses” (402). Hypothetically, if Ruth ended the curse by

going to China, replacing the dragon bones, and burying her grandmother’s body, the text

would then explicitly support a supernatural, Chinese explanation. If the curse ended

because Ruth chose not to believe in it, the text would support a rational, American

explanation. Instead, LuLing escapes the curse by forgetting, and Ruth ends the curse by

writing the story LuLing forgets. The development of the curse throughout the novel's composition supports the sustained hesitation and lack of explanation that characterize the structure and function of the *fantastic*.

Themes of Self and Other in The Bonesetter's Daughter

The curse relates directly to a failure of communication, and this failure to exchange information seriously impedes Ruth's formation of a healthy and complete sense of self; Ruth's hard-won identity formation is part of one of the novel's most poignant themes of the self—the coming-of-age story. Themes of the self are those that deal with the system of perception and consciousness that distinguish the individual from the other, focusing on selfhood, identity, and interpretation. Many contemporary Chinese-American novels, including *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, employ adolescent coming-of-age stories to focus on identity formation as a theme (Grice 37). The ghost of Precious Auntie and the use of the written word play an important role in Ruth's adolescent identity formation, according to a story narrated in flashback while Ruth is an adult. When Ruth is eleven, she mistakenly accuses her adult neighbor, Lance, of impregnating her. Then, when she learns the truth of how pregnancies occur, she hides from Lance until he confronts her, and she apologizes. Then Lance assaults Ruth. Ruth does not tell her mother because she thinks the shock might drive her mother to suicide, since her mother frequently threatens suicide for much less serious reasons. Ruth uses Precious Auntie, transmitted via the sand tray, to convince LuLing to move to San Francisco:

. . . Ruth took down the sand tray by herself. "Precious Auntie wants to tell you something," she told her mother.

“Ah?” LuLing said...Ruth smoothed the sand with the chopstick. She closed her eyes, opened them, and began.

You must move, Ruth wrote. *Now*.

“Move?” her mother cired. “Ai-ya! Where we should move?”

Ruth had not considered this. *Far away*, she finally decided.

“Where far?”

Ruth imagined a distance as big as an ocean. She pictured the bay, the bridge, the long bus rides she had taken with her mother that made her fall asleep. *San Francisco*, she wrote at last.

Her mother still looked worried. “What part? Where good?”

Ruth hesitated. She did not know San Francisco that well, except for Chinatown and a few other places, Golden Gate Park, the Fun House at Land’s End. And that was how it came to her, an inspiration that moved quickly into her hand: *Land’s End*. (148-49)

Ruth’s identity is closely tied to writing, during and after her adolescence. She gradually comes to enter the symbolic sphere of language and letters, although ultimately she uses a dead ancestor in whose ghost she hardly believes as a step-stool to leverage her way into the symbolic realm she had every right to enter all along. When Ruth is seven with a broken arm, her schoolmates pay her more attention than ever before because she writes in the sand-tray (84). She becomes her mother’s full-time translator by age ten because LuLing never masters the English language. As an adult, Ruth is a professional editor, a ghost-writer, a book doctor, writing for other people, in much the same way she writes for Precious Auntie on the tray of sand. Ruth listens to her client’s ideas then she writes what she thinks they mean (31). Her ability to shape reality through the written word begins in her childhood: “In an odd way, she now thought, her mother was the one who had taught her to become a book doctor. Ruth had to make life better by revising it” (50). Yet Ruth never learns to read and write Mandarin, an issue closer to themes of the other than themes of the self. Until Ruth writes her own story as part of the story of her grandmother and the girl who would become her mother, she never writes for herself. She uses language to repair and improve the external world, but she does not turn that

power inward until the end of the novel when she uses language to detour symbolically back to China: “Before, she never had a reason to write for herself, only for others. Now she has that reason” (401). In the epilogue Ruth feels communion with her mother and grandmother as she writes their three stories, which is now her story. She imagines her laptop as the sand tray. She uses the act of writing to reconcile herself with her intergenerational past. In this way the written word fuses with Ruth’s coming-of-age story to show how Ruth achieved selfhood.

The uncertainty of words and language is another theme of the self in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* because the multiple meanings of Mandarin words obscure Precious Auntie’s name; uncertainty is a common theme of the self in the *fantastic* because uncertainty is the most basic aspect of the structure, represented through the actions, words, and thoughts of the characters (Todorov 33). Use of the Mandarin language in *The Bonesetter’s Daughter* opens the possibility of an alternative way of perceiving and interpreting reality, and frustrates the characters’ (and the reader’s) attempts to find meaning. Tan uses Chinese words as a counterpoint to the English language; the Chinese words, with their multiple shades of meaning, expose a form of logic more subtle and complex than American, Western logic (Unali 235). When LuLing loses her memory she loses the curse, but she also loses Precious Auntie’s name. She knew the name all along, but Ruth interprets LuLing’s recollection as a mistake caused by the translation from Chinese:

Her mother hesitated only a moment before answering: “Family name Gu.” She was looking sternly at Ruth. “I tell you so many time, you don’t remember? Her father Dr. Gu. She Gu doctor daughter.” Ruth wanted to shout for joy, but the next instant she realized her mother had said the Chinese word for ‘bone.’ Dr. Gu, Dr. Bone, Bone doctor. (Tan *TBD* 394)

When GaoLing tells Ruth about the many possible meanings of *gu*, she expresses appreciation for the complexity and infinite variety of the Chinese language: “Ruth had once thought that Chinese was limited in its sounds and thus confusing. It seemed to her now that its multiple meanings made it very rich. *The blind bone doctor from the forge repaired the thigh of the old grain merchant*” (398-99). Chinese-Americans, in a space between cultures, have the ability to translate. If they cannot literally translate one language into another, they still code-switch between cultures depending on their immediate situation and context. Translation introduces ambiguity into the construction of meaning. Multiple definitions challenge hegemony by offering alternatives in the *paraxis*, the third space, the place between one culture or language and another (Lee 123). This third space is the location of the *fantastic*, so it seems appropriate for Tan, a hyphenate, to write stories of the *fantastic* populated by translators and hybrids.

Language—the difference between English and Mandarin and the problems caused by the juxtaposition of the two—also functions as a theme of the other. In *The Bonesetter’s Daughter*, themes of the other are expressed through the characters’ desire to unify self and other. Unlike the characters in *Love Medicine*, Tan’s characters seek to unify self with other through the process of communication, and according to some critics, assimilation. In “‘A Barrage of Ethnic Comparisons’: Occidental Stereotypes in Amy Tan’s Novels,” Tamara S. Wagner argues that Tan’s themes of cultural hybridity establish the American characters as the self and the Chinese characters as the other (Wagner 438). Ruth is as ignorant of Chinese culture as any other American and feels embarrassed by her mother because her mother has not assimilated (Wagner 440-41).²²

²²Contemporary (post-World War II) Chinese-American writers often emphasize the relationship between a mother and a daughter to explore cultural assimilation as a theme (Grice 6).

Certainly Ruth is assimilated into American culture, but Ruth's assimilation does not make LuLing the other. LuLing narrates Part Two of the novel; she is its only first-person, with as much claim to selfhood as Ruth. Contrary to Wagner's assessment, Ruth and LuLing take turns as the other for each other, until the epilogue, at which point Ruth, Bao Bomu, and the girl who would be LuLing form a cohesive self for the sake of the story Ruth writes. Up until this point, Wagner is correct in her assertion that Ruth treats LuLing like someone foreign. As a child, LuLing's mispronunciation of Ruth's name ("Lootie") embarrasses Ruth (Tan, *TBD* 50). On the playground the day Ruth breaks her arm, LuLing yells at Ruth her Chinese name, Luyi, and Ruth is so embarrassed she tells her playmates that LuLing is not her mother (77). Likewise, LuLing is embarrassed by the extent to which Ruth chooses the dominant American culture over her ancestral Chinese culture. During the first sand-writing incident, LuLing apologizes to Precious Auntie because Ruth only speaks English (87). But the epilogue shows how Ruth justifies her self with her mother and her unknown grandmother through the process of writing (401-03). Ghosts, ghost writing, and sand-writing circle the concept of creating the other through language. For example, the Mandarin word for ghost, "gui," has many meanings. It is the same as the English word for ghost, indicating the apparition of a deceased human being. It can also be used affectionately to describe a child, or as a derogatory word used to describe foreigners, especially whites: "Calling whites 'ghosts' becomes a process of Othering the non-Chinese people. The ghosts also symbolize the untranslatability within and between culture" (Lee 112). Precious Auntie's ghost only speaks Chinese while Ruth only speaks English, but LuLing expects seven-year-old Ruth to translate for Precious Auntie, just as Ruth translates for LuLing. During the first sand-

writing incident, Ruth is a ghost—a child, a foreigner, a hybrid, more American in manner and speech than Chinese. LuLing makes Ruth, a ghost, translate for Precious Auntie, a different sort of ghost, but LuLing is responsible for creating some meaning from Ruth's translation because Ruth is assimilated and does not speak Chinese.

Does assimilation prevent an immigrant's child from living out her mother's old-world curse? Can ghosts cross oceans? According to Todorov, literature of the *fantastic* often involves beings with more power than people (109), and the non-human entity in *The Bonesetter's Daughter* is the ghost of Precious Auntie. In his article on ghost stories by Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, Ken-Fang Lee claims that ghosts represent the nowhere space between Chinese and American cultures. Writing and translating bridge the gap between the cultures and exorcise the ghost (Lee 106). This gap is a gorge like the End of the World; it is a wound, a lapse, a hiatus, a *paraxis*, a third-space, and it is where meaning lies. *The Bonesetter's Daughter* never resolves the reader's hesitation by supporting or negating the ghost; rather, the story concludes and the curse lifts because Ruth writes Precious Auntie's story—this makes entry to the symbolic landscape the resolution, omitting any ontological claims about the afterlife. According to Ben Wang in his article on the *fantastic* in France and China, ghosts do not appear in the *fantastic* to make any claims about the afterlife. A ghost subverts the reader's assumptions about the difference between life and death (Wang 154). Ghosts also subvert Christianity, the novel's counterpoint to superstition, by presenting an unorthodox possibility of life after death. Death, in the novel, does not necessarily exclude Precious Auntie from interacting with the living, which many members of the Liu family seem to expect.

In this way the ghost is the equalizer. Haunted houses recur in ethnic fiction to right wrongs, bridge gaps, and subvert assumptions. The house, once haunted, represents the events that occurred inside, often associated with a stigmatized pregnancy (Grice 217-18). Precious Auntie's pre-wedlock conception almost results in homelessness, but Great-Granny Liu demands that the Lius take care of both mother and baby, to avoid the wrath of Hu Sen's vengeful ghost (Tan TBD 198). Moral and cultural imperatives allow Precious Auntie to linger at the Liu house. Morally, her suicide and the subsequent haunting blamed on her ghost punish the Lius for their cruel treatment of LuLing. The Liu family tries to marry LuLing to a Chang despite Precious Auntie's protest, so when the Liu ink shop burns down, the Lius blame it on Precious Auntie. Then, when the Lius are satisfied that the ghost is gone, GaoLing's mother ignores her duty to raise LuLing and sends her to live at the orphanage. Culturally, the Lius erred by dumping Precious Auntie's body down into the End of the World, rather than giving her a proper burial. A haunting in China is perhaps no longer typical, but certainly not beyond the realm of possibilities in a land of ancestor worship. Ruth's America, however, has a much lower tolerance for the return of the mysterious dead. Precious Auntie's presence in America would be subversive; it reminds the reader that the past can travel through time or across oceans, that the difference between life and death is illusion, and that narrative can bridge this gap.

Secularism and empiricism mock non-rational beliefs predicated on unobservable forces and mysterious beings. One of the *fantastic's* purposes is the reclamation of the spiritual impulse displaced by a skeptical secularism. So, why not just go back to church? Organized religion, especially Christianity in this country, provides socially-

and politically-sanctioned access to the spiritual and the unknown. In her dissertation, “Christianity in Contemporary Asian American Literature,” Di Gan Blackburn shows that LuLing incorporates Christianity into her belief system by ignoring its most basic ideological structure. She simply replaces Buddhist faces with Christian faces, baptizing Buddhist statues with paint (Blackburn 73). According to Blackburn, Tan’s characters abandon Christianity when their faith fails to prevent pain and suffering (77). LuLing’s concept of religion is largely pragmatic:

I believed that if I was respectful to both the Chinese gods and the Christian one, neither would harm me. I reasoned that Chinese people were polite and also practical about life. The Chinese gods understood that we were living in a Western household run by Americans. If the gods could speak, they, too, would insist that the Christian deities have the better position. (Tan *TBD* 274)

Curses, ghosts, Chinese gods, and other permutations of imaginary causality permit exceptions to the rules that govern reality. If there is no ghost, LuLing cannot ask her mother to forgive her. If there is no curse and no bad luck, LuLing’s many tragedies are either her fault, or they happened for no reason at all. Christianity denies all ghosts but one, so LuLing returns to a worldview that allows her to continue to interact with a mother she never honored in life. Ruth, however, is a translator, a medium, a hybrid, and a different sort of ghost. She need not seek out any world view to help her bridge the gap between the living and the dead, or the rational and the nonrational. She is the bridge, between thought and word, between Chinese culture and American culture, and between her mother and her grandmother, whether she believes it or not.

The in-between space Ruth occupies puts her in a position to seek meaning for herself and her mother because Ruth can knit both sides together through her ability to write. LuLing made a Chinese home for her American child in California; Ruth, having

grown up American, cannot resolve the presence of Precious Auntie's ghost. She accepts the ghost without any ontological claim as to its existence—she does not need to find the ghost and appease it or rationalize it out of existence because all she needs to do to lift the curse is write the story. According to Rosemary Jackson, the *modern fantastic*, which Todorov believed would replace the *fantastic* as he defined it for nineteenth-century texts, is predicated on a world without meaning. In the *modern fantastic* characters experience endless desire, and when the story concludes, they have gained nothing (Jackson 159-60). *The Bonesetter's Daughter* does not fit this description: during the course of the story, LuLing gains a mother, Ruth reclaims her voice, and Precious Auntie gets a name. Some of its mystery remains unresolved, particularly regarding LuLing's success in the stock market, but the mystery of the ghost is the book's enduring message of hope. According to Mr. Tang, ““So much of history is mystery. We don't know what is lost forever, what will surface again. All objects exist in a moment of time. And that fragment of time is preserved or lost or found in mysterious ways. Mystery is a wonderful part of life”” (Tan, *TBD* 396). LuLing solves one mystery—she finally retrieves the poetic secret of her mother's name, Remain True. The unsolved mystery also relies on words: what is the source of the words Ruth scratched into the sand? Were they her words, or her grandmother's words? The text never answers that question; instead, Ruth uses the words of her mother and her grandmother to revise and recreate their lives in a text—a text the reader might suspect she has been reading all along.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Puttermesser Papers and the *Marvelous*

Cynthia Ozick's *The Puttermesser Papers* (1997) manifests the *marvelous*, a subgenre of the *fantastic*, to subvert the shortcomings of a flawed world through re-creation and metafiction. *The Puttermesser Papers* is five separate short stories about one protagonist, juxtaposed to form a novel. This chapter will analyze *The Puttermesser Papers* within the structural framework used in the first two chapters of this thesis. First, this chapter will move through the novel chronologically, demonstrating which events in the novel fit the definition of the *marvelous* subgenre. The *marvelous* is defined by a mimetic reality, disrupted by a supernatural intrusion; the reader hesitates as to whether to accept a supernatural or a rational explanation for the supernatural intrusion until the text explicitly accepts the supernatural explanation. *The Puttermesser Papers* describes a universe like the reader's, but the narrator disrupts the verisimilitude early in the novel, which primes the reader for hesitation after the supernatural intrusion. The supernatural intrudes in the second section of the novel, "Puttermesser and Xanthippe," when the protagonist, Ruth Puttermesser, finds a strange creature in her bed. The narrator provides the rational explanation: Puttermesser believes the creature is a drug addict who has broken into the apartment. Then Puttermesser animates the creature, and the creature provides the supernatural explanation with pad and pen: the creature is a golem. The reader's hesitation can last only until the protagonist researches the history of the golem, at which point the text absolutely accepts the supernatural explanation.

The next two stories in the novel contain no supernatural intrusion, and, therefore, do not belong to the *marvelous*; but they do contribute to the novel's *marvelous* structure as a whole because they do not refer to the first story at all. Rather than doubt the golem or reaffirm the golem, the novel continues as if there is nothing special about a golem that warrants further comment. Also, the two more realistic stories, "Puttermesser Paired" and "Puttermesser and the Muscovite Cousin," reestablish verisimilitude. Then, when the final story mentions paradise, paradise violates the mimetic reality established by the preceding two stories, and the reader can hesitate briefly before the story's setting moves to heaven and the novel once again asserts the *marvelous*.

The next section of this chapter evaluates the three aspects of structuralist unity: the utterance, the act of speech, and the composition. Each aspect of structuralist unity in this novel supports a universe full of mystery and meaning. The utterance examined in this chapter is the written word. In *The Puttermesser Papers* the treatment of the written word—grammar, translation, letters, books, research—parallels the concept of *paraxis* and underscores the novel's theme of re-creation and reenactment. The act of speech in this novel is the third-person omniscient point of view,²³ but the omniscience is selective and primarily focused on the protagonist, which enables the reader to hesitate between rational and supernatural explanations. Also, the third-person narrator disrupts the speech act early in the novel to talk to the writer (biographer), which violates the suspension of disbelief briefly because it questions the source of the story. Although the speech act is not first-person, as Todorov prefers in his definition of the *fantastic*, it still permits the ambiguity necessary for the reader's hesitation. The novel's composition

²³Todorov prefers the first-person speech act for the *fantastic* genres because an identifiable, human, flawed narrator can deliver statements of questionable veracity, which allows the reader to hesitate as to whether or not the narrator is reliable (82-84).

supports the *marvelous* because the story arranges events in such a way that the reader can hesitate between supernatural and rational explanations in “Puttermesser and Xanthippe.” The rest of the novel’s composition establishes mimetic reality so that it can once again be violated in the final story.

While the text alternately subverts and establishes mimetic reality, Ruth remains the still center of the novel; this Ruth-centered humanism is a theme of the self in the novel, while the theme of the other criticizes narcissistic humanism by exploring the difference between human creation and human idolatry. Having established structuralist unity, the chapter will present and analyze the novel’s themes of the self and themes of the other. The theme of the self analyzed in this chapter is intrinsic human value. Does a person have value simply because she is created by God, or does she have value only if she acts in such a way that benefits humankind? Ozick believes in the intrinsic value of all people, but in “Puttermesser and Xanthippe,” the protagonist shows how a person can choose to have instrumental value. This humanist theme continues throughout the novel. As her creations and her world change, Ruth remains the center of the story. To emphasize her centrality in the novel, the final story ends with a song that plays on her name. The theme of the other analyzed in this chapter is creation and re-creation. The novel shows the protagonist repeatedly trying to make an other, and to make that other into her ideal other, but the creation is only as good as the creator. This theme of the other exposes Ozick’s preoccupation with idolatry. Only God can create perfection, so all human creations are bound to fall apart. The human imagination is nothing compared to the mind of God, and yet people must create anyway.

The Puttermessenger Papers *and the Definition of the Marvelous*

The Puttermessenger Papers demonstrates the definition of the *marvelous*. In the novel's first story, "Puttermesser: Her Work History, Her Ancestry, Her Afterlife," Ozick establishes a mimetic version of reality by describing the details of Puttermesser, the title character.²⁴ Puttermesser's characteristics appear in the following order: age thirty-four, a lawyer, a feminist, unmarried, a New Yorker, driven, and Jewish. As for Puttermesser's career, she quits her job at a discriminatory WASP law firm to work in the City Department of Receipts and Disbursements. Puttermesser's personal indulgences include, and seem limited to, eating candy and fantasizing about the afterlife: "In Eden insatiable Puttermesser will be nourished, if not gluttoned" (Ozick, *TPP* 14). Her heaven is limited to reading books and eating candy; in *Cynthia Ozick*, Joseph Lowin sees this as antisocial revival of Puttermesser's childhood (132). This early discussion of the afterlife foreshadows the final chapter, "Puttermesser in Paradise," although her fantasy Eden is not like the afterlife she experiences at the end of the novel.

In the scene with Uncle Zindel, the author starts to give Puttermesser an ancestry, but the text references itself, destroying the reader's suspension of disbelief. This is fiction, purporting to be fictionalized biography, and the reader doubts the text's correspondence to a mimetic version of reality. Puttermesser takes Hebrew lessons from her Uncle Zindel, then the narrator retracts the scene: "The scene with Uncle Zindel did not occur. It could not occur because, though Puttermesser dares to posit her ancestry, we may not. Puttermesser is not to be examined as an artifact but as an essence

²⁴According to L. Lamar Nisly in his book on mystery and fiction, both Flannery O'Connor and Cynthia Ozick "draw readers into a seemingly 'realistic' story only to shock them through a bizarre or supernatural occurrence. By disrupting usual expectations in their stories, Ozick and O'Connor push their readers to recognize that more is at work than can be rationally understood" (81).

Hey! Puttermesser's biographer! What will you do with her now?" (*TPP* 18-19). So, in this first section, the text introduces a mimetic reality, drawn with fine detail: the reader learns about Puttermesser's accent, the shape of her eyelids, and the crossword puzzles in her bathroom. The reader can trust the world of the text to behave in a manner similar to the world in which the reader lives; however, the text undermines itself when the narrator talks to the author in the Uncle Zindel scene: the narrator asserts authorial control implicitly, simply by narrating, and the narrator then denies any claim to truth by revealing an author, separate from the narrator and not entirely within the narrator's sphere of control.²⁵ The reader is on notice: the text will proceed according to the fantastic imaginings of the author, and the narrator can question the validity of the author's statements. Neither narrator nor author roots her statements in the reader's reality, and, without any ontological claim about the reality of the text, the reader cannot know which aspects of the story to believe.

"Puttermesser and Xanthippe" begins with another mimetic version of reality—Puttermesser's life is realistic because she has problems. Her romance declines; in "Puttermesser's Brief Love Life, Her Troubles, Her Titles," Puttermesser, now forty-six, alienates her married lover Morris Rappaport by reading Plato's *Thaetetus* in bed. Her mouth rots; Puttermesser suffers from gum disease and tooth decay caused by her chocolate habit. Her apartment disappoints her; sometime during the interim between the first and second stories of the novel, arsonists burn the apartment in which Puttermesser

²⁵Or, rather, the narrator asserts a nonrational concept of truth. "The scene with Uncle Zindel did not occur. How Puttermesser loved the voice of Zindel in the scene that did not occur!" (Ozick 18). Sanford Pinsker observes that these two statements are "logically incompatible" and likely to cause discomfort for the reader, as will the upcoming supernatural intrusion (92).

has always lived, so in this story, she lives in a new apartment.²⁶ Her job frustrates her; Puttermesser's new boss lacks the understanding and appreciation of Receipts and Disbursements necessary for the work. This subsection tentatively reclaims the text's connection with reality by describing the workings of a bureaucracy and foreshadows Puttermesser's mayoral adventure by establishing her administrative expertise: "The truth was that Puttermesser was now a fathomer; she had come to understand the recondite, dim, and secret journey of the City's money, the tunnels it rolled through, the transmutations, investments, multiplications, squeezings, fattenings and battenings it underwent" (Ozick, *TPP* 29). This sort of insect-eye view of city finance contrasts with Puttermesser's dream of the ideal New York to come:

In New York, Puttermesser retained an immigrant's dream of merit: justice, justice shalt thou pursue. Her heart beat for law, even for tax law: she saw the orderly nurturing of the democratic populace, public murals, subway windows bright as new dishes, parks with flowering borders, the bell-hung painted steeds of dizzying carousels. (*TPP* 30)

At this point in the story the narrator contrasts Puttermesser's dream of the city with the reality of the city; this contrast between dream and reality contributes to the mimetic quality of this part of the story. The text is no longer self-conscious; the narrator does not refer to herself, or the author, or the reader. The reader can again suspend disbelief because this part of this story does not penetrate fiction's fourth wall as the end of the first story does.

In the next subsection, "Puttermesser's Fall, and the History of the Genus Golem," the supernatural first intrudes into the novel. Puttermesser's boss fires her, then

²⁶Nisly focuses his critical language, in reference to Ozick's work, on Jewish history and symbolism: he calls Puttermesser's string of misfortunes, "losses of Jobean proportions" (98) and repeatedly uses Old Testament and Talmudic references for "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" (98-102).

gives her a job low in the ranks of the Taxation department.²⁷ Back at her apartment, Puttermessenger puts Rappaport's discarded copy of the Sunday *New York Times* in her bed.

Then the supernatural intrudes:

A naked girl lay in Puttermessenger's bed. She looked dead—she was all white, bloodless. It was as if she had just undergone an epileptic fit: her tongue hung out of her mouth. Her eyelids were rigidly ajar; they had no lashes, and the skin was so taut and thin that the eyeballs bulged through. . . . Puttermessenger moved to one side of the bed, then circled back around the foot to the other side. She put on her slippers; summoning reason, she continued to move around and around the bed. There was no doubt that a real body was in it. (*TPP* 37)

The narrator provides a rational explanation for the presence of the body in the bed: "The body seemed filmed with sand, or earth, or grit; some kind of light clay. Filth. A filthy junkie or prostitute; both. Sickness and filth" (*TPP* 38). Even Ruth doubts the marvelous at first. Puttermessenger considers a rational resolution for the body's intrusion into her apartment; should she call for help? Despite her logical predispositions, she sculpts the girl's nose, mouth, and forefinger, and blows into one of the girl's nostrils, as if the girl is made of clay. Puttermessenger notices that the dirt from her potted plants is missing and the pots are broken, which foreshadows the eventual *marvelous* resolution of this supernatural intrusion.

The creature herself provides the supernatural explanation for her intrusion into Puttermessenger's apartment: the creature is Puttermessenger's golem. Puttermessenger pulls a slip of paper from the girl's tongue, and on that paper she sees the Hebrew word for the name of God. Puttermessenger reads the word out loud, and the girl becomes animated.

²⁷The narrator alludes to Socrates when she describes Puttermessenger as an ill fit for taxation because her mind is so pregnant with ideas. Socrates described himself as a midwife to the ideas born from his soul. According to Kauvar, "The allusion is a telling one, for the offspring from Puttermessenger's soul are a golem and an ideal Civil Service. The reasons for their creation and destruction are the reader's revelation as well as Puttermessenger's" ("Ozick's Book" 146).

Puttermessenger gives the girl some clothes and demands that the girl leave the apartment.

Puttermessenger asks the girl, ““What’s the matter? Can’t you walk?”” (Ozick, *TPP* 41).

The girl takes a pen and notepad, and on the pad she writes: ““I have not yet been long up upon my fresh-made limbs. Soon my gait will come to me. Consider the newborn colt. I am like unto that. All tongues are mine, especially that of my mother. Only speech is forbidden me”” (Ozick, *TPP* 41). Puttermessenger wants the girl to leave so she demands that the girl put on the shoes, but the girl refuses, and in her explanation she introduces the supernatural explanation for her intrusion:

The thing wrote: “No shoes. This is a holy place. I did not enter. I was formed. Here you spoke the Name of the Giver of Life. You blew in my nostril and encouraged my soul. You circled my clay seven times. You enveloped me with your spirit. You pronounced the Name and brought me to myself. Therefore I call you mother.” (*TPP* 42)

Puttermessenger hesitates, so the reader hesitates.²⁸ She acknowledges circling the bed and blowing into the creature’s nostril and reading God’s Name out loud, but does not yet accept the veracity of the creature’s statement. Despite her disbelief, Puttermessenger legitimizes the creature’s claims by giving it a name.

Immediately after Puttermessenger names the creature, the text explicitly supports the supernatural explanation; when the supernatural intrudes into the story so much that Puttermessenger must name it, the story lapses into the *marvelous*. The creature requests a name, and Puttermessenger supplies the name Leah, which the creature accepts, but the creature demands to be called Xanthippe.²⁹ Despite her objection that Xanthippe,

²⁸Lawrence Friedman distinguishes the magic of Zindel from the mystery of the golem: “But Zindel’s unreality was blatant, the girl’s nature conjectural” (134). When the text explicitly supports the girl’s mystical nature, the story manifests the definition of the *marvelous*.

²⁹Puttermessenger denies giving birth to the golem, but the golem repeatedly calls Puttermessenger her mother. Puttermessenger, for her part, considers telling other people that Xanthippe is her adopted daughter. Also, Puttermessenger names Xanthippe Leah, the name she always wanted to give a real daughter. The

Socrates' wife, is a shrewish and therefore undesirable namesake, Puttermesser relents, and calls the thing Xanthippe. At this moment Puttermesser, and therefore the reader, accepts the supernatural explanation for Xanthippe's intrusion: "In some unknown hour after Rappaport's departure in the night, Puttermesser had shaped an apparition. . . . Xanthippe was a golem, and what had polymathic Puttermesser *not* read about the genus golem?" (TPP 43). Puttermesser does not remember making the golem but she believes she has; although Puttermesser does remember reading about the golem, she researches the golem again anyway.

Puttermesser orders Xanthippe to fetch books, and Puttermesser researches the golem. The narrator then provides a five-page summation of the history of golems. Historically, great rabbis created golems to eliminate crime and anti-Semitism in their cities. Puttermesser resists any superstitious or supernatural conclusions because she considers herself a "rationalist" (TPP 44), but after her research, she accepts the supernatural explanation for Xanthippe's intrusion into her life. According to Nisly, "Within the logic of the story, then, the existence of the golem appears to slip into Todorov's category of the marvelous: the fantastic event is explained as a supernatural happening" (101).³⁰ The reader must also accept the supernatural explanation because the text provides no alternative. The story continues, golem included. Because the text

mother-daughter motif recurs throughout Ozick's fiction (Lowin 135), and it will be discussed further with themes of the other toward the end of this chapter.

³⁰At this point the story lapses into what Todorov calls the *instrumental marvelous*, in which the supernatural explanation relies on the introduction of a technology, like a flying carpet, and the rest of the world reacts to the new technology in a realistic manner (Todorov 56). The golem can be considered technology because she is synthetic—made by human hand. If the reader accepts the golem, and reads Puttermesser's golem research on which her golem is predicated, all Xanthippe's outlandish accomplishments are justified.

explicitly supports a supernatural explanation for Xanthippe's intrusion, the rest of this story manifests the *marvelous*.

The following subsection, "The Golem Cooks, Cleans, and Shops," shows how Xanthippe rejects Puttermesser's desire to use the golem for domestic purposes. Left with instructions to straighten up the house, Xanthippe goes shopping. Puttermesser returns to the apartment to find new ugly furnishings. Puttermesser and Xanthippe argue about Xanthippe's future, and Xanthippe begs for her life and her utility. "'Do not erase, obliterate, or annihilate me. Mother, my mother. I will serve you. Use me in the wide world'" (*TPP* 54). Puttermesser offers no comfort. However, in the following subsection, "Xanthippe At Work," Xanthippe joins Puttermesser at the office. Puttermesser tells Xanthippe to stay out of the way and type, so all day Xanthippe types. The next day Puttermesser arrives late to work and learns from her co-worker, Cracow, that her superiors are displeased with her job performance. From a memo she learns that she has been fired.

In "Why the Golem Was Created; Puttermesser's Purpose," the golem enacts the purpose for which she was created—the renaissance of New York City, orchestrated by Puttermesser. When Puttermesser finds that the document Xanthippe typed at the office was a "*PLAN FOR THE RESUSCITATION, REFORMATION, REINVIGORATION & REDEMPTION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK*" (*TPP* 67), Puttermesser remembers creating the golem with the dirt from her potted plants. Puttermesser asks Xanthippe about the origin of the *PLAN*: "The golem wrote: 'Two urges seeded you. I am one, this is the other. A thought must claim an instrument. When you conceived your urge, simultaneously you conceived me'" (67). The last page of the *PLAN* contains the

conclusion that Puttermesser must be mayor of New York. Puttermesser resists. “Mayor Puttermesser,” enacts Puttermesser’s fantasy reinvigoration of New York City.³¹

Xanthippe campaigns for Puttermesser by personally charming citizens into signing petitions and voting for Puttermesser. The golem grows larger. The freckles on her forehead spell out *aleph*, *mem*, and *tav*, making the Hebrew word for truth. Once elected, Puttermesser uses the spoils system to install visionaries, idealists, and poets into positions of bureaucratic power. Puttermesser’s reforms awaken civic virtue in her fellow New Yorkers, as youth gangs clean and refurbish subways, people garden in their streets, criminals voluntarily seek other vocations, slum-dwellers renovate the slums, and parents send their children to the City Department of Day Play for day care while they go to work. Xanthippe spies on the city and reports its improvements to Puttermesser. Also, the golem grows so large that she must dress in togas made of two bed sheets.³²

Puttermesser invigorates the city while Xanthippe grows—she grows in size and in complexity as she develops sexuality, and her sexual awakening will eventually undo all of Puttermesser’s reforms.

“Rappaport’s Return” catalyzes the downfall. Morris Rappaport visits the mayoral mansion to rekindle his relationship with Puttermesser. After dinner, Puttermesser attends a meeting, and when she returns to the mansion, she finds

³¹Pinsker identifies Puttermesser’s mayoral victory as “fantasy of fantasies” (93). A female Jewish lawyer, recently fired from the Civil Service, presumably not a millionaire or a celebrity, is elected Mayor of New York: it is highly improbable, perhaps a form of what Todorov would call the *social uncanny* (131), but not supernatural, except that it was achieved by a golem.

³²Here Xanthippe’s costume calls attention to the secular/sacred dichotomy at work in *The Puttermesser Papers*. In this particular detail the opposition is between Greek (secular) and Judaic (sacred) myth. “Wearing a toga, or a ‘sari brilliant with woven flowers,’ Xanthippe the Jewish golem elides into a Greek sex goddess risen from earth; as such, she gives a new twist to Ozick’s old Hellenism/ Hebraism dichotomy” (Strandberg 118). The Hellenism/Hebraism dichotomy will be discussed later in this chapter with the discussion of the written word as *marvelous* utterance in the novel.

Xanthippe and Rappaport sleeping together. In “Xanthippe Lovesick,” Puttermesser tells Xanthippe to stop sleeping with Rappaport, but Xanthippe refuses. She starts wearing saris and perfume. Soon Rappaport leaves; Xanthippe writes, ““I wore him out”” (84). Xanthippe wants to have more affairs with more powerful men, and Puttermesser knows she should destroy the golem. Xanthippe goes to Florida, and when she returns, her prose has changed to a more telegraphic style. She claims to have visited Puttermesser’s political enemies from the previous administration. Then Puttermesser’s appointees, all men, get bizarre ailments and leave their offices, causing a general decline of civil service and civilian behavior: “The city’s peace is unraveling” (86). Xanthippe refuses to stay out of the city, and she stops communicating by pad and pen. The city comes apart in “The Golem Destroys Her Maker” because Xanthippe has sex with every powerful man in the city, and after she has sex with a man, he gets very sick. His bureaucracy or business falls apart, and the city suffers as a result. In “The Golem Snared,” picketers protest Puttermesser while Xanthippe rampages. Puttermesser brings Rappaport back to the mansion to lure Xanthippe, but he only agrees to serve as bait in exchange for an appointment to the Department of Receipts and Disbursements: “On the newly appointed Commissioner of Receipts and Disbursements the golem will spend her terrible ardor” (93). Only powerful men attract Xanthippe, so Puttermesser invests Rappaport with power.

In “The Golem Undone, and the Babbling of Rappaport,” Puttermesser waits out the remainder of her mayoral term in disgrace. The story flashes back to the night of Xanthippe’s demise, when Puttermesser has the Parks Commissioner remove a mound of dirt from a bedroom in the mansion. He buries the dirt in a park near City Hall and plants

geraniums on the mounds, at Puttermesser's request. The story backtracks again, to tell the story of Xanthippe's undoing. Rappaport waits as bait in Xanthippe's bed. After she ravishes Rappaport, she sleeps, so he wraps her in velvet from the bed's canopy and drags her to the floor. Then Puttermesser, with Rappaport as her acolyte, circles Xanthippe counterclockwise seven times, thinking of filth and hell, to counteract her creation act, which was performed with clockwise circling and thoughts of purity and Paradise. During the circling, Xanthippe wakes up and asks Puttermesser why she is walking around her.³³ Xanthippe begs for her life, but Puttermesser continues. After the circling, Xanthippe still lives, so Puttermesser directs Rappaport to cut the *aleph* off Xanthippe's forehead, turning the Hebrew word for *truth* into the Hebrew word for *dead*, and Xanthippe dies. In "Under the Flower Beds," the story concludes with the City in the same condition it was before Puttermesser made the golem. "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" manifests the definition of the *marvelous* to reinvigorate a corrupt city; Xanthippe, the *marvelous* intruder, destroys the city with sex—she cannot create life through sex, but she can destroy a city.

The next chapters, "Puttermesser Paired" and "Puttermesser and the Muscovite Cousin," contain no supernatural intrusion; however, the themes established in "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" continue through the other stories, and the mimetic interlude supports the structure of the *marvelous* by establishing another mimetic reality for "Puttermesser in Paradise" to violate at the end of the novel. Neither "Puttermesser

³³According to golem mythology some golems were mute and some were not. Mute golems were mute because of some flaw in their creator indicating a less-than-holy mind. Those golems that could speak praised their creators for the absence of sin in their minds and warned others against idol worship. Xanthippe gains speech only when Puttermesser goes to destroy her (Kauvar, "Ozick's Book" 154), indicating that Puttermesser's mind is sinful when she creates the golem, but she is holy when she destroys it.

Paired” nor “Puttermesser and the Muscovite Cousin” refers to the supernatural intrusion into “Puttermesser and Xanthippe.” The reader can doubt the existence of the golem, considering the narrator’s admission of the invention of Puttermesser’s Hebrew lessons with her uncle. However, no doubt is cast on the golem; rather, Puttermesser’s golem is ignored, and her mayoral term is mentioned only briefly. The middle chapters provide an entirely mimetic interlude between the supernatural intrusion of the golem in “Puttermesser and Xanthippe” and the supernatural intrusion of the afterlife in “Puttermesser and Paradise.” These rational chapters lull the reader back into a sense of reality: the events of these two chapters are weird, but not mystical, supernatural, otherworldly, folkloric, or otherwise predicated on any phenomena that subvert an empirical, rational worldview.

In “Puttermesser Paired,” Ruth reifies the romance of George Eliot and George Lewes; this story presents a very strange, although perfectly rational, attempt to re-create Puttermesser’s world through reading. Puttermesser is fifty-five years old. She contemplates her advancing age and her persistent solitude: “Puttermesser, despite everything, was not beyond idealism; she believed (admittedly the proposition wouldn’t stand up under rigorous questioning) she had a soul. She dreamed—why not dream?—of a wedding of like souls” (111). Puttermesser’s romantic idealism is irrational in that it is unscientific and unquantifiable, but looking for love is not a supernatural event. Unemployed, Puttermesser goes to the Metropolitan Museum to read the *Yale Selections from George Eliot’s Letters* on a bench near a sculpture of Socrates. A man she saw the day before is in the same room, painting a reproduction. Puttermesser and the young man, Rupert Rabeeno, talk about his work. He calls his paintings reenactments, not

copies or versions. Puttermesser's neighbor photographs Rupert's reenactments and transfers them onto postcards for sale. Rupert goes to Puttermesser's apartment for tea to begin this story's re-creation project: "This was the beginning of a project; they were going to do all of George Eliot's novels—out loud, taking turns" (129). Rupert also tells Puttermesser the story of his life. After they read George Eliot's fiction, they read about her life, George Lewes's death, and the story of George Eliot and Johnny Cross, Lewes's nephew, who was twenty years younger than Eliot. Rupert and Puttermesser, inspired by either the two Georges or George Eliot and Johnny Cross, decide to get married. After the witnesses leave Puttermesser's apartment, Rupert acts gloomy. He says he cannot stay. He runs for the window, but does not jump out like Johnny Cross did on his honeymoon with George Eliot. He gets his things and leaves (164).

In "Puttermesser and the Muscovite Cousin," Ruth arranges for her Russian cousin to escape Communist anti-Semitic fascism. Puttermesser, in her sixties, gets a phone call from Zhenya in the Soviet Union, her first cousin on her father's side.³⁴ Zhenya begs Puttermesser to get Zhenya's daughter, Lidia, to New York City. Lidia finds work cleaning a woman's apartment in Puttermesser's building, despite Puttermesser's advice that Lidia find a better, more stable job: "What she wanted was to clean house and get dollars" (Ozick, *TPP* 183). Lidia's employer invites Lidia and Puttermesser to a fundraising party thrown by a yuppie magazine ideologically focused on the freedom of expression. That day Lidia brings a young innocent man named Peter to the apartment. Peter allows Lidia to sell Russian folk art in the sports store he manages. Lidia, Peter, and Puttermesser attend the fundraiser. The keynote speaker

³⁴These Russian relatives are Puttermesser's first real connection with the past and the family she has, as yet, only fantasized about (Parrish 448).

rambles on all topics New Age and utopian before referring to the failed experiment of Soviet Communism, at which point he turns the floor to Lidia. She mocks him for his naïveté, denying any cleanliness or purity involved in Communism, so her embarrassed employer terminates Lidia's housecleaning job.

Lidia is a mystic, but nothing mystical happens during her stay. In a dream Puttermesser's apartment is a gulag and she cuts her foot on barbed wire. The phone awakens her; Lidia's boyfriend, Volodya, calls her from Sakhalin to tell her about an illegal business venture. Lidia interprets Puttermesser's dream to mean that Puttermesser will become a saint.³⁵ Lidia then tells Puttermesser that she intends to leave New York after she makes enough money to join Volodya in Sakhalin. Lidia returns to Moscow, and Peter mourns her departure over vodka in Puttermesser's apartment. The story concludes with three letters. The first is written to Puttermesser from the keynote speaker at the fundraiser, Schuyler Hartstein. He asks for some information in order to contact Lidia, with whom he is infatuated because of her passionate mockery and her red hair. The second letter is from Ruth to Mr. Hartstein, informing him of Lidia's departure and abandoned empty box of hair dye. The third letter is to Ruth from Zhenya, sent about six months after Lidia's departure; the letter describes Zhenya's relocation to Germany, Lidia's pregnancy and plans to marry Volodya, and Lidia's investment of all her American money into Volodya's illegal business. Zhenya scolds Ruth for bringing Lidia to a political meeting at which all the members had knives and guns—apparently Lidia's story of the yuppie magazine fundraiser differs from the story given in the narrative.

Lidia also fictionalizes Peter, telling Zhenya that the baby she carries is Peter's and that

³⁵Parrish proposes that Lidia's Saint Puttermesser "comments obliquely on the mythic status of the golem-maker" (448). Also, Puttermesser's saintly effort to rescue Lidia from the U.S.S.R. "represents the attempt to overcome the sad Diasporic fate of being a Jew cut off from her people" (Parrish 448).

Peter sells reproductions of Russian religious icons. “Puttermesser Paired” is strange, and “Puttermesser and the Muscovite Cousin” is interesting and entertaining, but neither contains a supernatural intrusion.

The supernatural does intrude into the novel in its last chapter, “Puttermesser in Paradise.” The chapter begins with Puttermesser’s reading in bed. The narrator warns the reader: “Puttermesser is about to be murdered and raped—in that order” (*TPP* 215). The burglar comes in through Puttermesser’s open bedroom window. He asks her for valuables. Puttermesser, almost seventy years old, has nothing more valuable than her father’s watch, which the burglar takes, and an obsolete computer, which the burglar refuses. The narrator reveals that Puttermesser has been using the computer to write “improbables” (217), like an excerpt about her almost-Yankee grandfather and her sister in Calcutta with her “four children and seven saris of various fabrics” (217). According to the narrator, “Not a single syllable of any of this was true. She had no sister, whether younger or older. There was nothing of New England in her veins. Her history was bare of near-Yankees” (217). The reader, therefore, hesitates; both these fragments in Puttermesser’s computer, which the narrator claims to be false, are reprinted in the first chapter, “Puttermesser: Her Work History, Her Ancestry, Her Afterlife.”³⁶ How much of this story is an invention? Of course, all of it is invented; it is fiction. But the reminder of its artifice, like with the narrator’s disclaimer of Uncle Zindel’s Hebrew lessons, unbalances the reader.

³⁶In the first story the narrator presents this statement about Puttermesser’s sister: “Puttermesser has a younger sister who was also highly motivated, but she had married an Indian, a Parsee chemist, and gone to live in Calcutta. Already the sister had four children and seven saris of various fabrics” (3). The narrator also presents the Yankee grandfather characterization later found in the computer: “From Castle Garden to blue New England mists, her father’s father, hat-and-neckwear peddler to Yankees! In Puttermesser’s veins Providence, Rhode Island beat richly” (8).

Therefore the reader hesitates whether or not to believe the narrator's upcoming assertions about Paradise. The narrator then cites Puttermessenger's idea of what heaven is like and argues that it, too is false.³⁷ The narrator readily forecloses the reader's hesitation by asserting authorial control: "Ah, false, false! Paradise, when Puttermessenger was transported there, bore no resemblance to this hungry imagining. Paradise, when Puttermessenger was transported there, was . . . but no. No and no. First it is necessary to get through the murder and the rape" (218). Puttermessenger can lie, about a sister and a grandfather and a Paradise, but the narrator states as matter-of-fact the true description of Paradise. The narrator also demands that the reader focus, for the time being, on the burglar. Puttermessenger directs him to the kitchen, claiming she has sterling silver, hoping she can escape from the bedroom in his absence. He ties her to the radiator. He returns from the kitchen with no silver and dumps out her wallet. Angered, he wiggles the knife at her. She vomits. He pushes *Joseph and His Brothers* down on her chest and cuts her throat. The narrator presents this horrifying scene to the reader, but assures the reader that Puttermessenger experiences none of the horror of the rape that follows the murder: "And since the rape was committed after the last living sigh had left her body, there was nothing to erase from Puttermessenger's posthumous cognition. For her, the rape never happened at all" (219-20). Death shelters Puttermessenger, but the narrator does not shelter the reader.

The narrator debunks misconceptions about heaven: there is no final look back at the body newly abandoned, there is no gate, there is no happiness (because there is no

³⁷While living, Puttermessenger creates a fiction of a heaven in which she reads and learns: "In Eden all insatiabiles are nourished: I will learn about the linkages of genes, about quarks, about primate sign language . . ." (218). The narrator of the first story initially presents the fiction Puttermessenger writes in the last story: "Her eyes in Paradise are unfatigued . . . the New Books section is peerless: she will learn about the linkages of genes, about quarks, about primate sign language . . ." (13).

sadness), and there is no learning.³⁸ The narrator explains that the consonants in “PARDES,” the Hebrew “Paradise,” is an acronym for understanding. P, for *P’shat*, is the most obvious meaning. R, for *Remez*, is the inferred meaning. D, for *Drosh*, is the interpretation or the theory. S, for *Sod*, is the secret. Puttermessenger, walking through Paradise, sees living people, and the narrator uses the presence of the living to evaluate Puttermessenger’s paradise in the PRDS framework: “And then (this was perhaps *remez*) Puttermessenger understood that all this was what in an earthly vocabulary would be called hallucination. Surely the living were not in Paradise” (222). The PRDS progression towards enlightenment continues when Puttermessenger arrives at a theory, *drosh*, that everything she left out of her mortal life could become part of her Paradise. Puttermessenger remembers Emil Hauchvogel, a twenty-two year old man who had rejected her when she was nineteen. In the memory, she meets him at a college retreat, although they attend different colleges. The subject of the retreat is: “Can There Be Morality Without God? . . . Puttermessenger knew what she thought. An ethical imperative without a divine order to implant and enforce it was unlikely, was no imperative at all” (224). According to Emil, art and religion were originally the same because people worshipped art objects. The God of Abraham, through the Second Commandment given to Moses, forbade the worship of objects, which freed art from God and gave art its powerful autonomy. Therefore, he argues, morality will not be fully realized until it is conceptually separate from God. Emil belittles Puttermessenger for her belief that God creates goodness in the individual, but he offers to take her on a date the next time he went to the City. On their

³⁸The type of the *marvelous* that occurs in Paradise is the *exotic marvelous*; the reader can accept the supernatural because the setting is exotic, remote, and unknown (Todorov 55-56). As far as the reader knows, Paradise is exactly like the narrator describes it, so the reader can accept anything the narrator says about what happens there.

date, he disapproves of her clothes, mocks her lack of music knowledge, and rejects her good-night kiss. She studies music theory without listening to any music, then writes him a letter about music in German because it is his native language. She is crushed by his rejection, and it hurts her again when she learns, years later, that Emil married a cellist and had musical daughters.

Heaven revises Puttermesser by granting her those aspects of life she denied herself while living, like Emil: “In Paradise she married him” (232). Emil talks with great philosophers and praises Puttermesser for her great thoughts. They have a baby, and Puttermesser is happy. Then Puttermesser discovers the *sod*, the secret meaning of Paradise. Timelessness does not equate permanence; according to the narrator, “A dream that flowers only to be undone will bring more misery than a dream that has never come true at all. The secret meaning of Paradise is that it too is hell” (234). Her husband and son fade and vanish. She sees others, reenacting the best possible outcome of their earthly failures, only to watch those successes slide back into failure again. The novel ends with Puttermesser’s song:

At the point of a knife
I lost my life.
Butter, butter, butter,
butter knife.

If I were alive I wouldn’t fault
Anything under the heavenly vault.
Better, better, better,
better life.

Better never to have loved than loved at all.
Better never to have risen than had a fall
Oh bitter, bitter, bitter
butter
knife. (235-36)

The afterlife intrudes into this chapter. The narrator allows some hesitation, brought to the forefront of the reader's mind by the untrue excerpts in Puttermessenger's computer, but the reality of heaven is a matter of fact within the world of the story. The narrator demands the foreclosure of belief and proceeds through heaven as if it were supernatural fact. The secret of Paradise, according to the narrator and to Puttermessenger's dirge, is that it really is worse to have loved and lost, and better never to have loved at all. The story ends with no postmodern lack of closure. Puttermessenger is dead, and she laments.

Structuralist Unity in The Puttermessenger Papers

The *marvelous* utterance, repeated throughout the novel, is the written word. Puttermessenger loves law and language—symbols, signs, books, letters, pages. Because Puttermessenger makes the golem after she holds the woeful *Times* written language presages Xanthippe's creation. Written language also animates Xanthippe when Puttermessenger reads aloud from a scrap of paper on which is written the Name of Names,³⁹ and Puttermessenger ends the golem's life by erasing the words written on the golem's forehead. Through the naming and the listing and the telling and re-telling, Ozick translates meaning from the secular to the sacred. She translates secular New York into the *gan eydn*, then it reverts. She translates mud into a girl (Epstein 50). She translates the tale of two Georges into a reenactment with Rupert. She watches Lidia translate emigration into capitalism and relates the story (translated from Lidia's Russian to Zhenya's German to Puttermessenger's English) of Lidia's time in America, for which Lidia translates calculated manipulation into victimization.

³⁹Puttermessenger had memorized Gershom Scholem's essay, "The Idea of the Golem" (Ozick *TPP* 48). Puttermessenger and Scholem share the assumption that letters and words have magical properties (Parrish 449). Ozick credits Scholem with a kaleidoscopic understanding of those issues of human imagination that Freud ignored (Ozick, *Art* 138-39).

The description of Puttermesser's brain, given to illuminate her study of Hebrew grammar, offers a perfect example of how the novel's utterance emphasizes written language as a possible third-space in which to house a contradiction. Her study of Hebrew is a transcendent experience, one in which she understands the infinite possibilities born from three letters:

The Hebrew verb: A stunning mechanism: three letters, whichever fated three, could command all possibility simply by a change in their pronunciation, or the addition of a wing-letter fore and aft. Every conceivable utterance blossomed from this trinity. It seemed to her not so much a language for expression as a code for the world's design, indissoluble, predetermined, translucent. The idea of the grammar of Hebrew turned Puttermesser' brain into a palace, a sort of Vatican; inside its corridors she walked from one resplendent triptych to another. (Ozick, *TPP* 5)

This passage emphasizes the simplicity and the complexity of written language. Her brain, where she experiences this paradoxical enlightenment, also embraces contradiction. Puttermesser's brain is the Vatican, where art is kept: Greek and Roman sculpture, the Sistine Chapel with its Hebrew prophets, pagan antiquities, Greek vases, and Michelangelo's frescoes. The Vatican, like Puttermesser's brain, contains both Hebraic and Hellenic, religious and secular, holy and pagan. Grammar, for Puttermesser, is the intersection of art and law (Kauvar, *Cynthia Ozick's* 128). The written language occupies the third space in which Puttermesser can embody the paradoxes of her Vatican mind through the process of translating English into Hebrew.

Puttermesser, devotee of the written word, does a lot of research in the novel. She uses the written word to contextualize and translate. The golem translates thought into form, and before Puttermesser can believe the translation, she refers again to the written

word.⁴⁰ She accepts the supernatural explanation for Xanthippe, but she has to read about the golem anyway. Xanthippe's first job, unless putting on clothes is a job, is her job as Puttermesser's research assistant; Puttermesser orders Xanthippe to bring books on the genus golem. After her research, she decides to accept the golem—not just the idea of the golem, but the idea that she had created a golem, and that she is not therefore a mystic or a fantasist. Puttermesser thinks, “If the Vilna Goan could contemplate the making of a golem . . . there was nothing irrational in it, and she would not be ashamed of what she herself had concocted” (Ozick, *TPP* 48-49).

The research resumes in “Puttermesser Paired.” Her entire relationship with Rupert is based on research. At first they read fiction together, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, then *The Mill on the Floss*. Then, having tacitly agreed to reenact the relationship of George Eliot and George Lewes, they embark on the biographies of the Georges, much like the Georges studied together during their relationship. “What Puttermesser and Rupert were studying was a pair of heroic boon companions. Boon companions! It was fellowship they were studying; it was nearness” (*TPP* 139). Then the research takes a very strange turn when Rupert decides that he will play the part of Johnny Cross in the reenactment. The rest of the happy part of Puttermesser and Rupert's relationship is like a graduate seminar. Rupert builds and presents his case that Johnny Cross was reenacting George Lewes, but his relationship with George Eliot went horribly awry and he had a nervous breakdown. For twelve pages Rupert presents his research on the courtship, marriage, and honeymoon of Johnny Cross and George Eliot. When the reading is done, Puttermesser and Rupert reenact the wedding and the honeymoon, then

⁴⁰Confronted with the golem's intrusion into her life, Puttermesser must “verify the golem's existence” (Parrish 447). Rather than referring to the golem for verification, Puttermesser consults her reference books.

he leaves her (although not through the window). They run out of material soon after the reading is done. Their entire relationship (and their entire story, “Puttermesser Paired”) exists only in the reading of another relationship and another story. It is an affair restricted to research.

Another author’s composition—Thomas Mann’s—ushers the supernatural intrusion into “Puttermesser in Paradise.” While Puttermesser reads the book and think about Paradise, and while the narrator tells the reader what “really” happens when people die, a burglar breaks in to kill Puttermesser. Then when the burglar attacks her, “It seemed to her important—she sensed this acutely—not to offend him by crying out, but her breath ran thin, it was anyhow not possible: he had placed the weight of *Joseph and His Brothers* on her breast, and was heaving downward with one powerful flattened palm” (Ozick, *TPP* 219). Then he cuts her throat and she enters Paradise.

In the beginning of “Puttermesser in Paradise” *Joseph and His Brothers* presses into her ribs. The ribs are a crucial part of the individual’s passage to heaven; according to “Puttermesser in Paradise”:

It happens that in the several seconds before we die the well of the ribs opens, and a crystal pebble is thrown in; then there is a distant tiny splash, no more than the chirp of a droplet. This seeming pebble is the earthly equivalent of what astrophysicists call a Black Hole. . . . Puttermesser heard (she did not feel) the pebble’s electric *ping!* As it pierced the veil of the sluice that lay at the bottom of the well—or, rather, as it flew through the impalpable membrane that marked the beginning of bottomlessness. And at the bottom of this bottomlessness—in Eden oxymorons are esteemed as orchids—there was PARDES. (213)

In this passage heaven is a place—inside the self, at the bottom of the ribcage—and it is an idea—“the beginning of bottomlessness” (213)—but it is best understood as a word: “PARDES is a Hebrew word, as befits so messianic a thought: it means orchard, it means

a garden, it means Paradise—derived, no doubt, in this intertwining of the vines of civilization, from the Greek PARADEISOS” (213). Here again Ozick shows the intersection of Hebraism and Hellenism, and she seems to give credit to the Greeks for this particular contribution although clearly the Hebrew form of the word contains the richest meaning. As a word it is best understood by its consonants, “PRDS;” *p’shat*, *remez*, *drosh*, and *sod*; the obvious meaning, the allusive meaning, the interpreted or theoretical meaning, and the secret meaning (221). Paradise only exists through a sustained oxymoron, as a third-space capable of embodying an absolute contradiction, and its meaning resides in the written word.

The second aspect of structuralist unity is the act of speech. *The Puttermessenger Papers* employs a third-person act of speech. The omniscient speech act diffuses narrative focus; the reader has no character to whom she can attribute the breach of the literary fourth wall, like the narrator’s admission that Uncle Zindel is a fabrication. The novel contains other statements the reader knows to be untrue, like Lidia’s story as presented in Zhenya’s letter and Puttermessenger’s story as written in her computer. Uncertainty persists throughout the novel because the narrator disrupts her own authorial control. According to Todorov, the *fantastic* genre has declined while the *marvelous* has persisted throughout literary history because texts written outside the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fail to treat hesitation and uncertainty as a theme (166). Clearly this novel manifests the *marvelous*, not the *fantastic*, and hesitation is a minor theme compared to the creation theme, but the act of speech in this novel does maintain the reader’s hesitation all the way through Paradise. This narrator is unwilling to admit that the entire story is fictive, which the reader knows, but the narrator will admit to lying

about Zindel. But who is the narrator? Or, if the narrator is in a position to correct the author, then who is the author? If the reader infers that the author is Ozick, the reader cannot suspend disbelief. The fourth wall is destroyed.

The text does not support this inference; instead, it supports the inference that Puttermesser is the liar—thousands of years of Jewish history, utterly separated from her, motivate Puttermesser to invent this link with Jewish suffering and Jewish tradition. She subverts this separation from her heritage by writing: “Puttermesser, who has no tangible link with the history of the Jews, has to go out of her way to find one. She must claim an ancestor even if she has to invent him out of the grain of his truth. So Puttermesser the lawyer becomes a writer of fiction. Zindel is merely the beginning. Of the rest she can have merely an inkling” (Lowin 131). Puttermesser does not write this novel, but her conceits leak into the novel. This fusion of Puttermesser’s life with Puttermesser’s fantasy is the biographer’s goal because it enables the reader to comprehend the essence of Puttermesser, part dream and part quotidian (Friedman 130-131). The novel lapses into the *marvelous* because it requires the reader to accept the natural and quantifiable along with the transcendent to comprehend this character, sometimes author, sometimes narrator, with no justification or explanation.

The third aspect of structuralist unity is the composition. *The Puttermesser Papers* is not composed as a traditional novel. It is unified by its protagonist and by its themes, but the stories are not interrelated; no event develops between or among stories. Puttermesser is constant, but her adventures, from story to story, are largely independent of one another. Despite the book’s lack of unity, each story comments on the meaning of the other stories. Specifically, “Puttermesser and Xanthippe” is the novel’s key. In it,

Puttermessenger creates a golem, the golem creates a paradise, the golem unmakes paradise, and Puttermessenger unmakes the golem. The golem is a model of creation by which all her subsequent creations can be understood (Parrish 447).

Puttermessenger makes the golem to repair the world, but at first she does not remember making the golem. Likewise, Ozick repairs the world of the text by retroactively attributing intent to Puttermessenger. Puttermessenger does not remember creating the golem; she simply knows it, and she does not know it until she encounters the PLAN (Ozick, *TPP* 65-67). When she circles the thing in her bed, she has no desire to create a supernatural intrusion, although she does create one. Her attitude toward creating the golem can be extended to characterize her attitude toward creating the “improbables” in her computer: “But, initially, there is no desire to create a supernatural being, no desire, in other words, to create a fictional text” (Lowin 140). The golem is the story: it is created to critique, correct, and remake a flawed reality. And at the end of the story, all reforms are undone, as if nothing ever happened. But the events of the story and the works of the golem have intrinsic value, apart from any lasting utility. According to Lowin, “What went on was the creation of a work of art whose magical qualities will, for good or ill, reverberate into an eternal future” (143).

The composition seems to support the idea that there is more idolatry than worship in the creation of a golem. According to Nisly, “Humans can never claim to have full knowledge of what God wants to have accomplished. Thus, while the golem does have a place in Jewish tradition and lore of showing the power of the Name, this creation by a human simultaneously contains a tension about the appropriateness of such an action” (102). The physical creation of the golem is appropriately mysterious. The

reader does not see Puttermesser build the golem while she does it; the reader sees the golem's construction in flashback. Why did the narrator keep it a secret until it was too late? Because the composition conceals the golem until she is about to receive life, the beginning of "Puttermesser and Xanthippe" gestures at the *fantastic*. Puttermesser thinks the creature is a junkie but describes something stranger, dirtier, more malleable. If she remembered making it, the reader could never hesitate about which explanation to attribute to the supernatural intrusion. The supernatural intrusion, in this hypothetical arrangement of the fabula, would be the making of the golem. Breathing life into the golem and animating it with the Name would be evidence to support a supernatural explanation. Hesitation, confusion, and shock would be diminished. The fabula supports the reader's hesitation by allowing the reader to hesitate along with Puttermesser, but more importantly, the fabula makes Xanthippe the locus of the supernatural intrusion. The golem pushes the story into an embrace of the nonrational—and if Xanthippe represents the story and its composition, her rise and fall show how mystery and paradox conclude as if nothing ever happened, but the fact of their existence reverberates into the wider world and down through history, possibly marked with a warning sign, like the geraniums on Xanthippe's grave: "The extraordinary existence of the golem, sparked by the power of the name, has an ongoing mysterious effect on the reader, pushing him or her toward the nonrational. Through the physical elements of dirt imbued with supernatural wonder, the story evokes a sense of the numinous, a feeling of awe and wonder" (Nisly 102). This feeling of awe comes from recognition of the power of creation; the human subject experiences awe because any human creation, even the

unorthodox creation of life, is really only a re-creation, a re-assembly of those elements mysteriously given by the Creator.

Themes of Self and Other in The Pattermessenger Papers

Although the events of the novel fail to unite the composition because no story refers back to any of the events in the previous story besides the fragments of story in Pattermessenger's computer before she dies, the novel's themes play through every story to create a united whole. The theme of the self analyzed here is the ongoing theme of the intrinsic, or instrumental, value of the individual. Ozick cites the Torah as the source of her feminism, which is a sort of divine humanism. In Judaism, and in Ozick's fiction, human beings have intrinsic value, given to them by God their creator. Ozick's feminism simply states that women have value beyond the instrumental. Women and their bodies are more important than their baby-making faculty; women, like men, are valuable because they were made by God. Joseph Lowin, in his book on Ozick, identifies a paradox of human value: a person with intrinsic value can choose an instrumental purpose, one that serves the rest of humankind. He asserts, "Indeed, as Ozick's oeuvre illustrates, a person may choose to be an instrument for the repair of the world" (Lowin 123). Pattermessenger, as a human, of course has intrinsic value; but she chooses to have instrumental value when she pursues, albeit at first unintentionally, the creation of a life that should implement a worldly utopia for the benefit of all New Yorkers. The creative force behind utopia-making is a golem, a life Pattermessenger makes, although not in the conventional way. Pattermessenger circumnavigates biology to make her golem. Golem-creation, according to the historically accumulated myths, was previously only done by men. It was the only way a man could make a life; a woman's ability to bear children

supports the concept of the instrumental value of women. Puttermessenger revises the inherited masculine golem-making tradition, which parallels Ozick's revision of an inherited masculine story-making tradition (Parrish 451). Puttermessenger's value is therefore intrinsic and instrumental, although she chooses to implement her instrumental purpose in a non-traditional (non-rational, unorthodox) manner. Like writing fiction, Puttermessenger's inspiration behind the golem is her desire to make her own universe; she wants to turn New York into heaven. Puttermessenger's most enduring characteristic is her pursuit of Paradise on earth. In the two adventures that contain a supernatural intrusion, Puttermessenger's entire universe is transformed into a paradise.

Puttermessenger as an essence remains the same while the paradise she creates changes. Her first paradise is her internal fantasy world, the world with Uncle Zindel and a heaven with trees and chocolate and library books. The first paradise she creates in her tangible world is the PLAN's New York, brought forth by the golem. She incorporates her beloved books into her paradise city by choosing, as her bureaucratic dream-team, all the great writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. She only appoints visionaries where previous mayors appointed cronies. But the PLAN fails when Xanthippe runs amok with Puttermessenger's visionaries; the city returns to its former dilapidation (Daemmrich 224). In "Puttermessenger Paired," Puttermessenger's idol is literature. She seeks to transform her life into her fantasy of George Eliot's life, and succeeds, for a brief time, in turning her apartment into George Eliot's parlor (Parrish 457). In "Puttermessenger and the Muscovite Cousin" Puttermessenger engineers a paradise aimed at connecting with her heritage. This took the form of fantasy when Puttermessenger loves her Uncle Zindel's voice in the scene that never happened; she tries to make

something similar happen in her real life by facilitating the importation of Lidia. But Lidia is not a golem. She resists Puttermesser's attempts to Americanize her and refuses to be the conduit for Puttermesser's link with Soviet Jewry (Parrish 448). Lidia only came for the dollars. The same Puttermesser, only many years older, actually gets to see Paradise after her horrifying murder and rape. This Paradise is not presented as one of Puttermesser's inventions, but it is located inside of her—specifically, at the bottom of her abdomen. Although she did not create it, she can control it. She engages in activities she wishes she had done while living—marry, have a child, hobnob with philosophers and writers. Her paradise comes apart, just like the paradises she tries to create in the book's other stories. The novel's last words are a play on her name, emphasizing her static quality in a universe of evolving paradises (Daemmrich 224).

The novel's theme of the other is creation. The self transforms the not-self through the creative faculty. Early in the novel, Puttermesser's colleague provides a perfect summary of the human creative faculty:

. . . Leon Cracow, a bachelor from Forest Hills who wore bow ties and saddle shoes, was engaged in a tedious litigation: he had once read a novel and fancied himself its hero. The protagonist wore bow ties and saddle shoes. Cracow was suing for defamation. "My whole love life's maligned in there," he complained to Puttermesser. . . . The novel was called *Pyke's Pique*; a tax auditor named John McCracken Pyke was its chief character. . . . Sometimes Cracow asked Puttermesser for her opinion of his lawyer's last move. Puttermesser urged him on. She believed in the uses of fantasy. "A person should see himself or herself everywhere," she said. "All things manifest us." (TPP 35-36)

When Puttermesser leaves after being fired, she says, "'So long, Leon. May you win your case against the mediocre universality of the human imagination'" (62).⁴¹

⁴¹In the early 1980s, the *New Yorker* rejected *Puttermesser and Xanthippe* to settle a lawsuit. A headmaster at a day school threatened to sue because he believed he was written into one of Ozick's stories (Lowin 9).

Here is the theme of the other that underscores the creation theme throughout the novel: a mediocre creator produces a mediocre (or wicked, or dangerous, or tragic) creation. An object is only as good as its maker. According to Elaine Kauvar, the Paradise Puttermessenger creates in “Puttermessenger: Her Work History, Her Ancestry, Her Afterlife” is boring and childlike compared to the Paradise she encounters after her death. The *PLAN* she instilled in Xanthippe is limited to the Civil Service, the confines of Puttermessenger’s own career. Because Puttermessenger is human, flawed, and limited, so is her *PLAN*. So is her golem (“Ozick’s Book” 150). Regarded in this manner, Rupert’s artistic reenactments of the masters are perfectly legitimate artistic gestures. If a painting is only as good as the painter, and Rupert paints the paintings of the best painters, the quality of Rupert’s paintings is magnified by the painter he reenacts. Rupert’s painting is midrash—it is enriched by, as it enriches, the original.

Puttermessenger’s creative urge does not replace her procreative urge. The procreative urge expresses itself through fantasies of daughters. The fantasy daughters (who are fictitious within the fictional world of the novel) represent the desire to generate, not necessarily children, but fiction. Puttermessenger does indeed make fiction, as revealed in her computer during her death scene. The daughters also represent another sort of wish fulfillment—the desire to relive a lost childhood. Puttermessenger does not dream of nurturing her daughters; instead, she creates (fictional) daughters to repeat the high points of her life: “Sometimes the thought that she would never give birth tore her heart. She imagined daughters. It was self-love: all these daughters were Puttermessenger as a child. She imagined a daughter in fourth grade, then in seventh grade, then in second-year high school” (Ozick, *TPP* 36).

Xanthippe, although she calls Puttermesser her mother, is not Puttermesser's daughter. But Puttermesser created Xanthippe, and mothers create daughters. When the creature asks for a name, "A new turbulence fell over Puttermesser. She had always imagined a daughter named Leah. 'Leah,' she said" (Ozick, *TPP* 42). Xanthippe accepts Leah, but demands to be called Xanthippe. Leah, in Hebrew, means "wild cow," and the Kabbala's Rite of Leah regenerates light when all light is gone. The golem is wild where Puttermesser is reserved, and the golem illuminates those aspects of Puttermesser most easily ignored and relegated to the realms of fantasy, like the angry letters to bureaucrats she drafts internally but never writes. The golem, although made to serve Puttermesser, argues and gainsays more often than she obeys; Xanthippe was the only person who could contradict Socrates. Puttermesser and Xanthippe are "different aspects of the same self" (Kauvar, "Ozick's Book" 150). Xanthippe claims that she is Puttermesser's amanuensis, which establishes the golem as a double, not a daughter. She is Puttermesser's double, made in the image of Puttermesser's thoughts and Puttermesser's research (Lowin 136) not Puttermesser's genes. So Puttermesser creates a double, and her double is a golem.⁴² But to what extent does the individual make the double (the daughter, the golem, the fiction, the universe, the not-I) and to what extent does the double make the individual? According to the text, "Puttermesser made Xanthippe; Xanthippe did not exist before Puttermesser made her; that is clear enough. But Xanthippe made Puttermesser Mayor, and Mayor Puttermesser too did not exist before. And that is just as clear. Puttermesser sees that she is the golem's golem" (*TPP* 78-79).

⁴²Todorov identifies the double as a recurring theme of the other in the nineteenth century *fantastic* and related subgenres: "The multiplication of personality, taken literally, is an immediate consequence of the possible transition between matter and mind: we are several persons mentally, we become so physically" (116). Xanthippe, as Puttermesser's double, has all the characteristics Puttermesser suppressed.

Here the text warns that creations can re-create the creator; even worse, sometimes creations try to re-create themselves.

And the golem also wants to procreate, but cannot. Puttermesser bypasses the natural order of childbearing to create a double from dirt, in a generative act more like God and Adam than a mother and a daughter. The golem was made in Puttermesser's thoughts' image, and because Puttermesser desires an other, so will Xanthippe. The narrator exclaims, "The rampaging energies of Xanthippe's eruptions, the furious bolts and convulsion of her visitations—Xanthippe, like Puttermesser herself, longs for daughters! Daughters that can never be! Shall the one be condemned by the other, who is no different?" (88). As Puttermesser's double, Xanthippe erupts with all the passions Puttermesser suppresses. Puttermesser wants daughters, but not enough to try, in the traditional manner, to have them. Xanthippe can never have daughters, but insists on the furiously empty gesture of sex.

This theme of the other, as a creation of the self, continues in "Puttermesser Paired" with Rupert's reenactments. Rupert reenacts paintings of the masters, but he also reenacts his entire life by telling his story, in explicit detail, to Puttermesser:

Whatever had happened once he meant to make happen again. Reprise invigorated him. And Puttermesser was the same. It came to her in a rush of deliverance as wild as cognition, wilder than consternation—she was the same, the very same, no different! Whatever had happened once, she conspired, through a density of purposefulness, to redraw, redo, replay; to translate into the language of her own respiration. A resurrection of sorts. Wasn't her dream of having George Lewes again—a simulacrum of George Lewes—exactly the same as Rupert Rabeeno's wanting to make things happen again? Wasn't she, all on her own, a mistress of reenactment? (132).

The entire story is a series of reenactments, reenacted. George Lewes and George Eliot reenact, through study, their literary forerunners. Ruth and Rupert reenact Lewes and

Eliot through studying the literature and the life of George Eliot, then Rupert leads the reenactment of Johnny Cross reenacting Lewes for Eliot. Johnny Cross reenacts George Eliot's life by writing her biography after she dies. Then Ruth and Rupert reenact the ruin of Eliot and Cross, and their relationship is ruined also. Rupert himself is a reenactment of Xanthippe. Puttermesser obliquely suggests to Rupert that they should reenact the Georges, and Rupert responds enthusiastically: "She saw how, once she had yielded up her little burning, he could make it better, he could complicate it, he could shake the ash of theory from it and fire it into life" (133). Like Xanthippe, Rupert becomes Puttermesser's amanuensis. But once he controls the reenactment, he unmakes the entire affair. All these reenactments are only similar; none actually recreates an original. Even Rupert's paintings are reenactments shrunken down to postcard size. This shows how human creations are never as wonderful as the original, which was created by the God of Abraham and Moses. If people are creations, then anything they create is really only a re-creation. This justifies creation and answers the question of idolatry. Even the most devout believer can create because the creation is only a gesture of the original which God created. Also, the creation, no matter how wonderful, will eventually come apart as if it never existed.

Ozick's preoccupation in this novel is translation; specifically, she seeks to translate the secular into the sacred. This is her dichotomy: holy versus unholy, Hebraic versus Hellenic, Divine creation versus Human creation, law versus art. The Jewishness of the novel is Ozick's insistence that the reader take some meaning from the story—not any meaning, but the Right meaning, Ozick's meaning. This is not a novel suited to relativistic interpretation. Instead, this novel insists on an absolute and mysterious Truth,

imposed by an omnipotent and mysterious God. The novel shows that it is our lot as people to make golems, reenact masters, and write fiction. Our creations will fall to ruin as if they never existed, and we will mourn them, because we must. Humans build and destroy, then rebuild, then repeat. It is Ozick's duty to create this golem, to translate mud into life, and to translate a secular city into a Paradise on earth; and it is the golem's destiny to undo it all. This is where Ozick's *marvelous* lives, in unknowable certainty, in the *paraxis* between worldly and otherworldly, in translation.

CHAPTER FIVE

The *Fantastic* Is Subversive Language

Translation functions like *paraxis* in *Love Medicine*, *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, and *The Puttermessaer Papers*; it bridges the gap between the real and the not-real, and even when it denies resolution it creates an opportunity for the subject to be both halves of her disparate self as with Marie when she leaves the convent and Ruth Young as she writes the three stories, or it enables her to simultaneously experience presence and absence like Ruth Puttermessaer in heaven and LuLing with her mother's ghost.

Translation has two tropes in these novels—translation occurs between languages and it occurs between opposite ends of the discourse. Multiple languages permit multiple meanings, and the multiplicity of meaning supports the ambiguity characteristic of the fantastic, but more importantly, the multiplicity of meaning creates additional opportunities for the subject's participation in the discourse.

The Bonesetter's Daughter is the most preoccupied with successful translation in the first trope—from one language to another—but the failure to translate in *Love Medicine* and *The Puttermessaer Papers* signifies the subject's far remove from one of the poles of the discourse. In *Love Medicine*, no one ever bridges the gap between the languages; the novel recognizes the presence of multiple languages on the reservation, but no one ever translates the new words into the old language for the benefit of the new generation:

“Can you gimme a cigarette, Eli?” King asked.
“When you ask for a cigarette around here,” said Gordie, “you don’t say can I have a cigarette. You say ciga swa?”

“Them Michifs ask like that,” Eli said. “You got to ask a real old-time Indian like me for the right words.”

“Tell ‘em, Uncle Eli,” Lynette said with a quick burst of drunken enthusiasm. “They’ve got to learn their own heritage! When you go it will all be gone!” (32).

Before Eli can tell them, King interrupts with a verbal outburst and an angry shove for Lynette—drunkenness, violence, and intense emotion prevent Eli from passing the old language down to the next generation. Eli’s generation is the last to use the old language; Gordie’s generation has some words unknown to the English-speaking world, but those words have no correspondence to the old words of the previous generation; and King’s generation only has English. *The Puttermesser Papers* also mourns the loss of a language—Hebrew—to the point that the narrator grants Puttermesser the opportunity to learn this old language from an aging relative, then denies the opportunity and repudiates Uncle Zindel. Both these novels show an absence of translation; in *Love Medicine*, the older generation is available, but the younger generation seems unwilling to learn the old language or translate for their young children. In *The Puttermesser Papers*, the older generation is painfully absent—“How Puttermesser loved the voice of Zindel in the scene that did not occur!” (18)—and, lacking the daughters she dreams about, Puttermesser has no younger generation to which to pass the knowledge from the Hebrew lessons that do not occur.

LuLu becomes a consciousness-raising Native-pride activist after Nector dies, and LuLu’s son Lyman scoffs at her efforts to resurrect the spirit (but not the letter) of the old language: “This was the way her AIM bunch talked, as though they were translating their ideas from the original earth-based language. Of course, I knew very well they grew up speaking English. It drove me nuts” (Erdrich 307). This effort at cultural renewal and

increased awareness seems like a hopeful development in the translation process, but within the scope of the novel, LuLu's effort comes to nothing. The old language fails to correspond with the new language, but the failure to translate in the first trope does not lead to a failure to correspond in the second trope. Marie, as previously discussed in the chapter on *Love Medicine*, translates Catholic imagery into the Ojibwe vision quest that gives her the power to nurture the orphans of the whole reservation; at this level Marie translates foreign symbols into native symbols to form a set of images that allow her to transcend the Cruel Nun/Dirty Indian discourse.

At translation's first trope, *The Bonesetter's Daughter* shows the translation between Chinese and English; but at the second trope, this novel translates death into life and subject into object, which transcends the Superstitious Chinese/ Alienated American discourse for Ruth and allows LuLing to escape the guilty curse caused by Precious Auntie's initial failure to communicate. In *Love Medicine* translation in the second trope is more about relationships and less about words, but in *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, translation in the second trope also depends entirely on language. Translation in the second trope reaches its peak in the epilogue as Ruth and her absent grandmother reconstruct the past through Ruth's narrative:

Words flow. They have become the same person, six years old, sixteen, forty-six, eighty-two. They can write about what happened, why it happened, how they can make other things happen. They write stories of things that are but should not have been. They write about what could have been, what still might be. They write of a past that can be changed. And after all, Bao Bomu says, what is the past but what we choose to remember? (TBD 403).

Ruth Young's writing bridges the gap between life and death, American and China, past and present, and mother and daughter. In the alternate world she creates, she can make

and unmake the curse. The writing itself is what lifts the curse, because the writing undoes the lack of communication that lead to Bao Bomu's self-inflicted silence, LuLing's failure to read Bao Bomu's story, Bao Bomu's suicide, and the perpetuation of a cycle of aphasia, ignorance, secrets, and absence that distance Ruth from LuLing throughout Ruth's childhood. Ruth bridges a three-generation gap with words, and these words have the power to lift the curse. Ruth's words bring her grandmother into her mother's kitchen and, as an adult, Ruth's words bring her grandmother and her mother into the world. Words and wordlessness conjure a ghost then set it free—these words subvert rational reality through *paraxis*, a place in each of these novels where the past is not necessarily past, and death is not at all a finite end.

What is the unsatisfactory state of affairs subverted by the fantastic in these novels? In each novel, it is a failure to bridge a gap. Puttermesser cannot communicate her fantasy New York to the reality of New York without the golem, and she cannot live the life she wants until she dies and goes to heaven; the entire novel is a chronicle of replay and recreation that never truly corresponds to the life she creates in her mind. In *Love Medicine* Gordie cannot communicate his anger and guilt with June unless he resurrects her, and then kills her all over again. Marie cannot be Marie unless the Warrior Mother Marie corresponds with Saint Marie. In *The Bonesetter's Daughter* Precious Auntie cannot be Gu Liu Xin unless LuLing reads her mother's story; Ruth ends their curse by writing their stories, a process that allows her to communicate with her grandmother without the tray of sand. The unsatisfactory state of affairs in each novel is silence and absence. The fantastic in these novels subverts the lack of voices, names, and

languages; these novels protest silence, absence, and division by creating a *paraxis* where irrational is rational the either/or discourses are mute in the presence of these new voices.

WORKS CITED

- Barry, Nora and Mary Prescott. "The Triumph of the Brave: *Love Medicine*'s Holistic Vision." *Critique* 30 (1989): 123-139.
- Barton, Gay. "Pattern and Freedom in the North Dakota Novels of Louise Erdrich: Narrative Technique as Survival." Diss. Baylor University, 1999.
- Blackburn, Di Gan. "Christianity in Contemporary Asian American Literature: (Mis)-Translations of the Word." Diss. Baylor University, 2004.
- Chen, Fanfan. "Archetype and Aesthetics of the Fantastic: the Narrative Form in Chinese and French Fiction," *Comparative Criticism*. Ed. E.S. Shaffer. Vol. 24. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002. 239-54.
- Daemmrich, Ingrid G. "Paradise and Storytelling: Interconnecting Gender, Motif, and Narrative Structure." *Narrative* 11 (2003): 213-33.
- Epstein, Leslie. "Stories and Something Else." *Cynthia Ozick*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1986. 47-51.
- Erdrich, Louise. *Love Medicine*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.
- Filmer, Kath. *Scepticism and Hope in Twentieth Century Fantasy Literature*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green UP, 1992.
- Friedman, Lawrence S. *Understanding Cynthia Ozick*. Columbia: South Carolina UP, 1991.
- Gleason, William. "Her Laugh an Ace: The Function of Humor in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook*. Ed. Hertha D. Sweet Wong. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 115-35.
- Grice, Helen. *Negotiating Identities: An Introduction to Asian American Women's Writing*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002.
- Hafen, P. Jane. *Reading Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine*. Boise: Boise UP, 2003.
- Hull, Akasha. "Uncommon Language." *Women's Review of Books* 18 (2001): 13.
- Jackson, Rosemary. *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen, 1981.

- Jaskoski, Helen. "From Time Immemorial: Native American Traditions in Contemporary Short Fiction." *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook*. Ed. Hertha D. Sweet Wong. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 27-34.
- Kauvar, Elaine. *Cynthia Ozick's Fiction: Tradition & Invention*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.
- . "Ozick's Book of Creation" *Cynthia Ozick*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1986. 145-57.
- Lee, Ken-fang. "Cultural Translation and the Exorcist: A Reading of Kingston's and Tan's Ghost Stories," *MELUS* 29 (2004): 105-127.
- Lloyd-Smith, Allan Gardner. *Uncanny American Fiction: Medusa's Face*. New York: St. Martin's, 1989.
- Lowin, Joseph. *Cynthia Ozick*. Boston: Twayne, 1988.
- Matchie, Thomas. "Love Medicine: A Female Moby Dick" *The Midwest Quarterly* 30 (1989): 478-91.
- Mermann-Jozwiak, Elisabeth. "'His Grandfather Ate His Own Wife': Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine as a Contemporary Windigo Narrative." *North Dakota Quarterly* 64 (1997): 44-54.
- Nisly, L. Lamar. *Impossible to Say: Representing Religious Fiction by Malamud, Percy, Ozick, and O'Connor*. Westport: Greenwood, 2002.
- Ozick, Cynthia. *Art & Ardor*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983.
- . *The Puttermesser Papers*. New York: Vintage, 1997.
- Parrish, Timothy. "Creation's Covenant: The Art of Cynthia Ozick." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 43 (2001): 440-64.
- Pinsker, Sanford. *The Uncompromising Fictions of Cynthia Ozick*. Columbia: Missouri UP, 1987.
- Rainwater, Catherine. "Reading Between Worlds: Narrativity in the Fiction of Louise Erdrich." *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook*. Ed. Hertha D. Sweet Wong. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 163-78.
- Reynolds, Guy. *Twentieth-Century American Women's Fiction: A Critical Introduction*. New York: St. Martin's, 1999.

- Sanders, Karla. "A Healthy Balance: Religion, Identity, and Community in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." *MELUS* 23 (1998): 129-56.
- Sands, Kathleen. "Love Medicine: Voices and Margins." *Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine: A Casebook*. Ed. Hertha D. Sweet Wong. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 35-42.
- Smith, Jeanne Rosier. *Writing Trickster: Mythic Gambols in American Ethnic Literature*. Berkeley: California UP, 1997.
- Strandberg, Victor. "The Art of Cynthia Ozick." *Cynthia Ozick*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1986. 79-120.
- Tan, Amy. *The Bonesetter's Daughter*. New York: Ballantine, 2001.
- . Interview with Bel Mooney. "Mixing It." *New Internationalist* 370 (2004): 28.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*. Trans. Richard Howard. Cleveland: Case Western Reserve UP, 1973.
- Unali, Lina. "A Case of Double Logic in Amy Tan's *The Bonesetter's Daughter*, With a Comparison with Honore de Balzac's *The Accursed Child*." *The Cultural Shuttle* 57 (2004): 229-36.
- Vecsey, Christopher. *Imagine Ourselves Richly: Mythic Narratives of Native North Americans*. New York: Crossroad, 1988.
- Van Dyke, Annette. "Of Vision Quests and Spirit Guardians: Female Power in the Novels of Louise Erdrich." *The Chippewa Landscape of Louise Erdrich*. Ed. Allan Chavkin. Tuscaloosa: Alabama UP, 1999. 130-43.
- Wagner, Tamara S. "'A Barrage of Ethnic Comparisons': Occidental Stereotypes in Amy Tan's Novels." *Critique* 45 (2004): 435-45.
- Walker, Nancy A. *Feminist Alternatives: Irony and Fantasy in the Contemporary Novel by Women*. Jackson: Mississippi UP, 1990.
- Walter, Roland. *Magical Realism in Contemporary Chicano Fiction*. Frankfurt am Main: Vervuert Verlag, 1993.
- Wang, Ben. "The Real Under Scrutiny: The Cutting Edge of Chinese Fantastic Narrative." *Tamkang Review* 21 (1990): 149-65.
- Wisse, Ruth R. "Ozick as American Jewish Writer." *Cynthia Ozick*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea, 1986. 35-45.