

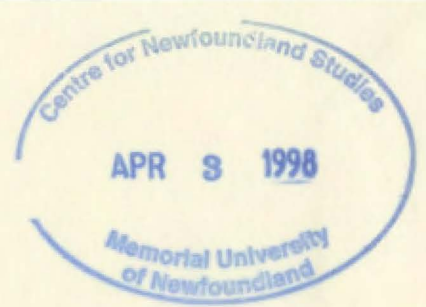
THOMPSON'S FAMILY VALUES:
JUDITH THOMPSON'S RUPTURING OF
THE TRADITIONAL FAMILY UNIT

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**Thompson's Family Values:
Judith Thompson's Rupturing of the Traditional Family Unit**

Submitted by Lisa Stowe

**A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts**

**Department of English
Memorial University of Newfoundland**

December 1996



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0-612-23175-5

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	iv
Chapter One <i>THE CRACKWALKER: THE NEGLECTED CHILD</i>	1
Chapter Two <i>WHITE BITING DOG: THE DEATH OF THE FATHER</i>	30
Chapter Three <i>I AM YOURS: THE MATERNAL FUNCTION</i>	72
Conclusion	104
Bibliography	113

ABSTRACT

From the Ancient Greeks to twentieth century playwrights family dramas have a long tradition in the theatre. This tradition includes playwrights such as Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg and Tennessee Williams. Judith Thompson works out of this tradition and her first three plays, *The Crackwalker*, *White Biting Dog* and *I Am Yours*, offer a disturbing view of the traditional family unit. Through unique stage signs and unusual linguistic systems, Thompson presents each member of that unit (child, father and mother) as subjects in crisis or as subjects who, because of external societal pressures, are unable to survive in a society not ready to decipher their language codes.

Psycholinguist Julia Kristeva offers a theory of language which helps to unravel the metaphoric and often bizarre language systems of Thompson's characters. Kristeva's theory suggests that subjectivity begins long before Jacques Lacan's mirror stage; an individual uses bodily and instinctual drives as a basis for subjectivity - drives of basic bodily needs. Kristeva claims that these drives, collected in the semiotic chora, situate the individual in life until the mirror stage, at which point the individual enters the logic of Lacan's Symbolic Order. The chora is repressed at the mirror stage,

but Kristeva believes it continues to bubble, rupture and manifest itself through speech patterns, unusual sign systems, music, and pauses. Her subject-on-trial becomes an individual who oscillates between the semiotic and the Symbolic chora.

Thompson's characters' language codes are based on bodily functions: sex, hunger, and defecation. The linguistic is complemented by the theatrical stage signs that vividly illustrate an individual's internal psyche. They are examples of Kristeva's two spaces, as they struggle to control their rumbling semiotic chora while at the same time trying to negotiate the Symbolic Order. In *The Crackwalker*, Thompson combines a naturalistic structure with her unusual sign systems to deconstruct children. *White Biting Dog* attacks the patriarchal middle-class family unit, specifically the paternal member, and illustrates through surreal stage signs and heavily realistic language, that family roles are contrived and superficial. *I Am Yours* confronts the maternal figure through metaphor and illuminating stage signs, and shows how self-awareness and self-reflexivity during a pregnancy can exorcise daemons created from a negligent maternal relationship. Thompson's theatre exemplifies the Kristevan notion of the subject-on-trial.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest thanks to Dr. Denyse Lynde for her guidance, perserverance and patience through this sometimes trying ordeal. I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to Richard Buehler for his meticulous copy editing. Many thanks to Jerry Varsava, Ronald Rompkey, the School of Graduate Studies and the Department of English Language and Literature for their support. I wish to thank "the girls" for their comfort and lastly I want to especially thank Danine for her unwavering patience and complete belief in my abilities. This thesis is dedicated to her.

INTRODUCTION

We are animals, and that's what we try to persuade ourselves that we're not. There's a sort of mass delusional that we're not. A lot of our behaviour is almost biologically determined. You see that with a baby. With my baby, I'm just observing this. She's in a great mood, at some hours of the day, because everything digestively is going well. It's not really situational. It's biological. (Wachtel, *BRICK* 37)

We emphasize the regulated aspect of the chora: its vocal and gestural organization is subject to what we shall call an objective [ordonnancement], which is dictated by natural or socio-historical constraints such as the biological difference between the sexes or family structure. (Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language", *The Kristeva Reader* 94)

Thompson's plays, and their unusual signifying systems, invite a study of the psychological dilemmas of her characters. These dilemmas are presented through a language that combines unusual signifying codes, such as systems

based on disease, sexuality, body functions, with unusual grammatical elements such as alliterations, ellipses, and contorted syntax to create a language that is at once disturbing and beautiful, nonsensical and perceptive, revolting and touching - a language that becomes the vocalization of internal fears, desires and instincts. In her way Thompson, with this unusual language, creates the music of the subconscious.

Thompson's unique language constructions mean the audience has to negotiate and decipher certain character's dialogues. This constant negotiating by the audience parallels the negotiations of Thompson's characters as they try to establish fixed subjectivities within their realms of reality. Often Thompson's characters find themselves in subjective turmoil because the identity which they assume is at odds with an acceptable social identity. The tension between who her characters truly are and who they are suppose to be creates dramatic conflict both within themselves and among other characters.

Who the characters are suppose to be is predicated by a role; in the case of this study the role is a family member. The three plays, *The Crackwalker*, *White Biting Dog*, and *I Am Yours* can be read as a trilogy where each individual play becomes a study of an individual family member. In the case of *The Crackwalker* it is the children who are examined. In

White Biting Dog and *I Am Yours* the role of the father and mother, respectively, become scrutinized as Thompson shows how social pressures associated with rigid familial roles can split and fracture individual subjectivities.

Julia Kristeva, a French linguistic theorist and psychoanalyst, offers a theory which can help explain the subjectivity crisis that many of Thompson's characters undergo. In "Revolution and Poetic Language", Julia Kristeva explains that Jacques Lacan's notion of subjectivity begins with an individual's entrance into language following the mirror stage. It is the lack created by the separation from the mother (after the subject, through a gaze in the mirror, recognizes that he/she is separate from the maternal figure) which arouses desire in the subject; desire that is manifested through the language of the Symbolic Order as the subject tries desperately to identify this lack or absence through language construction. It is through language manipulation that an individual becomes subjective as he/she assumes a position within the Symbolic Order. For Kristeva, the most important absence in Lacan's theory is his belief that the first eighteen months of existence are not relevant to an individual's subjective crisis.

For Kristeva, subjectivity takes place in the eighteen months before the mirror stage. Kristeva explains that there is a relationship between mother and child from the moment

of conception; a relationship based upon instinctual drives which move between mother and child. Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* explains how these drives are the reason for subjectivity:

Do we not find, sooner (chronologically and logically speaking), if not objects at least pre-objects, poles of attraction of a demand for air, food, and motion? Do we not also find, in the very process that constitutes the mother as other, a series of semi-objects that stake out the transition from a state of indifferenciation to one of discrete (subject/object)-semi-objects that are called precisely "transitional" by Winnicott?(32)

The very fact that there are these "demands" indicates that there is some position assumed by the infant. These instinctual drives, which are primarily concerned with bodily functions such as hunger, eating, defecation, control the child's movements and a measure of subjectivity is established. Kristeva explains that this subjectivity of pre-mirror stage subjects is based on the semiotic. She explains the semiotic as a collection of drives or instinctual energies and they are collected in what she labels the semiotic chora:

Discrete bodies of energy move through the body of the subject who is not yet constituted as such and, in the course of his development, they are arranged according to the various constraints imposed on this body - always already involved in the semiotic process - by family and social structures. In this way the drives, which are "energy" charges as well as "psychical" marks, articulate what we call a *chora*: a nonexpressive totality formed by the drives and their stases in a motility that is as full of movement as it is regulated. (*The Kristeva Reader* 93)

These drives initiate sound production within the subject, but, as one gets older and learns to convey his/her self through the language of the Symbolic Order, this semiotic influence and its sounds are repressed - although not without influence - from society. Semiotic drives which bubble and rupture one's discourse throughout one's life, underlie the logic and order of the Symbolic Order. Language, for Kristeva, becomes heterogeneous, as all language construction is dependent upon both the semiotic and Symbolic Order.

How does this language theory influence a theory of the speaking, unified subject? Kristeva believes that one

constantly negotiates these drives and it is this oscillation between the Symbolic Order and the semiotic chora which constitutes her subject-on-trial. Kristeva explains that this oscillation constitutes the whole subject and that "these two modalities are inseparable within the signifying process that constitutes language, and the dialectic between them determines the type of discourse involved..." (92). Discourse is, then, a combination of the semiotic and symbolic and as Kristeva says: "no signifying system [the subject] produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively symbolic', and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (93). The indebtedness to both means the subject is no longer controlled entirely by a transcendental ego. Kristeva explains:

We view the subject in language as decentering the transcendental ego, cutting through it and opening it up to a dialectic in which its syntactic and categorical understanding is merely the liminary of the process... (*The Kristeva Reader* 98).

Subjectivity then becomes a process, a movement between the semiotic and Symbolic. There is a danger for the subject if too much emphasis is placed on either area. If one is dependent exclusively upon the semiotic, one lapses into

delirium, such as Alan exemplifies in his encounters with the Indian Man in *The Crackwalker*. If one is totally dependent upon the Symbolic Order, then one's speech and discourse are empty and shallow like Glidden's desperate attempts to regain control over his family in *White Biting Dog* through an overabundant use of cliched songs and expressions. The dialogue in *I Am Yours* reflects a more balanced example of relying upon the subconscious and conscious languages, as dreams and repressed fears rumble and manifest themselves as images on stage, fracturing the linguistic exchanges between characters.

Judith Thompson's characters become perfect examples of the subject on trial as they constantly find themselves negotiating the language of the Symbolic Order with the interruptive force of their bubbling semiotic chora. Some characters can negotiate both their semiotic bubblings and the Symbolic Order's logical and structured syntax to successfully operate in society. Other characters, however, find their identities shaped by an overabundance of semiotic drives, and as a result, lapse into psychosis. Still other characters represent those individuals who lapse into semiotic mumblings for only a moment before they regain control over their language manipulation. Whatever the degree of semiotic interruptions, one thing becomes evident through a study of Thompson's work; no character is

completely alienated from the influence of their semiotic chora and no one character is necessarily completely unified as society defines subjective unity. The subjective positioning of Thompson's characters lies as much in their disunity and fracturable psyches as the Symbolic roles they try to live - they represent Kristeva's subject in crisis as they constantly negotiate the Symbolic Order and the semiotic.

The way Thompson manifests this subjective crisis is through her unusual signifying codes, both unusual linguistic codes and inventive dramatic codes. In *The Crackwalker*, Thompson's characters position themselves in society through the means of unusual sign systems - Alan and Theresa's language codes are based on the body, sexuality, disease and mental/physical disorders; language that reflects the early maternal influences of Kristeva's language theory. Their language is contrasted with the more socially acceptable language systems of Joe and Sandy as well as to the socially alienated Indian Man, who can be said to communicate strictly through the instinctual rhythms and movements of his semiotic chora. Thompson introduces her unusual dramatic codes through a blurring of interior and exterior scene settings. This blurring of boundaries represents the blurring of the two language spaces as developed by Kristeva.

In *White Biting Dog*, Thompson's language systems become more challenging to the audience. Disease and food imagery become the major signs of *White Biting Dog* as Cape, Lomia, Pony and Glidden try to maintain family roles in a drama about the deconstruction of the family unit. This play explicates Kristeva's view that social institutions such as the family repress and constrain the semiotic chora. Thompson also uses ellipses and dashes to construct a language which communicates through the unsaid as much as it communicates through linguistic units. All of the pauses, ellipses and dashes work together to create, as Thompson says in her note to *White Biting Dog*, a "deliberate musicality" and a "textual rhythmic" script. This musicality represents Kristeva's semiotic chora as it influences movement and ruptures in each character's dialogue.

I Am Yours uses stage signs to present a hidden subconscious and Thompson's unique use of dramatic codes requires an analysis separate from a linguistic analysis. Stage signs, such as protruding sets, atmospheric lighting and daemonic stage paintings predominate in *I Am Yours*, as Thompson explores the hidden tensions between mother and child. These hidden tensions can be read through Kristeva's notion of the maternal function as it influences subjectivity. Such a physical representation of the maternal function provides the audience with a unique opportunity to

witness the changes and traumas an expectant mother's subjectivity undergoes as she prepares for the birth of her child.

All three of Thompson's plays focus on how individuals deal with social pressures. These pressures are presented through unusual signifying systems and strange grammatical constructions. Through an analysis of such sign systems, Kristeva's theory of the semiotic chora and pre-mirror stage subjectivity is explicated. The subconscious and instinctual drives of Thompson's characters influence subjectivity as much as social roles and the discourses of the Symbolic Order.

CHAPTER 1

The Crackwalker: The Neglected Child

The mystery of a play is like a psychiatric puzzle, one that deals with the landscapes of emotions and behaviour...It's like Columbus landing on the bank and stepping into the woods: he's facing an unexplored country (Judith Thompson).

[*The Crackwalker*] is gutter language fused with terrible, heart-breaking images - the kind that can never be blotted from memory by pretty music or greeting card visions of pink bunnies (Maureen Peterson).

Judith Thompson's first play, *The Crackwalker*, premiered at Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille in November, 1980. Using dialogue that Urjo Kareda describes as, "...the language of modern urban life..."(11), Thompson presents episodes which detail the unstable and violent lives of Joe, Sandy, Theresa and Alan. All four characters struggle to survive on the margins of Kingston society as they attempt to access the elusive 'better life' of mainstream society. But mainstream society often silences and oppresses those,

like the characters in *The Crackwalker*, who, because of their inability to manipulate the existing language codes within the social systems, find communication with others difficult. In *Elements of Semiology*, Roland Barthes explains how one must learn the rules of language before communication takes place:

A language is...a social institution and a system of values. It is the social part of language, the individual cannot by himself either create or modify it (sic); it is essentially a collective contract which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate. Moreover, this social product is autonomous like a game with its own rules, for it can be handled only after a period of learning (14).

It is Thompson's characters' inability to partake in this 'collective contract' that leads them to modify the language codes of the Symbolic Order. In their attempt to communicate and convey meaning, the characters of *The Crackwalker* use sign systems that are not reflective of what is normally thought of as acceptable social language. Instead, theirs is a language predominated by, "colloquialisms,... brand names, [and] fractured but expressive syntax" (Kareda 9). With a dramatic form that mirrors the rupturing and chaotic

language of her characters, Thompson presents episodes from these 'down and out' characters' lives and allows them to tell their tragic story in a forum (the theatre space) where people (the audience) are forced to sit and listen to the normally silenced and ignored of society.

The Crackwalker is often called a realistic 'slice of life' drama; as Nigel Hunt claims: "*The Crackwalker* is a frighteningly realistic look at the underbelly of our society" (10). But *The Crackwalker* is not only a realistic play nor is it merely reminiscent of kitchen sink dramas, despite its highly realistic language. Instead *The Crackwalker* contains elements and characteristics which make it more closely alligned to naturalism: elements which are reminiscent of early August Strinberg or Emile Zola. As with early Strinberg and Zola, Thompson refuses to romanticize her characters' situations; instead she shows the audience glaring examples of the human condition on the brink of survival. She does not shy away from the more difficult and even offensive moments in these characters' lives and, as with the killing of the bird in Strinberg's *Miss Julie*, Thompson, too, points out the horrors of Theresa and Alan's life with the on-stage murder of Baby Danny.

The Crackwalker spans the dramatic spectrum as shockingly realistic scenes are juxtaposed with surreal and dream-like segments. Like a crackwalker straddling two

separate blocks of concrete, Thompson's drama straddles separate dramatic genres. The surreal nightmare scenes such as the ones between Alan and the Indian Man or the raw poetic language presented by Alan to the audience in his monologue, both hint at Thompson's characteristically unique dramaturgy that makes this play more than just a 'realistic look at the underbelly of our society'. *The Crackwalker* presents the fractured human psyche through a collection of various dramatic and theatrical forms.

Alan and Theresa are *The Crackwalker's* main protagonists. Theresa is a semi-retarded native woman, who makes a living "blowin queers off down at the Lido for five bucks" (I,ii,24). Her desire for sexual activity often leads her into trouble and she relies on the other characters in the play, such as Alan and Sandy, to provide her with a more socially acceptable and less threatening lifestyle. Alan is Theresa's partner and father of their child. He desperately tries to fit into what he perceives as the socially acceptable role of father and husband, but the pressures in his life, such as the financial burden of supporting a wife and a family, and the constant pressure of trying to care properly for a baby, become too much for Alan. He eventually succumbs to these social pressures and, in a state of frustrated rage, he strangles his son.

The other couple in the play, Sandy and Joe, provide

friendship and compassion for Theresa and Alan, but they have problems of their own. Joe, an alcoholic, physically and emotionally abuses Sandy, and constantly looks for a way out of his lower class life. Mark Czarnecki points out that salvation for Joe is moving away from Kingston to "driv[e] a cab in Calgary" (63). Joe takes out his frustration towards society on Sandy, his ever-forgiving wife. Sandy "got a fuckin hole in [her] gut cause of [Joe]" (II,v,57), but, despite her physical and mental anguish, she continues to take him back. She, like Joe, is caught in a cycle of despair, but she fails to find a way out of the continuous abuse, willing, instead, to accept her abusive situation and survive the best way she can. For Sandy, advancements in her life are measured in such things as "Learn[ing] how to make a new drink" (II,v,59). Her compassion for Theresa and Alan extends to a blinding faith in their friendship, even after Alan murders his son. As Sandy points out: "Oh yeah I'll stand up for a friend, anytime. I'll tell ya who else I stood up for at that service...Al, and he done it. Oh yeah, I still consider him a friend" (II,ix,70). Thompson indicates near the end of the play, when Sandy and Joe settle their differences once again, that the couple will continue to exist in this cycle of abuse, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Four monologues anchor the action and duologues of *The*

Crackwalker. Each of the four characters has his/her own monologue which provides uncensored, stream of consciousness information to the audience. The monologues are the strongest dramatic segments of *The Crackwalker*. They provide the most vivid language in the play, a language that is best described by Kareda as: "...the poetry of the inarticulate and the semi-literate..."(9). To enforce the strength of the monologue, Thompson presents the duologues and multi-character scenes as chaotic and non-communicative. Characters cannot hear one another, they misunderstand one another and verbally abuse one another. It makes sense that the monologue, a dramatic structure which enables a character (regardless of how illiterate or inarticulate they may be) to capture the uninterrupted attention of the audience, provides the most compelling and informative moments in a play about social silencing and miscommunication. It is as if once released from the constraints of the pressure to communicate, Thompson's characters are able to convey successfully what they want about themselves and their situations. In a sense, the monologues are dramas within the main drama and they provide the audience with another vision of the characters. In *The Achievement of Grace*, Richard Knowles sees the monologues as representations of subjective fragmentation:

Each of these monologues reveal a divided, fragmented subject trying to contain itself through a narrative meta-commentary that allows that "self" to fit more comfortably into what seems to be a largely alien symbolic order (35).

Each character possess two identities - the identity created within the language of the Symbolic Order, represented by the duologues, and the identity created through the language of the monologues. It is the poetic language of the monologues which provide insights into each character's unconscious thoughts and desires as they struggle to maintain a position within society.

Structurally, *The Crackwalker* is divided into two acts. The first act sets up and establishes the relationships between the four characters. Through action and dialogue in the first act, it becomes apparent that, although Sandy and Joe are dysfunctionally involved with each other, it is because of their friendship and support that Alan and Theresa are able to survive in society. The second act becomes a study of what happens when Alan and Theresa move out on their own and attempt to establish a self-supporting family unit. Their independence and self support are shortlived as the pressure to conform to socially constructed roles, such as father or mother, becomes too

much for Alan and Theresa. The disastrous effect of such forced conformity ends with the death/murder of Danny, Alan and Theresa's mentally retarded son.

A neatly divided two-act play suggests a neatly structured and closed text. But in *The Crackwalker*, the structured two-act is merely an illusion of order and linearity. Within the two acts, there is a blurring of dramatic genres, between realism and surrealism. Monologues, which reflect the highly poetic and emotionally charged words of Thompson's characters, rupture the more conversationally oriented dramatic duologues; surreal dream-like scenes interrupt shockingly realistic scenes. The illusion of the ordered, self-contained, two act structure is completely shattered with the open-ended final scene. Theresa, who opens the play, also has the last word, suggesting that her life in the margins will continue. She runs onto the stage, after a 'small struggle' and asserts her identity with the words, "Stupid old bastard don't go foolin with me you don't even know who I look like even. You don't even know who I lookin like"(II,ix,71). The uncertainty of Theresa's future and the lack of closure to the play foregrounds the presence of chaos that lurks underneath the illusory well defined structure of the dramatic form. This violation of the Aristotelian tripartite dramatic model of opening - developing - closing can be seen

as a comment on the forever changing status of individuals. To defy Aristotle's view, individuals are never fixed in time or place, nor are they assured and fixed in their subjectivity. According to Julia Kristeva's theory of the subject in process, individuals constantly oscillate between the semiotic and Symbolic Order to attain true subjectivity. Thompson's characters are forever oscillating between real life situations, dream-like sequences and monologues to try, as best they can, to posit themselves in a society which defies that subjectivity.

The characters' discourse in *The Crackwalker* contain signifying systems which reflect the instinctive desires collected in the semiotic chora. Signs associated with the maternal function such as bodily functions, hunger, and defecation, rupture the more socially acceptable language as characters attempt to communicate. The consequence of these signifying systems is that Thompson's characters are misunderstood or ignored and, as a result, their position in society is always tenuous, often bordering on and often looking into what Robert Nunn terms "the opaque surface" or "the abyss, the depths that are hidden from us" (Nunn 5). These depths can also be termed the unconscious, 'the other side of the dark' or to this writer, or in Kristevan terms, the silenced world of the semiotic chora.

Codes which rupture the polite social discourse of the

majority of theatregoers will inevitably create controversy. Thompson's signifying codes were neither initially appreciated nor comprehended by critics and audiences. Norma Harris, reviewing the premiere production of *The Crackwalker*, found the play's language "stifling" and "limiting", claiming that "any playwright worth his or her salt will struggle to free the characters from the stranglehold of a four letter vocabulary" (22). Such four letter words are undoubtedly the reason some audience members left during the initial production of *The Crackwalker*: Ray Conologue notes in his review of opening night that, "[*The Crackwalker*] has also sent a few people packing because of its violent language and remorseless realism..." Some critics and audience members see Thompson's use of 'gutter language' or violent images as mainly shock effects and see no value in the play's dialogue.

Other critics see Thompson as a magician, who takes the most mundane and coarse language and uses it as a basis for a new level of discourse. Mark Czarnecki calls "the [*Crackwalker*] a minor masterpiece" because of its "language and humanity" (63). Jennifer Harvie describes Thompson's language as "magic realism" which she defines as " [taking] details of the realist language, ...explod[ing] it and [foregrounding] its writerliness" (90). Not only does Thompson's language 'foreground her own writerliness' and

call attention to itself because it shocks the audience into attentiveness, but her dramatic signifying systems allow for multi-levelled readings. One can read the plays as realistic, 'slice of life' dramas, (although to read the plays as solely realistic is to deny the existence of a more poetic and intriguing reading), or one can read her language as representative of the poetic unconscious. Nunn recognizes the need to see two languages and points out that:

two languages are spoken...the language of the 'conscious' with its clear demarcation between what is sayable and what is not, and another language registering the presence of the 'unconscious' and erupting (sic) and in a sense rewriting the text, a violently poetic language, at the same time horrifying and beautiful (6).

Thompson's characters do not censor their most inner desires or fears and they do not attempt to couch these 'horrifying and beautiful' signs in a more socially acceptable language system. In his article "The Plays of Judith Thompson", Richard Knowles furthers Nunn's observation that Thompson's language explicates another level of consciousness which ultimately splits the subjectivity of her characters:

Thompson [frequently constructs] fragmented and discontinuous characters and actions in her plays. Viewed in the context of Lacanian theory, in which entry into the symbolic order, language creates a division between the self represented (the 'I' speaking) and the self represented in discourse (the 'I' posited as subject) her plays tend to present characters undergoing a crisis of subjectivity....her characters often experience a conflict between a self which is submissive to the inherited and hegemonic discursive practices of society, and a self which is not synonymous with the subject of that discourse (34).

The "inherited and hegemonic discursive practices of society" do not adequately reflect the inner desires or drives experienced by Thompson's characters. The speaking "I" of these characters cannot be adequately posited in the discursive "I" because society's language does not have the ability to express the fluctuating subjective positions. Her characters are either inept at the 'normal' discursive practices and fail to understand and manipulate language in order to articulate these desires, or language itself is not flexible enough to accommodate the desires of their subconscious. As a result, these characters fall somewhere in between these two discursive shortcomings and find it

hard to express a 'self'. Their subjectivity splits. But is this split subjectivity a weakness in Thompson's characters, or do they represent the 'true' individual - the subject on trial as presented by Kristeva? Are Thompson's characters shaped as much by the maternal function as they are by the Symbolic Order or are they merely 'babbling', marginalized individuals who are outcasts because they do not have the mental capabilities necessary to posit themselves subjectively in the Symbolic Order?

The most revealing image in *The Crackwalker*, and the one which clearly illustrates Theresa's and Alan's position, is the image of Theresa near the end of the play, speaking into a phone which has been ripped from the wall:

...[puts bag to side, picks up severed phone, does not dial] Hi Janus won't be doin readin writin today. Somethin happen. Just somethin. The baby die. The baby die. Up at Sanny's. Okay Okay I waitin...Ron Harton still livin up at Shuter's? [hangs up the phone, and picks it up immediately] C'I speak to Ron please? Hi Ron, it's Trese. S'Okay if we start goin together I love ya. Okay see ya Tuesday...(II,vii,67).

The image of Theresa talking into a severed phone line clearly illustrates her inability to communicate with those around her. She talks, but what she says is neither heard or understood. As well, conversations over the phone severely limit the use of body language, a signifying system which Theresa depends upon for communication. Theresa's inability

to communicate through the language of society is noted by Sandy: "Jeez y'know I don't know what goes on inside that girl but it ain't what's going on inside the rest of us" (II,ii,70). Other characters, such as Joe, refuse to acknowledge Theresa's different codes of communication and, when she does attempt to speak, he often threatens her into silence - as Theresa says: "he say he gonna kill me if I don't shut up" (II,ii,22). Theresa is mis-read by those around her who refuse to take time to decode her deceptively simplistic language codes.

Theresa's inability to position herself in the Symbolic Order goes beyond the unwillingness of others to decode her signifying systems. Theresa's line: "Hi Janus won't be readin writin today" suggests that she struggles with the basic tools needed for survival in a society which places great emphasis upon the power to manipulate the Symbolic Order's spoken and written words. In her opening monologue, Theresa claims that "I don't like readin no stupid Bible! Ya get a stomach ache doin that ya do!" (I,i,20). It is interesting to note that Theresa reacts with physical disgust towards reading the Bible - a text which is literally the Law of the Father, the power of the Word, and the epitome of patriarchal social codes.

Theresa's reliance upon a language closely connected to her body is again illustrated with her answer to Alan when

he questions her about her 'readin writin':

Alan Theresa. Theresa I'm going try to not get mad
 at ya but ya can't keep doin this to me!
 Every day you're tellin me ya lost your
 homework!

Theresa Maybe someone take it

Alan Theresa don't you understand I am tryin to
 improve my family.

Theresa [coyly] Al.

Alan What.

Theresa [delighted] You shoul'da seen the pooh I done
 today it was hardly long (II,ii,52).

Theresa measures her daily accomplishments by the length of her 'pooh' - a term for defecation which is often associated with small children. Theresa exemplifies the child of Kristeva's maternal function - someone who depends upon others to nurture them and to congratulate them for such conquests as "having a big pooh". When Alan tells her, "Theresa married ladies with babies ain't supposed to say things like that!" (II,ii,52), it means nothing to her since her identity is not based on signifiers available through the Symbolic Order, such as 'housewife', 'mother', 'lady': instead, her identity and definition of 'self' rest in the language of her body.

Theresa's 'body language' also signifies her fear of others. At times when she is under great pressure, she often

uses the language of the body to divert attention away from herself. Farts become a sign of fear in the following scene when she is under increasing pressure to defend herself against Joe, a character who successfully manipulates the social discourse to weaken Theresa's charge of rape:

JOE Did you tell my wife that I raped you
 Theresa?

[Theresa doesn't answer]

Did you say that? Eh? *[grabs her]* Eh?

.....

JOE This little girl who's callin rape was sittin
 on that couch beggin for it.

ALAN She never.

SANDY Theresa?

JOE It's true. I came in piss drunk I'm passed
 out on the floor and there she is down on all
 fours shovin her big white ass in my face.

THERESA No I never.

JOE Big white bootie right in the face

THERESA Go away.

JOE Tell em like it was Trese, and no crossin
 fingers.

THERESA I never say that Sanny, I never mean he rape
 me!

SANDY Theresa is he tellin the truth?

ALAN Theresa you never done that, did ya? Shown
 him your bum?

JOE This is your last chance, burger, now tell

the fuckin truth or I get serious.

SANDY Don't lie to me Theresa. I can forgive a lot
 of things but not a lie.

ALAN You can tell the truth, Theresa, I'll take
 care of ya.

SANDY Eh, Trese?

[Pause]

THERESA [laughing] Who farted? (I,ii,29).

Theresa's childlike identity is reinforced with Joe's description of her as a "this little girl" as well as Alan's almost fatherly inquisition: "Theresa you never done that, did ya? Shown him your bum?" Interestingly, Joe uses a variety of derogatory terms, two of which are inhuman, to describe Theresa: "Little girl", "burger", and "down on all fours". Against the growing pressure and realizing that there is no way she can compete against the discursive power Joe possesses, Theresa resorts to the language of her body to regain composure as well as to divert attention away from Joe's challenge to her accusation of rape.

Alan is the other character in the play who finds it difficult to articulate society's signifying systems and position himself in the Symbolic Order. Whereas Theresa cannot help but to allow her instinctual drives to propel her through life and shape her discourse, Alan attempts to converse in socially acceptable language codes despite the

surging drives and desires of his subconscious. Alan literally straddles the two domains of Kristeva's language theory. He physically represents an individual whose subjectivity is constantly on trial as his subconscious desires and fears shatter his more constrained social position.

Alan's difficulty in mastering the discourse of the Symbolic Order is illustrated in his relationship with Joe. Even though Alan and Joe are 'good buddies', it is clear from their exchanges that Alan has difficulty communicating with Joe:

JOE: Were you screwin that?

ALAN: No! No I mean no I was just I-

JOE: Why the hell not?

ALAN: Oh no I mean I was eh, like I was a couple
 hours ago, but not before ya came in I
 wasn't.

JOE: Jeez you're strange. How come you got dressed
 you going out?

ALAN: No - no I'm not going out - I - I couldn't
 fuckin sleep, you know? (I,vi,39).

Alan spends the duration of this conversation in a confused state and all he can muster in the way of conversation are muddled and flustered responses. It is evident that he wants to communicate with Joe, but Alan finds the only way to do

this is to emulate him:

[ALAN goes to the window and silently mouths 'Fuuuuuck' in imitation of JOE. He turns on TV, crouches on sofa, and sings softly, but he can't remember the whole song].

ALAN Nobody-nobody here-but us chickens, nobody here but us guys don't-don't bother me we got work-to do we got stuff to do and eggs to lay-we're busy-chickens- *[ALAN pretends to be a car, makes sounds, mimes steering wheel]* Neeowwwwwwwww Whaaaaaa.Fhrhuuummm. Atta girl (I,vi,41).

Alan cannot find the voice to imitate Joe properly and all he can do is mouth the words. He does not even have the ability to articulate Joe's crude signifiers and his efforts to fit into the Symbolic Order are reduced to mime and seemingly meaningless gestures. Like Theresa who resorts to child-like language such as 'pooh', Alan, when struggling with his mental stability, also resorts to child-like language, this time in the form of a childhood song.

Alan's precarious position in society is further illustrated in a scene with Sandy and Joe. He tries again to communicate using society's language, but all he can do is repeat of Joe's actions. When repeated by Alan, this discourse borders on psychosis:

[Alan is sitting away from JOE and SANDY, and he is smoking and loudly eating barbecue chips. JOE and SANDY are very much involved with each other and the game, and they virtually ignore ALAN]

JOE Go go go you fucker-Bunnyfuck what are you

fuckin doin-get him off Nykoluk get him off
the ice fuck.

ALAN Imlach dies.

[JOE does not respond]

IMLACH DIES!!

JOE Oh LAROUQUE-come on Sittler put that mother
in come on come on FUCK OFF PERRAULT, do it
Daryl hey Martin Martin put it in put it ALL
FUCKING RIGHT! [jumps up] ALL RIGHT!

[ALAN jumps up with JOE, leans into the TV, his face
only one inch away from the screen, screams, wagging
his head]

ALAN ALLLLL FUCKIN RIIIIIIIGHT! [looks back at JOE
with a little laugh] (II,vii,65).

The picture of Alan on the fringes of society and outside the Symbolic Order is illustrated by his physical distance from Sandy and Joe. When he tries to re-enter social discourse, his first discursive exchange is with the TV, an inanimate object. The absurd and pathetic image of Alan screaming into a TV, which is oblivious and unresponsive to his actions, sums up society's reactions and exchanges with Alan. Regardless of how long Alan screams at society, it will never hear or respond to Alan's aggressive and fruitless pleas for attention.

Alan's sign systems are more closely related to poetic language than to normal social discourse. His referents are grounded in the signifying system of the Symbolic Order, but, do not represent the logic or linearity of the Symbolic

Order. Instead, his language consists of imagistic metaphors which compare his state of being to horrible pictures of daemons and monsters. Often his metaphors break down which indicate how the language of the Symbolic Order does not provide Alan with the proper words or images to help him communicate. Thompson's use of sentence fragments, expletives and purposefully placed ellipses in Alan's monologues, as well as throughout the rest of the play, illustrates the breakdown of language in these characters' lives. Alan compares his unstable identity as: "Sometimes I even think of someone takin out my spine, like they do with them shrimp" (I,xi,49). The metaphor, although not accurate because shrimp have no spine, still manages to describe visually Alan's existence in society as someone who cannot stand up for himself because of the inability to manipulate social discourse. This lack of a backbone has implications when someone attempts to subjectively position oneself in society as it becomes difficult to take a position when one cannot stand up for who one is or defend one's existence. Interestingly, like Theresa who positions herself with her body, Alan, as well, uses, his body to describe his position in society, enforcing Kristeva's belief that instinctual drives and bodily functions play a major role in an individual's subjectivity. Despite the fact that Alan's images and metaphors break down, he still manages to

communicate through the words of the Symbolic Order and, in some respects, his image of the spineless shrimp is much more powerful and able to convey a more visual picture of his subjectivity than would an accurate metaphor.

As Alan degenerates he loses his grasp with the identity he wants so hard to solidify, and his images become destructive and disintegrating. In his monologue, the audience obtains a clear picture of Alan's diseased and daemon-like images. He describes his perception of the world as: "It's not like bein crazy, it's just like thinkin one thing over and over and it kinda makes ya sick" (II,i,50). His inability to understand or manipulate the language of the Symbolic Order is compared to the daemon-like snakes who chew away at his eardrum:

And I would keep thinkin it was like a couple of garter snakes with big ugly teeth all yellow, like an old guy's teeth and there they were the two of them suckin and bitin on my eardrum with these yellow teeth. Makin noises like a cat eatin cat food. I could even hear the fuckin noises. [makes the noise] Like that. Just made me wanta puke thinkin that - made the pain worse I'd think of their eyes, too, that made me sick, black eyes lookin sideways all the time while they keep suckin and chewin on my eardrum (II,i,50).

The snakes are not only daemon-like, but their teeth are described as "yellow, like an old guy's teeth". This type of diseased and rotting image becomes common throughout the

rest of Alan's discourse and represents the breakdown of his identity and subjectivity.

In his mind, his body is literally breaking apart. Language often cannot adequately describe Alan's breakdown and often he resorts to sounds, such as cats eating food, to illustrate his bodily disintegration. Again Kristeva's idea of the semiotic chora as instinctual drives and pulsions, like the eating of food, ruptures the language of Thompson's characters. Alan tries hard to bury these horrible images, but as he says: "...it's like pictures burning holes in my brain I try all the time to like put other pictures over top of that..." (II,i,51). The results of Alan's actions to "put other pictures over the top" are images which juxtapose innocence with evil and destruction. The innocent lambs in his monologue are comforting for only a second before they change into monsters:

Anyways I try puttin pictures of these baby
sheep over top of the cauliflower and I'll do
it and it's okay for a second then the lamb
its eyes'll go all funny like slits lookin
sideways just like them snakes and then it'll
open its mouth and there'll be them long
sharp teeth and a bunch of worms inside and
the nice little sheep goes all ugly on me and
the cauliflower comes back worse than ever
like it ate the sheep or
something... (II,i,51).

Alan, because he is unable to successfully communicate his internal feelings through conversations with other

characters, is, through the freedom of the monologue, allowed to speak in his own signifying systems. It is then up to the audience to decode what Alan tries to say and, because often his images are so bizarre and nonsensical, it is impossible, at first, to understand what he means. The reader/spectator must work at deciphering his language and in turn can empathize with Alan's situation in the Symbolic Order.

Alan's oscillating subjectivity, which seesaws between his semiotic chora and the Symbolic Order, is physically represented in the scenes he shares with the homeless Indian Man. The Indian Man represents a person whose semiotic chora has completely shattered the logical discourse of the Symbolic Order and is society's example of a mad individual. His language is destructive, with images like, "Don't burn the fish bones! Don't burn the fish bones!" and "Let's tear off a piece" (I,x,48-49), dominating the 'conversation' he has with Alan. The 'vision' he has as he speaks with Alan is ominous and, like Alan, he juxtaposes innocent images alongside evil images: "Devil-baby-eyes-devil-baby-eyes. Please. Please. Mercy. Mercy. Hand. Gimme your hand. Hand. Please." (I,x,48). The Indian Man pleads for help and wants to be released from the horrifying image of "Devil-baby-eyes". His attempt to free himself through an unsuccessful suicide attempt is signified by the stage direction:

"...[the Indian Man's] wrists bleeding heavily" (I,x,48). The fact that the Indian Man has attempted suicide suggests that he feels it is impossible for him to survive within the oppressive Symbolic Order; that it is impossible for him to communicate with others using a linguistic code that no one can understand or is willing to decode. Alan, however, fails to see the hopelessness of the Indian's situation and tries to help him. As well, the Indian does not ask for Alan's help to stop his wrists from bleeding, but instead asks for release from the horrible visions that he has. After the Indian Man screams a "death scream", Alan "comes back, takes off his own shirt, ties it around the MAN's wrist to stop the bleeding" (I,x,48). The irony, however, is that Alan with his sweater can only slow the flow of blood; he can never completely heal the Indian Man's wounds. The only release, of course, is death, something that Alan at first tries to stop. Alan does not yet realize that the Indian Man's position outside of the Symbolic Order means a life filled with delusions of reality and psychotic mumblings. As Kristeva explains in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, "Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either "exclusively" semiotic or "exclusively" symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (93). To communicate exclusively with the semiotic is to communicate

in a language that is psychotic and non-sense; the language of the Indian Man suggests the incomprehensability of the language of the semiotic. Alan eventually realizes that those not able to take a position within the Symbolic Order lead a life of madness and social alienation and it is this realization which prompts him to kill his mentally retarded son. In effect, Alan saves his son from the horrors he and the Indian experience. This is indicated by the final line of the scene when Alan shouts: "Dieeeeeeeeeeeeeee!" (I,x,49). This shout not only signifies Alan's wish to kill the Indian Man and all he represents, but it also foreshadows the murder of Alan's baby.

Thompson never makes it clear in the stage directions whether the first scene Alan has with the Indian Man really takes place or if it is a dream. The scene opens with: *[ALAN on way to work, stumbles out door. There is an Indian MAN on the street, his wrists bleeding heavily. He is ambling past ALAN. He is very drunk]*"(I,x,48), which implies that the scene is a part of Alan's reality. The stage directions towards the end of the scene, however, can be read as a dream: *"[ALAN jumps back to SANDY's living room where THERESA is asleep at his feet]"*(I,x,49). The fact that Alan "jumps" from one scene to the next could refer to his jumping from one level of consciousness to another. His seesawing back and forth from the semiotic, which is

represented by the Indian, to the Symbolic Order, which is represented by his relationship with Theresa, is physically manifested in his movements on stage. As well, this scene marks the halfway point of the play. From this point on, Alan begins to lose hold of his identity within the Symbolic Order and slowly begins to descend into the semiotic space which the Indian Man represents. The blurring of reality and dream-state also suggests the thin line that exists between consciousness and unconsciousness and illustrates the relationship that the unconscious plays in the day to day existence of the conscious. Like a crackwalker who walks the thin line between solid ground and the abyss, Alan walks the thin line between the semiotic chora and the Symbolic Order in order to establish his position in society.

The Crackwalker introduces the audience to Thompson's unique dramaturgy and unusual signifying systems. It becomes apparent after reading this play that the characters who use unusual and socially unacceptable signifying systems are from the lower classes. Society refuses to acknowledge Alan and Theresa's signs and, as a result, they are further silenced and ignored. The cycle of oppression continues as these characters find it impossible to manipulate the Symbolic Order to the extent which would allow them to survive in society. But Alan and Theresa are anything but inarticulate or non-communicative. They merely communicate

using another form of language. Their unity and subjectivity are established with a language that often borders on mad babbling with disunified sentences; a language which is reminiscent of child-like linguistic manipulation.

It is society's inability to decode their language which makes them appear fractured and split. In effect, the audience undergoes a fractured and split subjectivity as they experience *The Crackwalker*. Thompson, by using such a rich and unusual signifying system, off-centers the spectator's\reader's expectations of what language should accomplish. Like Alan and Theresa, who constantly experience a tenuous subjective state because of an unfamiliarity with the signifying system of the Symbolic Order, the spectator\reader also experiences instability and tenuousity within their own beings as they attempt to de-code the sign systems incorporated by Theresa and Alan - a sign system which relies heavily upon the semiotic chora as defined by Julia Kristeva.

The Crackwalker becomes the first instalment of the family trilogy. It exposes the lack of worth given to a child-like language and the lack of respect for people who use such a language. When Baby Danny is killed it is much more than a case of Alan succumbing to the societal pressures of being a father and husband - it is the death of the infant in the modern family structure and the silencing

of a language which reflects the hidden chora. The next play, *White Biting Dog* will illustrate how the patriarchal family suffocates each individual's desire to communicate at a base and instinctual level. It takes the family structure of *The Crackwalker*, (father, mother, child), establishes them as middle class and educated and points out that the problems inherent in the lower classes (miscommunication, fractured subjectivities and uncompromising societal expectations) are present even within those individuals who have the linguistic power to talk themselves out of any situation.

Dog, the deep drives, articulated through language systems based on disease and sex, corrode family roles. It is as if once cracked open, the patriarchal family unit is unable to maintain a cohesive organized structure - roles break down and language becomes meaningless in a world framed by the Symbolic Order. What results is a family drama that thrives on chaotic rumblings of instinctive drives and desires - none of which can be contained and controlled by the characters.

Rather than presenting her family drama as Neil Simon does - in a realistic, middle-class urban American way, which follows the Aristotelian rules of logical drama - Thompson presents a surrealistic, convoluted, anti-narrative view of the urban family. She distorts that narrative linearity so indicative of conventional playwrights like Simon, to create her own version of the modern family drama: a drama which Diane Bessai describes as "...an unsettling mixture of domestic black comedy [,] sexual intrigue, social deception and surreal dramatic action" (King 109). After the original production, Jaimie Portman saw the play as incorporating the "conventions of soap opera [and] filter[ing them] through a malignant and malicious prism" (C5). *White Biting Dog* is a prismatic refraction of conventional soap opera themes; the situations are realistic enough but the sequence of events and the characters

involved push drama beyond the boundaries of what is traditionally considered realistic theatre.

In *White Biting Dog*, Thompson moves away from the naturalism of *The Crackwalker* into a dramatic genre which may be characterized as heightened realism: a genre similar to that inherent in the works of American playwrights Tennessee Williams and Edward Albee. She follows in the tradition established by Williams and developed in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, which exposes the socially contrived identities within the patriarchal family unit. Thompson, however, not only shows how these familial roles are defined, by actions and reactions to other family members, she also illustrates how language contributes to an individual's conditioned subjectivity within the family unit. Whereas Williams largely depends upon traditional dramatic elements such as lighting, setting, props and characterization to deconstruct his family unit, Thompson incorporates her unusual signifying systems within dialogue and stage directions to show how the family unit is a socially contrived set of rules and identities. Her language systems, which are primarily based on cultural and political allusions, animals, disease and food, deconstruct what is usually thought of as "normal" family identities and successfully illustrate that social identities are constructs established by the Symbolic Order. The attack on

the roles of the family becomes an attack on the Symbolic Order, since the family unit is responsible for upholding many of the rules and traditions of patriarchal society. Thompson, with her deconstructive approach to the family drama, undermines the legitimacy and validity of the Symbolic Order and the family roles this order upholds.

The plot of *White Biting Dog* is reminiscent of many other family dramas; it is fundamentally about a young man's attempt to reunite his estranged parents. The process for such reunification, however, is far from that familiar socio-drama landscape. Cape, a young lawyer, is about to commit suicide by jumping off the Bloor Street bridge, but has a vision of a small white dog. This vision, presumably the white biting dog of the play's title, tells Cape that his mission in life is: **"TO SAVE [HIS] FATHER FROM DEATH"**(I,5). With this new purpose in life, he moves home to care for Glidden, his terminally ill father. Cape, at the urging of Pony, his lover and an ex-ambulance attendant, feels the only way to save his father from imminent death is to reunite Glidden with his estranged wife, Lomia. Lomia provides Cape with his opportunity when she conveniently shows up at Glidden's house with Pascal, her latest, younger lover, following a fire which destroys their apartment building. Cape, with Pony's help, manages to reunite the two parents, only to see Glidden die from the shock of realizing

that Lomia has only returned to him because Pascal walked out on her. Pony, unable to handle the stress of the confrontations, as well as realizing that the love she has for Cape is unrequited and that their relationship is purely sexual, commits suicide. Lomia and Cape survive the family disintegration and, at the end of the play, realize the extent of Glidden and Pony's unconditional love. This understanding, by two ego-centric and unfeeling characters who finally feel a genuine emotion, even if that emotion is regret and guilt, is the tentatively optimistic ending to *White Biting Dog*. There is a suggestion in the closing lines of the play that there is hope for these two characters, although Thompson provides no decisive answer to her characters' problems: "LOMIA looks up. Her hope shows in her eyes. CAPE just does not know" (II, 108).

White Biting Dog's plot may be typical of many other family dramas, but the narrative and the strange characterizations prove problematic for many critics and audience members. As a result, there are myriad readings. Thompson's bizarre sequence of events leaves people confused and overwhelmed. Critics often find the inability to label or classify *White Biting Dog* distressing; Jamie Portman dismisses the play as "pretentious garbage" (*Calgary Herald* C5), and Ray Conlogue, reviewing for *The Globe and Mail*, calls *White Biting Dog* a "comic romance" (E10). Mark

Czarnecki offers an explanation for Thompson's strange sequence of events when he explains that the first act of *White Biting Dog* is the deconstruction of "normal social and dramatic conventions..." (51). Czarnecki's insight is myopic as he laments the lack of narrative and is confused by the non-linear sequence of events. As a result, he calls the first act "boring gibberish" and dismisses the plot as "simple". Similar to the resistance expressed among critics to *The Crackwalker's* use of raw and coarse language, is the resistance among critics to *White Biting Dog's* postmodern form. Most critics recognize the peculiar use of genres and forms in *White Biting Dog* resulting in a nominal congratulation to Thompson and her unique, or in Portman's terminology, "weird" writing skills, but many critics, even after recognizing what Thompson is doing with the dramatic form, refuse to undertake the close analysis that such a play as *White Biting Dog* requires. They tend to pass it off as inaccessible and incomprehensible. Most agree with Czarnecki: "Judith Thompson has worked her miracles in truly mysterious ways, but she runs the risk that few of the congregation will stay to witness them" (51).

Other critics see *White Biting Dog* as something of a masterpiece. George Toles calls this play "[Thompson's] finest" (129) and is confident that, despite its chaotic progression of events, the audience is familiar enough with

the themes and structure of the play to follow the action. In fact, it may be the semi-conscious recognition of their own proximity to the characters' fears and desires that makes the play so difficult or uncomfortable for them to watch and read. Toles claims: "Before we have had an opportunity to analyze this structure enough to gain some distance from it, it begins to "heave and buckle" threatening collapse" (130). This "heaving and buckling" might explain Robert Nunn's declaration that "I have seen it, read it countless times, am deeply impressed by it, and it slips through my fingers like quicksilver" (10). Much of the admiration for Thompson's second play is paired with the confession that it is hard to comprehend. And this is what makes the play so engaging and exciting -- the inability to comprehend and grasp the images only reinforces *White Biting Dog's* nightmarish and dream-like quality. The images can lead to myriad readings and such a purposeful defiance of category and labels makes *White Biting Dog* all the more successful.

The spiralling deconstruction of the modern family in *White Biting Dog* begins within the play's dramatic structure. Although *White Biting Dog* has a two act structure like *The Crackwalker*, there are no scene divisions or time shifts. This lack of scene divisions signifies a move away from the naturalistic structure which Thompson experimented

with in her first play. Each scene in *The Crackwalker* represents a short "experiment" to show how each of her characters deals with external and societal forces. These "experiments" take place over a period of about a year. In contrast, time seems to be non-linear and non-consequential in *White Biting Dog*. The events in *White Biting Dog* closely resemble dream sequences, where linear time has no effect upon the action. Time displacement and image condensation in *White Biting Dog* contribute to the dream-like, surreal tone of the play.

Unlike *The Crackwalker* in which monologues provide the most dramatic and imagistic language, *White Biting Dog* incorporates Thompson's unusual signifying systems in the actual *dialogue* between characters. This incorporation of such sign systems, which shatter and rupture the more linear and traditional sign systems of the Symbolic Order, indicates a marked difference from the predominantly monologic *Crackwalker*. Thompson is able to move her characters beyond the isolation of the monologue into a more socially interactive form of communication, a form in which the characters maintain their own signifying systems. As well, the fact that the characters talk to one another suggests, as Diane Bessai points out, "an inherent connection between them" and illustrates a "connected[ness]"

between the characters, which furthers the dream-like and surreal tone present throughout *White Biting Dog*.

In contrast, many dialogic scenes in *The Crackwalker* indicate a mis-communication among characters - characters do not listen to one another, they mis-hear one another or are unable to understand each other's discourse. In *White Biting Dog*, there is an awareness among characters of unusual and bizarre language systems, but this does not necessarily mean they are able to decipher one another's codes. Their awareness merely shows that they can distinguish the language of the semiotic from the language of the Symbolic Order. In *The Crackwalker*, the thematic emphasis is on how the lower classes are repressed by social conformity; if they cannot articulate in socially acceptable language they are silenced and marginalized. Theresa is not aware of the inappropriateness of her language and Alan often mimics Joe's discourse in order to communicate. Both communicate the best way they can - honestly and innocently. In *White Biting Dog*, there is an awareness among the characters (due in large part to their middle class status and extensive education) of the power of language. They are aware of and self-conscious about the ruptures in their discourse. In an exchange between Cape and Pascal, Cape cannot restrain his true feelings towards Pascal:

PASCAL: How's it keeping, Cape?

CAPE: Yeah, yeah, Pascal, is that --ah-- scab permanent or is it there all the time? Ha Ha just kidding! We --ummmmm -- we were just -- ah --going for a stroll (I,23).

The polite salutation of Pascal to Cape is ruptured by Cape's interjection, "is that --ah-- scab permanent or is it there all the time". He tries to unsuccessfully silence his bubbling hatred with "--ah--" but it slips out. Cape then attempts to pass it off, self-consciously, as a joke until finally he collects himself with the "--ummmmm--" and finds an excuse to exit the scene altogether. The "scab" interjection is also characteristic of the play's disease imagery and accurately reflects the decaying and diseased nature of the family unit in *White Biting Dog*. This example of uncontrollable interjections, often interjections detailing bodily functions or diseased body parts, is characteristic of *White Biting Dog's* dialogue. It is as if the characters have no control over these subconscious articulations and they are constantly self-consciously apologizing for their verbal slips.

Despite the change in social class, the themes present in *White Biting Dog* are similar to those in *The Crackwalker*. In his review of the text, Paul Walsh recognizes these familiar Thompson themes lying under the disturbing linguistic decorum of *White Biting Dog*:

If the story of the mission is not just a pretence for the explosive confrontation of eccentric characters, then behind the straw dogs of excess that clutter the stage stand the familiar values of patriarchal authority, of duty and restraint, industry and patience, and, above all, responsibility and guilt (146).

The same social forces of "patriarchal authority" and "duty and restraint" so dominant and consequential in *The Crackwalker* are at work on the characters in *White Biting Dog*. The difference is that in *White Biting Dog*, Thompson narrows the social units and relationships down to one middle class family and focuses on how their relationships and roles become representative of a societal construction based on years of patriarchal conformity and social conditioning.

In *White Biting Dog*, the characters talk to one another in conventional family settings - around the kitchen table, over tea and toast, and on the sidewalk, but what they say to one another is hardly the stuff of family reunions or dinner table chit-chat. The first meeting of Pony and Cape gives an indication of how Thompson ruptures the expected polite talk of two people meeting for the first time:

(PONY is heard singing, off. She enters, continuing to sing until she notices CAPE when he says "Hello." CAPE speaks after he has heard the word "dog" for the second time)

PONY Your eyes do shine so bright and clear my
 dear my Queenie dear 'cause you're my dog my
 doggie dog I love ya sooo I always will
 'cause your eyes do shine so bright and clear
 my dear my Queenie dear and I hope you never
 shed a single tear my Queenie dear 'cause
 you're my dog my doggie--

CAPE Oh my God! OH my God that's it this is IT
 she's HERE-- (runs out of house) It's --
 it's-- a GIRL!! I guess an angel, kind of
 a... Hello!

.....

CAPE You-- (tries to keep her there) --name! Name,
 what is your name?

PONY Daid, Pony (hits herself) I mean, Pony Daid.

CAPE I'm Cape, Cape Race. Does -- does that sound
 -- familiar to you?

PONY Sure. I even been there. Are you from there?

CAPE Where? Oh! Cape Race? No. No!

PONY Well how come you're named for it?

CAPE 'Cause 'cause you know why? 'Cause I am the
 way the word sounds, I think. Do you --
 think? (I,13).

This exchange is a good example of Thompson's rhythmic speech patterns and how each character's speech pattern is different. Cape has a frenetic rhythm as indicated by the dashes, fractured sentences and capitalized words. Spoken aloud Cape's dialogue would seem hesitant, indicating an unsureness of what's going on, and confusion - which would

adequately reflect his mental state at the time of this encounter. His name, Cape Race, is an accurate description of how he manoevers in life and how he affects the people around him. The place, Cape Race, is known for its fog and navigational hazards. This geographical description accurately reflects the character Cape's mental state; before the white dog he is in a fog, unable to decide what direction his life should take. But even when he does receive clarity from the small white dog he is unable to navigate those directions without the help of Pony who serves as his beacon and guide. She is the experienced guide, able to help Cape fight his way back from the precipice of despair. This connection between Pony and Cape is furthered by Thompson's stage direction, *Cape speaks after he has heard the word 'dog' for the second time*. This is indicative of the mystical connection between Pony and the white dog he saw and heard near the Bloor Street Bridge. Immediately there is an indication that Pony is not merely "a girl" out wandering the streets, but that she is destined to help Cape with his new purpose in life. She becomes an "angel" in Cape's eyes and her innocence is furthered with the child-like song she sings as she enters. However, in the midst of his confusion he causes Pony to suffer and lose her way and, by the end, she is "filled by the worst evil...you ever imagined" (II, 107).

It takes Pony and Cape an extremely long time to get around to the conventional polite exchange of names. Pony inverts the order of her name, to present a humorous but revealing version of her identity. A pony is a small horse which is used as a pack animal and which can withstand harsh environmental conditions. The character Pony becomes a pack animal of sorts as she collects the Race family baggage in environmental conditions which sometimes become harsh and life threatening. Pony's downfall, however, arises out of the fact she cannot cope with the burden of guilt and hatred placed upon her by Cape. Someone as trusting as Pony is doomed from the outset of her involvement with the devious Cape and she foreshadows her own death with the simple inversion of her name - "daid, pony".

Proper names in *White Biting Dog*, then, become more than merely identification signs. Names become insights into a character's mental state or the impact s/he has on other characters. With a close examination of Thompson's naming strategies subjective unity becomes fractured and the family unit is dismantled. Pascal, Lomia, and Glidden all have names that reflect subjects in crisis or on trial or who affect other characters' positions in the play.

Pascal becomes the character who exerts the pressure on the family unit - a fitting purpose since one meaning of 'pascal' is a scientific term meaning the kinetic

measurement for air pressure. It is his relationship with Lomia which destroys her relationship with Glidden and it is his presence throughout the play which exerts pressure on the family structure and eventually causes it to rupture. His rupturing of the family unit is a progressive fresh start for the Race family. In terms of Kristeva's concept of the Symbolic Order and the semiotic, Glidden's death allows the family unit to break open and roles to shatter. By the end of the play, Lomia and Cape, the two characters who struggle to obtain some sense of subjective unity, find themselves in a state of subjective unity. They are at last allowed to drop the pretense of role conditioning and just be who they are. Without social barriers, they can finally let in emotion, something that was lacking in them throughout the rest of the play.

Lomia, the mother and wife figure in *White Biting Dog*, does not portray the stereotypical maternal figure. Her first rejection of the typical parenting role is seen when she cannot find a name for her new born son. Lomia named her son, "sonny" because as she says: "[his] squished little face didn't remind me of anything so I didn't want to BRAND [him] with..."(II,37). As well as indicating that Cape's role in this drama is as a "son", the fact that Lomia did not want to "brand" him with anything suggests that there is more to Thompson's naming strategies than merely marking

identities. "Sonny" also defines Cape in relation to her as he is **her son** and not as a subject unto himself. The link between mother and son was never quite broken as Cape and Lomia's bizarre relationship delves into the incestuous at the end of Act I. Again, their identities are not defined by the family roles they play but by their instinctive desires for each other.

Lomia's own name invokes images of "loam" and this connects her to her husband's terminal illness contracted from handling too much peat moss. Her absence from the family is as much a cause of her husband's death as is sphagnum moss. The connection to "loam" also points out the paradoxical role Lomia plays in the drama. When one is associated or connected with the earth, there is an assumption that one is giving, nurturing and maternal. Ironically, Lomia possesses none of these characteristics; instead, she is anti-maternal, selfish and superficial.

Lomia is suggestive of the term "lamia", a mythological monster who had the head and breasts of a woman but the body of a serpent. She preyed on children and sucked their blood. This allusion is reinforced with Pascal's revelation that Lomia keeps the "blood of saints" in "jam jars" in the fridge. He goes on to say "there's no room for milk" (II, 73-74), which signifies the lack of nurturing in their relationship. Lomia's role as the non-maternal mother is

furthered with Cape's line: "Anyway, chief, don't fret, that's not saint's blood, that's just nosebleeds. Our fridge use to be full of them too except we use to drink them"(II, 74) .

What type of role is Lomia meant to play in this modern family drama? Carrying such horrifying allusions, Lomia in *White Biting Dog* becomes closely connected to the Lamia in the Keats poem of that same name: a woman who has the outward appearance of beauty but in reality is a serpent¹. Lomia's paradoxical role is expressed in the character description: "She is obsessed with her physical being. She is often very shy and girlish as well as nasty and powerful"(iii). Her inability to establish one subjectivity becomes apparent in her interactions with other characters. She is unable to provide the maternal care that Cape so desperately needs; she is unable to portray the perfect middle class wife to Glidden; nor is she able to be the sexy older lover to Pascal. Lomia is not the picture of the all-loving or all-caring mother and wife; instead she becomes the "whore of Babylon"(II, 74) as Pascal labels her - a non-

¹Interestingly, in Keats' poem, the sorceress Lamia is exposed by the sage or guide Apollonius at the wedding feast organized by her husband Lycuis. In *White Biting Dog*, Glidden realizes that he, too, has been deceived into believing his wife will return to him at a banquet or dinner party. And like Lycius, who dies from grief at realizing his Lamia is in reality a serpent, Glidden, too, dies from grief when he realizes that his Lomia does not wholeheartedly love him.

maternal figure. The whore of Babylon is far from the perfect maternal image associated with other "family" dramas, either on television or on the stage.

The father in *White Biting Dog*, Glidden is appropriately named as he 'glides' towards death. The long slow decay of the father figure symbolizes the collapse of the family structure. The death of the father also signifies the decline of the Symbolic Order as the semiotic takes a more prominent role in this play as a form of communication. Thompson signifies this death with the sound of a skateboard heard off stage. The first time this sound is heard precedes Glidden's introduction to the audience, just after he recovers from an attack:

CAPE: Dad!
 (*CAPE pulls his father onto the couch. Glidden lies on CAPE's lap; CAPE strokes his father's forehead*)

 There. Just lie for a minute.

 (*Sound of skateboard is heard*)

GLIDDEN: What-- What the heck is that sound do you know I've heard it every day now for...

CAPE: That's a skateboard. Down the steep hill
 (I, 5).

The fact that it is Cape, the son, who points out the origin of the sound is important; in pointing out the sound, Cape is also pointing out that Glidden is dying. The son voices

the fate of his father and the eventual destruction of his family, despite the fact that he desperately wants to save his father from death.

The title suggests the deconstructive nature of Thompson's drama as well as connecting the characters in the play to the higher spiritual forces which underlie the action of the play. *White Biting Dog* seems to imply the white dog in Cape's vision as he is about to commit suicide. The white dog is a religious or spiritual symbol and it saves Cape from death and provides him with a mission in life. The spiritual and mysterious nature of the white dog is furthered by Pony's declaration that she had a white dog whose name was Queenie.

...I had a white dog, like that, she was probably the being to which I was closest of all. Queenie, and I know she had ESP in her, things happened all the time, and then just last month she died then I get this overpowering urge to come here? (I,17).

The name 'Queenie' suggests a diminutive being of a higher order, a ruler or monarch in charge of events but who has a child-like nickname. Queenie, the white dog never makes an appearance in the play, but her presence is felt throughout the course of action - from Cape's vision to Pony's psychic connections. It is as if she is responsible for the future

of all these characters. Thompson, by placing the Race family's future with Cape's vision of the small white dog and a messenger named Pony, shows her lack of confidence in the family members' ability to work out their own problems.

Pony's connection to her white dog furthers her connection to the white biting dog of the play's title. Pony is white - she is described by Cape as an angel, which implies innocence and purity. She is also associated with biting - in her final action as saint and saviour she consumes the three dead dogs, Hans, Erica and Gretchen(II,93). Finally, it can be read that the dog of the title implies that Pony is man's best friend: in this case, she becomes the Races's best friend and guard. Pony, through her association with her dead dog Queenie, replaces the White Biting Dog of the title.

Pony's role as spiritual healer is further enforced during her intial appearance. She enters after Cape sings a song "to the melody of Agnus Dei"(I,9). Pony is the saviour, the religious figure, the healer, in the play - she does, after all, own a fix-it store in a nearby mall.

As the healer, Pony's mission is to help Cape reunite his family with the ultimate aim of saving Glidden from death. In her role as healer, Pony literally becomes the receptor of all the family's secrets and sins. She absorbs these secrets near the end of the play when she finds the

dead dogs in the freezer. The dogs, Hans, Erica and Gretchen², were all killed in a horrible road accident and, as Lomia describes them, were: "bacchic, gobbling up each others' viscera, dying all over the road..." (II, 72). The dogs could be said to represent Lomia, Cape and Glidden - the three family members who spend much of their time backbiting and destroying each other. The three dogs were placed in the freezer until the time was right to bury them. Pony's description of her finding the dogs and slicing them up to eat presents a vivid and horrifying picture:

PONY: My white dead dog that I loved more than anything. She'd save me now even though she was dead. She saved me then and I knew I knew so -- I listened and she told me, she told me what to do and I did it, I did it yeah, I crept down the stairs like a burglar, down to the cellar and over to the freezer and I opened it whew! Cold air! And I took out my Swiss Army knife and I slashed the bags open and -- there they were! The dachshunds! Erica, Gretchen, and Hans, her dogs just lying there dead and I did it I did it I sliced -- off chunks of their fro-frozen flesh -- and I stuffed 'em in here, in the sides of my mouth like a squirrel (II, 93).

The names Hans, Erica and Gretchen, suggest a fairytale element to the play. Fairytales are noted for their nightmarish qualities (witches who eat children, big bad wolves who follow little girls and monsters who hide in castles and forests) and these nightmarish elements can be read into Thompson's bizarre imagery. As well, families in fairytales are often seperated or destroyed by wicked step mothers or evil fathers. This destruction of families relates to the destruction of the family in *White Biting Dog*.

The key to this image is that the dogs are already dead and lying in the freezer. Like the dogs, the Race family's fate is already determined and nothing can save them, not even Pony who enters with the sole purpose of helping to reunite the estranged mother and father.

The three dead dachshunds also represent the Race family's psychological baggage; however, Pony's attempt to absorb physically --that is to eat-- and digest that baggage in order to make the Race family a 'normal' and socially acceptable family unit translates into her own destruction. In an attempt to swallow the evil sins of the Races, she resembles a person with bulimia:

-- yeah, so so I run up the stairs as fast as I can and I get out the cake mix, Dominion brown fudge and I mix in the dogflesh and I put it in my hand I eat it and I eat it and I eat it till I almost faint, till it's coming out my tear ducts but I don't care! I don't care, eh, 'cause I feel good, I feel clean.... (II,93).

This sociological disease is an accurate metaphor for Thompson's portrayal of the modern family. Pony literally splits apart in her attempt to swallow down the hurt and hate of the Races. Even a vessel as pure and clean as Pony is at the beginning of the play cannot absorb that much psychological distress without undergoing severe physical

reactions. With this verbal barrage, Pony represents the Kristevan concept of the abject; that person who is attracted to something but also repulsed at the same time. She is attracted to Cape and his family situation and tries desperately to help him reunite his parents. At the same time, she is repulsed with herself and the evil person she becomes as she tries to help Cape. Her repulsion for her situation is manifested in her attempt to swallow the dog flesh and cake mix. With her binge, she hopes to stuff down the hurt and despair she feels as a result of Cape's actions. Pony's abject feelings towards the Race family also illustrates how Thompson creates a play whose language moves beyond the linearity and cohesion of the Symbolic Order. In effect, Thompson's language is abject; the audience is both attracted to and repulsed by Pony's images of dog flesh, puke and Dominion brown fudge cake mix. Her language challenges the boundaries of social linguistic codes and forces the boundaries of acceptable linguistic and dramatic codes into a chaotic and unstable space. Without the borders or the limitations of an acceptable code of linguistic behaviour, the Symbolic order fractures - a new space opens up: the space of the semiotic with its bodily functions and pulsions.

Pony's identity and shifting subjectivities are based on dead dogs. As she changes from innocence to "badness", as

she calls it in her final monologue, the dogs also change from Queenie the innocent and pure dog to the nightmarish, bad dogs, Hans, Erica and Gretchen. A sign system based on dogs also helps develop Glidden's shifting subjectivities. Lomia's "pet" name for her husband is "pooch". This name signifies, not only his relationship to the white biting dog of the title and all that it implies, but, as well, "pooch" also signifies how Lomia views Glidden; as a pet rather than as an equal partner in their relationship. Such a derogatory view of the family patriarch deconstructs the notion that the father and husband of the nuclear family is the head of the household. Glidden further enforces this perverted view of the father figure when he enters at the end of Act I:

(There is a knock knock knock at the door. CAPE opens it. It is GLIDDEN, drunk, on all fours with a big bone in his mouth. He drops it, and speaks, a la Churchill)

GLIDDEN: Rally up Australia... There's a great work to be done... A nation, to be built up...and won...underneath...this...southern...sun (to LOMIA) Eh? How 'bout it, toots? Give a dog a bone, eh? Give a dog a bone!! (to audience) Ohhh I do like a well-turned ankle! (I, 57).

This episode also reveals the desperation Glidden feels at having his role as father/husband shattered. He is, in his Churchillesque voice, attempting to take on the role of leader - a position he cannot assume while he is merely

'Glidden'. He must acquire another voice in order to project an image of the patriarchal, colonial, domineering leader. Glidden's desperation for a self identity is further reinforced with his demand on Lomia later in Act II. Glidden says: "*(pulls her onto his knee; in a funny voice)* Get in your place woman!! That always gets a rise out of her!"(II,69). Again the spectator/reader sees Glidden asserting the typical patriarchal role, but again in a "funny voice" which implies that such a role is not the true Glidden speaking. This contrived identity again reinforces Thompson's idea that such a patriarchal role is a social construction and that the nuclear family with its stereotypical mother, father, son, daughter is equally a construction. As well, the Australian reference enforces his desire to return to a time when "men were men" - when they had definite roles in society; as the explorers, leaders and colonizers of nations. Throughout the play, his reference to the 1950s and 1960s enforces his desperate attempt to regain those days when the father/husband was the perceived leader of the family. He enters at one point singing a Herb Alpert love song; at another point he calls Lomia "A real Lucille Ball..."(II,69); both references imply a simpler society where male and female roles are well defined and maintained and where the nuclear family was a strong institution.

But Glidden's attempt at positioning himself in these "leader" type roles is subverted by the image of him as a dog. Despite the references to strong men and nation builders, he is still Lomia's "pet pooch" and he has difficulty finding a definite role as father/husband throughout the play. Cape furthers this identity crisis with his own inability to give Glidden a definite name. He calls Glidden "Daddy", "father", "Pop" at various points in the play. At one point Cape says: "D-duh-Father? Da-Daddy what are you--" (I,8). As well as enforcing the inability of Glidden to assume a secure identity in his son's eyes, this statement can also be read as Cape asking his father "What [or who] ~~are~~ you?" (I,8), and this furthers Thompson's deconstruction of the typical family roles.

Thompson's language throughout *White Biting Dog* does challenge each character's subjective position and forces the audience to re-evaluate what, exactly, familial roles are suppose to determine. Kristeva's theory of the subject in process and the oscillating subjective positions which this theory includes can be seen in the stage signs of *White Biting Dog*. A study of the characters' names reveals the splitting apart of the unit. A rupturing or splitting of their subjective unities can also be seen in Thompson's unique dramaturgy. Such visual additives to a script where language already instigates a heightened sensory response

from the audience, increases the subconscious and dream-like state of Thompson's script. Stage signs such as setting, props and lighting help physically represent a family in crisis. Thompson, with her imaginative stage signs, pushes the boundaries of realistic theatre into an area which can only be characterized as surreal and bizarre.

One of the most dominant stage signs in *White Biting Dog* is Cape's incessant drumming. Drumming opens the play and creates a dream-like state on stage and among the audience: "It is dark on stage. CAPE is drumming on his bongo drums" (I,1). But Cape is not an attentive drummer. His lack of focus at drumming is illustrated by the later stage directions, "He reaches a peak, stops, doubting the reason for drumming, starts again, then stops" (I,1). Beating on bongo drums suggests keeping time or providing a backbeat to other movements, either physical, musical or lyrical, descriptions that reflect Kristeva's view of the semiotic as a musical or rhythmic space rather than a linear and ordered space, such as that space represented by the Symbolic Order. But this play does anything but follow an established rhythm. Its pace constantly breaks and jars the expectations associated with a family drama; the play's action constantly confronts the audience. These confrontations begin at the beginning of the play when Cape, "steps a few steps towards the audience, hands and body shy, but with a lot of

energy." (I,1). Cape forces the audience to engage in the action of the play by breaking the fourth wall and combining the stage space with the audience space. This is indicative of Thompson's style, as she frequently breaks down the boundaries between audience and performers. In *The Crackwalker*, the boundaries were broken with each character's monologues as they addressed the audience physically as well as with their dialogue. With such intrusions upon the audience's space, Thompson shows that the characters in *The Crackwalker*, despite existing in a different social class from the conventional theatre goer, still have a lot in common with the audience. This idea is again explored in *White Biting Dog*, beginning with Cape's inclusion of the audience through his physical presence in their space, as well as the all inclusive drumming.

The drumming does more than simply create a dream-like or other worldly atmosphere on stage. Drumming also suggests the need to get in touch with a primal essence; something that is outside civilized human nature. Drumming immediately suggests the "Iron John" movement. This need for another, more ritualistic essence implies that Cape is not satisfied with his present identity - he feels he is not complete as a lawyer, husband or son. His emptiness is illustrated in his monologue when he describes his marriage and his eventual breakdown:

CAPE: ...Me, a lousy young...lawyer with a wife a wife who -- in the whole of four years of marriage I did not smile at her once. Not once! I had never smiled at anyone, really, except a baby once, on the street. I couldn't. I -- didn't have the...stuff to make a smile...rise up. It wasn't THERE. NOTHING WAS. Nothing was ever there -- for other people, do you KNOW what that...I could fake it, of course, it was simple to make the faces smiles laughter, lust -- I laughed so much, in fact, that I was...noted for my laugh (I,7).

But Cape's search for a truer identity through the methods defined by the Iron John movement is just as much as a construction as his role as lawyer and husband. Toles reasons that the drumming becomes a barrier and, because he "cannot hear over the ceaseless drumming din of his fraudulent personality", Cape is unable to follow the white dog's instructions to save his father from death. In this case, the drumming is not a manifestation of a hidden or primal self but instead becomes an obstruction to Cape's search for the way to family reunification.

Reunification of his family becomes Cape's single mission in life, but the Race family is in a state of decay and disintegration. This decay and disintegration is seen in the vivid stage imagery and stage props. The most prominent disease stage sign is Glidden's overflowing insides. Thompson describes Glidden as a man who: "... is dying of a disease contracted from the constant handling of sphagnum

moss -- gardening was one of his chief pleasures."(ii).

Glidden uses a language which illustrates the decaying state of his body and soul. He describes himself as, "a rotting tree turning into a swamp, a..."(I,5). Thompson, with Glidden and his terminal disease, plays with another convention of the family drama. In other family tragedies the parent figure can have a terminal disease which reunites the other members of the family. In Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Big Daddy's illness begrudgingly brings together the members of his family. Instead of coming together to offer support to Big Daddy in his time of need, however, the Pollitt family lie, deceive, and manipulate each other in order to acquire Big Daddy's estate. In Thompson's family drama members of the Race family lie and deceive in a desperate attempt to keep the family together. In both plays, there is a pretense of family unity, but in reality there is division and dishonesty which threatens to tear the family apart. Williams does keep the family structure together, even after the conflicts between family members have been exposed. Thompson, however, makes no suggestion that the patriarchal family structure will continue. Glidden as well as Pony, who may have helped Cape continue the family structure with marriage, is dead at the end of the play. Lomia and Cape are left at the end of the play to survive as best they can and from all indications they will

survive. Thompson, with the destruction of the family unit, enables two characters to live as they should live, without the pretense and role playing that had previously inflicted and inhibited their relationship.

Thompson, however, goes beyond language to show her audience how a diseased family member affects other family members' lives. Instead of hiding the disease or making it visible only through dialogue, Thompson literally exposes the disease through the frequent stage directions indicating that "peat moss falls out of [his pyjamas]" (I,4). Glidden's terminal illness is not hidden from other members of the family: rather it is foregrounded and physically exposed on the stage.

This foregrounding and exposure of Glidden's disease shows the effects such a terminal illness has on other members of the family. Because the stage is littered with peat moss, actors have to deal physically with it, in order to either sit, move or interact with other characters. In the following interaction, Thompson illustrates how a prop like the sphagnum moss can visually show how Glidden's disease has affected his son:

GLIDDEN Nope, no, you know -- I think I'm going to die tonight.

(CAPE turns suddenly)

CAPE But you can't. You can't you have to fight
it Dad you have to kick and punch and...

*(CAPE is holding GLIDDEN, shaking him. Peat-moss
falls out of GLIDDEN's pyjama top)*

Dad I just don't think that's very funny any
more.

GLIDDEN Sorry... It's cool.... on the... stomach...
It's...

CAPE *(cleaning up)* ...I just don't think you
should do it any more (I,5).

Cape is not merely cleaning up after his father, but rather he is handling the material which provides Glidden relief from the discomfort of his disease. This clearly illustrates to the audience that Glidden's disease affects Cape in a real, tangible way.

The fact that it is Glidden, the father-figure, who is dying, is significant. *White Biting Dog* is about the disintegration of normal family roles, and the death of the father guarantees a dismantling of the patriarchal structure. The other character who would ensure the survival of the patriarchal structure as well as the continuation of the nuclear family is Cape. When his mother Lomia and her younger lover Pascal sleep in his room, there is a suggestion made that Cape's role as future patriarch is also in a state of decay:

GLIDDEN: Cape tell your mother you are happy to have her and her friend stay in your old bed for as long as they...
CAPE Certainly, if they don't mind the mould (I,37) .

Cape's bedroom is infested with mould, which suggests the decay of the contining family structure.

Food also helps redefine the ever changing roles of family members in *White Biting Dog*. As was seen in *The Crackwalker*, food signs help illustrate characters' inability to position themselves in society. In *The Crackwalker*, there is an abundance of empty calorie food. Theresa survives on doughnuts, french fries and cakes which may satiate her hunger but it do not sustain her health. In *White Biting Dog*, food signifies the rupturing and decaying situation of the family unit. Toast and cake become signifiers of illness and decay.

Toast can be associated with sickness and it can provide the patient a simple but nourishing chance at recovery. In *White Biting Dog*, every character has a chance to either accept or reject someone's offer of toast. Both Cape and Glidden reject each other's offer of toast:

GLIDDEN: ...Never too old or too sick for a bit of a joke! ...Hey, how about a piece of toast?

CAPE: Toast? No thank you, but I could get you one if--

GLIDDEN: Me? Oh not for me thanks. I'm for a bit of...booze. (gets drink) (I,3).

Glidden plays the expected role of parent and offers Cape toast but it is Glidden who needs toast and the recovery it signifies. The fact that Cape offers his sick father toast implies the nurturing role he assumes throughout the rest of the play. Cape desperately tries to nurture his father back to health in the hopes that his family will also be restored. The fact that Glidden rejects the offer of help and care and wishes to have "a bit of booze" instead, suggests that Glidden will never recover and that the diseased patriarch will continue to deteriorate. Booze and alcoholism are stereotypical features of the family drama. Thompson plays with this stereotype and sends it into absurdity. The family unit is disintegrating and no amount of toast, medicinal care, or alcoholic escapes will help its rupturing structure.

When Glidden is confronted by his ex-wife, his survival instincts are resurrected and he makes a desperate attempt to fix his family unit. Toast again implies the road to recovery, as Glidden offers a piece to Lomia when she returns to his house following a fire at her apartment building:

GLIDDEN: (*kisses Lomia on the cheek*) Wh-what a pleasant surprise darl I-I was lying in the sack and I heard your...mellifluous voice -- and I said to my-myself...I think a little...en-entertainment is in order but ah -- I-I guess nobody's laugh-laughing, eh, LAUGH! Will-will ah anybody have a drink? Piece of toast? (I,31).

Glidden's offer of toast to his estranged wife indicates his desire to "fix" the family unit, to provide a nourishing environment in which to re-establish his position as head of the household.

A last attempt at establishing his position as head of the household is signified with Glidden's last entrance in the play. He enters in the final section of Act two with a piece of toast stuck on a pronged fork, "*Glidden enters carrying toast on a fork. He holds it up and then offers it to Lomia. She holds it up for the duration of the scene.*" (II, 99). The toast becomes a peace offering and Lomia's acceptance of it signifies her willingness to try and make the family work. Unfortunately, she is not totally honest with Glidden in her reason for returning and when he realizes she has returned because it is convenient and not because she truly loves him he disintegrates and begins his final descent into death:

LOMIA When he first -- told me he was leaving I --
felt -- like a carrot! Headless -- cold -- I
thought I'd lost my power to hold -- to --

you know, enchant! I haven't, have I? I'm --
I mean I'm not just another middle-aged
woman--

GLIDDEN You're a goddess, darl, a sphinx, and the
best darn hostess -- hold on a minute, hold
on, are you saying that he -- left you?

LOMIA He brought it up--

GLIDDEN If he hadn't -- brought it up, then you
would still be -- with him? (*clutching his
stomach*)

LOMIA Oh Glidden, that's not fair, it's--

GLIDDEN Just tell me the truth, please.

LOMIA I wasn't myself when I was with him. I was
counterfeit, so it doesn't count.

GLIDDEN Listen to me Lomia. I am your husband and I
know you. Do you understand that? I know
about your...

LOMIA You do?

GLIDDEN And I love you. Still. Okay? (*starts to
go upstairs*) Okay.

LOMIA Where are you going?

GLIDDEN Just to get -- something -- don't -- go
away (II 102-103).

This exchange signifies the end of the Race family as
Glidden realizes that Lomia does not really love him. The
roles of husband and wife are totally meaningless and empty.
Lomia no longer plays the young lover because she thinks she
has lost her power to "enchant". Glidden no longer wants her
as a wife and she refuses to play the middle-aged woman,

which is what she is. She oscillates between what society thinks she should be and who she wants to truly be. Her de-centring is signified with her description of herself as a "headless carrot" as well as her fractured and incomplete sentences. Like Cape, whose dialogue is interrupted with dashes as he struggles with his identity and subjectivity, Lomia's dialogue here is interspersed with dashes and fractured syntax as she loses hold of her position in the family.

One of the most interesting stage exchanges in any of Thompson's plays is Pascal and Cape's game of catch in the second act. Here, Kristeva's theory of the subject in process is illustrated through a simple game of ball:

(Cape hears PASCAL approaching, whistling self-consciously. CAPE gets the three hard balls. PASCAL is drawn back to CAPE. CAPE goes to meet him and throws a fast one at PASCAL, who surprised catches it. PONY watches this scene from the watching place)

PASCAL: OWWW. That's like a belly flop but -- with the hands...stings--

CAPE Give it here. Throw it.

PASCAL: I -- I can't I can't throw, I'm terrible at it. Really you should have seen me in baseball games. I can't throw -- hand-eye coordination I guess.

(PASCAL puts the ball on the floor. CAPE picks it up)

CAPE: Why don't you try?

(CAPE throws. PASCAL catches. CAPE taunts him)

Daddy's little girl!

(PASCAL hesitates)

Come onnn-- Come on!

(PASCAL throws. CAPE throws the ball back, hard and quick. PASCAL misses it, but picks it up and strokes it nervously) (II, 81-82).

Pascal gets caught in Cape's power games and becomes another one of Cape's victims in his attempt to reunite Glidden and Lomia. Cape continues to dominate Pascal and eventually succeeds in breaking Pascal's outer identity to expose the inner subconscious desire of lust:

CAPE: Hey. Try to hit me in the head.

PASCAL: Why?

CAPE: TRY TO HIT ME IN THE HEAD.

PASCAL: *(rolls ball along floor)* If you -- do a headstand it'll -- get you right in the cortex.

(CAPE, looking at PASCAL, picks up the ball and throws it full force at PASCAL. He does the same with the others. PASCAL falls. CAPE gets him down. PASCAL, fighting tears, surrenders)

CAPE: What's the matter, eh?

PASCAL: *(whispers)* Why do you keep looking at me with that--

CAPE: Why... Because-- I -- know you. *(lies on top of PASCAL)* Yeah...I know you SO well, the way you looked -- what you thought -- you thought

about me...I know you, and I KNOW that you
love me. (long kiss) (II,81-82).

As in the game at the dinner table when Pascal cannot keep up with the language play, Pascal in this sexual game cannot successfully deter Cape from making him play the game¹. What is interesting about this exchange is that the movement of the ball can be seen as a metaphor for the movement and oscillating subjective positions of these two characters, especially Pascal. At first he resists the temptation to succumb to the attraction he feels for Cape with the excuse that he was terrible at games, "Really you should have seen me in baseball games. I can't throw -- hand-eye coordination I guess".

Thompson subverts, deconstructs and ruptures the expectations associated with family dramas in her spiralling and chaotic *White Biting Dog*. The innocence and honesty of *The Crackwalker* are left behind for a style and tone that is malicious, confusing and surreal. Linear narrative, plot development and conventional character creation are clearly not Thompson's concern in *White Biting Dog*. The language in *White Biting Dog* is the key to a greater comprehension of the play. The ruptures and shifts within the play represent

¹Pascal's inability to partake in the Race's games is reminiscent of Honey and Nick's inability to partake in George and Martha's games in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*.

the shifting subjectivities present within each character and each audience member and can be defined by the Kristevan concept of the subject in process. No one person can represent what society has termed the 'normal' family member and no family is 'normal' or as contrived as the families on a television drama or in a Neil Simon play. Rather, each member of a family becomes like Pony in the following speech, aptly titled 'White Biting Dog'. In this speech, she cannot hang onto an one established identity, but instead shifts and sways from one subjectivity to another:

PONY: Umm -- this speech is called the White Biting Dog on account of that's what my dog is. That's Queenie so um -- here goes -- Linda! We all know you like Randy, you don't have to talk to him-- Excuse me Miss Birdsall -- anyways, something about that dog. I'm so close with her I almost am her, although I'm not as good a barker, ha ha and um I never bite, just jorshin', I mean -- uh oh, that was supposed to come later oh cripe, I did this, Miss, I just oh geep I have to sit down (I, 47).

This speech can be read as a microcosm of the play *White Biting Dog*, with all its shifts, ruptures, self-conscious interjections and unsaids which help create the subjects in process of all five characters.

In *The Crackwalker*, Thompson points out the problems marginalized individuals have manipulating the socially acceptable codes of the Symbolic Order. As a result of the

inability of Theresa and Alan to define successfully themselves in these acceptable codes, they are silenced and oppressed. They have no hope of fulfilling their desire to maintain a traditional family role such as father or mother, husband or wife. The family is again the subject on trial in *White Biting Dog*. This time, however, Thompson presents a picture of a family already established. But, like the characters in *The Crackwalker*, the characters in *White Biting Dog* cannot hide behind the socially constructed roles forever. It is their bubbling subconscious desires and fears or the semiotic pre-linguistic urges, which eventually rupture the family structure and cause it to disintegrate. The Symbolic Order and the patriarchy cannot contain these drives and, as a result, the most patriarchal system of all, the family unit, cracks and collapses. What is left at the end of the play, after the death of the father, is a family unit in chaos but free to explore other subjective expressions, now that they are no longer contained within the familial roles. Thompson's linguistic and dramatic codes become more sophisticated than her codes in *The Crackwalker* and even though her script is at times wonderfully non-sensical and absurd, the message that the family unit is nothing more than a societal construction rings clear. In the second part of her trilogy the father or the head of the patriarchal family is the subject on trial. The question now

becomes what happens to subjectivity now that the constructed roles of the familiar are disintegrated? Again Kristeva provides the framework for the possibility of an explanation as the maternal function and the third part of the trilogy, the mother, becomes significantly important in shaping characters' subjectivity in *I Am Yours*.

Chapter 3

I Am Yours: The Maternal Function

Your children are only loaned to you, that's what Muriel said; they're only loaned to you for a short time...It comes as quite a shock to us, you know, us girls who been brought up to think family is our whole life and ya grow up and ya get married and ya start having kids and you are in your prime, man, everybody on the street smiles, they respect ya, you're the most powerful thing there is, a mother, with young kids... (*I Am Yours* I, xix, 150-151).

Loss and fear of abandonment are the central themes in Judith Thompson's third stage play, *I Am Yours*, specifically the loss or abandonment of the maternal figure. The mother-child relationships or lack thereof lead to a collection of characters who, because of repressed fears generated by intimidating maternal figures, constantly negotiate their subjective unity. On one end of the spectrum is Dee, who, because of a distant mother, must come to terms with the hatred she feels for her mother as she awaits the birth of her first child. On the other end of the spectrum is Toi, whose over-bearing mother, Pegs, controls his life and

child comes to represent her coming to terms with her past; Tracy Meg's birth is a rebirth for Dee as she is able to finally feel love for another human being without additional baggage. In Toi's case, however, Tracy Megs can be seen to represent his continued entrapment by his mother as Pegs encourages him to kidnap the baby from Dee.

Dee and Toi are reminiscent of other Thompson characters in that their actions are often based on primordial urges. Dee, at the beginning of the play, can be compared to Theresa in *The Crackwalker* in that she is dysfunctional and assertions of her subjectivity are based on her body. Her subjective state can be traced through her nine-month pregnancy, which ultimately results in the exorcism of her inner daemons.

Toi is ruled by the romantic notion of manhood and he sees himself as a knight riding in to save his princess, Dee, but as he says, "I want to be your knight with no armour" (I,viii,132). He desperately wants to be the hero but, like Alan in *The Crackwalker*, he does not have the ability to negotiate society aptly enough to be a hero in the traditional sense. Without the protection of armour, he is doomed in the fight.

Unlike *The Crackwalker*, which uses naturalism, and *White Biting Dog*, which has elements of heightened realism and surrealism, *I Am Yours* uses expressionistic elements.

Unlike *The Crackwalker*, which uses naturalism, and *White Biting Dog*, which has elements of heightened realism and surrealism, *I Am Yours* uses expressionistic elements. Thompson works within a tradition established by early expressionists like August Strindberg in *The Dream Play* and *The Ghost Sonata* and Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*. Like these early expressionists, Thompson puts her characters' subjective state physically upon the stage through lighting, stage sets, and stage props. Such expressionistic elements are present in *I Am Yours* and John Gassner's preface to Strindberg's plays could be a description of Thompson's third stage play:

The term [expressionism] embraces fantasy and symbolism in general, and is especially applicable to works distinguished by upheavals of emotion affecting our inner view of the world, distortions of thoughts ... and states of mind comparable to dreams or deliriums in which appearance, time and space lose cohesion or continuity (1).

As was noted, *I Am Yours* has a complex collection of stage signs which parallel the inner worlds of Thompson's characters - the more accessible consciousness which is responsible for the character's everyday subjective self and

the repressed unconscious. The stage paintings become representative of Dee's internal struggle between the hatred she feels for her mother and the guilt that this hatred creates. Dream-like lighting, tight spots or dimly lit playing areas, help create a physical setting which projects each character's dreams and nightmares. Other physical representations of repressed fears and desires are portrayed through a stage set composed of doors and walls, where locked doors and high walls suggest the two psyches existing side by side.

Time also "loses cohesion" and is manipulated by Thompson. Linear time is speeded up, as in the bizarre delivery scene near the end of the play. Cross fades signify a change as lights fade down on one painting and come up on a different painting, indicating the passing of a month in Act I, scene 16. *I Am Yours* is indicative of expressionistic drama, but Thompson moves beyond Strindberg and O'Neill in her language, which, as in her first two plays, uses codes grounded in modern day urban life. Toilane, Mercy, Pegs and Dee use a language that relies heavily on body metaphors, animalistic images, colours and nature. Like Theresa, Alan, Lomia, and Pony, all the characters in *I Am Yours* try to ground their subjective states in their bodies. This is again reminiscent of Kristeva's notion that the true subjective individual uses both the Symbolic Order and

another language that arises out of the instinctual chora. It is the negotiation or movement between these two languages which results in Thompson's unusual signifying systems.

Critics agree that *I Am Yours* is Thompson's most tightly crafted play. Diane Bessai believes that it is Thompson's best play and she extols it over the previous play, *White Biting Dog*:

In contrast to the convoluted and overloaded continuity of *White Biting Dog*'s extended dream-like exploration of unconscious will turned in on itself, this [*I Am Yours*] is a more formally disciplined play of emotionally rendered, often fragmentary moments (111).

These fragmentary moments, although jarring to an audience not used to such ruptures in linear thought and presentation, accurately reflect the subjective states of the characters on stage. But as Bessai goes on to explain, it is not the overt jarring moments which give this play its strength, but rather it is the subtleties at work in the script which push the play beyond pure psychological drama:

...for all its violent "waking" confrontations, the complexities of the erupting unconscious are evoked through the interconnecting subtext of metaphoric reference (such as the animal behind the wall and the locked heart) that bridges and comments on both levels of experience. This is at once more subtle and more suggestive than the overstated literal enactments of psychic disorder, in Pony's desperate gluttony, for example, or in Glidden's rotting disease in *White Biting Dog* (115).

Like Bessai, Richard Knowles, in his article "Redeeming Light", also sees *I Am Yours* as Thompson's finest play and points out that her subtlety and control illustrate her growth as a playwright. He says:

[*I Am Yours*] is considerably more complex in structure and world view, incorporating as it does an exploration of generational, sexual, social, and psychological gaps among a much wider variety of characters than does *The Crackwalker*, and employing a much more evocative and overt symbolic subtext. It is a deeply moving and extraordinarily sophisticated play... (41).

I Am Yours includes elements found in both *White Biting Dog* and *The Crackwalker*. The familial themes previously explored in *White Biting Dog* take prominence, but in a construction similar to that of *The Crackwalker*. The scenes in *I Am Yours* are short, and episodic, which helps construct the fragmented lives of the characters. Like *The Crackwalker*, *I Am Yours* relies heavily on individual monologues which help clarify for the audience the internal workings of the characters' minds. The monologues also give the characters the opportunity to communicate directly with the audience, a relationship Thompson enforces and intensifies with a ramp that projects into the audience. The cycle of oppression first seen through Alan and Theresa in *The Crackwalker*, continues in *I Am Yours*. In *Playwrighting Women* Cynthia Zimmerman notes the similarity:

...Structured much like *The Crackwalker*, *I Am Yours* breaks the unities, is composed of a series of short scenes (in this case, thirty-six), and is organized around powerful monologues. In both works the last scene completes the first while reinforcing the notion of circularity and repetition (195).

In both plays, the characters, specifically Theresa in *The Crackwalker* and Toi in *I Am Yours*, are caught in a cycle from which, because of their inability to manipulate the Symbolic Order and its language constructions, they cannot escape.

I Am Yours is not without the usual Thompson humour. John Bemrose, reviewing for *Maclean's*, says that *I Am Yours*, "...strikes new emotional depths, ...while surrendering none of [Thompson's] usual black humour or poetic intensity" (65). Bemrose accurately calls *I Am Yours* a dramatic tragicomic free fall that leaves [an] audience drained" (65). Like others, he commends Thompson's skill as a dramatist and writer:

In the hands of an ordinary realist, Thompson's plot would lead swiftly to soap-opera - a series of unlikely coincidences approaching bathos. But Thompson neatly avoids those risks with her intensely poetic insights (65).

Ray Conlogue agrees with all the above critics and describes *I Am Yours* as "[a product] of assiduous labour. It is tightly constructed, compelling to watch, without the obscurity of her last major play, *White Biting Dog*." (E14). The tight construction of *I Am Yours* means a move away from

the spiralling sequence of events in *White Biting Dog*. The two sides of the human psyche are more clearly demarcated in *I Am Yours* as stage settings clearly distinguish between the unconscious and the conscious realities. The broken speech patterns, the corporeal language and the ellipses and dashes used throughout the first two plays are not as prevalent in her third, more contained play. What is obvious in *I Am Yours* is that the two languages employed in a play - the stage language with its sets, lighting, props and sound and the linguistic language with its images and metaphors - work almost seamlessly together to present a disturbingly thorough picture of characters undergoing subjective crisis.

I Am Yours is about Dee trying to reconcile the estranged relationship she had while growing up with a seemingly negligent and distant mother. Her difficult relationship with her mother gives her horrible dreams which she describes as "the animal behind the wall". In Dee's desire to control and purge this "animal", she overcompensates and looks for self-fulfilment and love through physical relationships. However, she fails to repress those early childhood fears and constantly oscillates between love and hate for the individuals in her life, specifically her husband, Mackie. In one extreme emotional swing which borders on psychosis, she asks Mackie to leave her and never come back. Still in search of love

and to fill the void that Mackie's absence creates, Dee has a wild one-night stand with Toilane, the building superintendent. Ironically, it is this one-night stand, devoid of any emotional commitment on Dee's part, which leads to the pregnancy that eventually purges Dee of her repressed hatred for her mother. Toi, who has maternal baggage of his own, wants to marry Dee and raise the child with her, but he has to settle for trying to obtain custody of his unborn child. With the encouragement of his aggressive and powerful mother, Pegs, he goes to court to try and win custody of his child. Dee, with the help of her sister Mercy (who is all this time attempting to reconcile her own daemons which are manifested through the character Raymond, an apparition from Mercy's past who represents Mercy's search for love) falsely charges Toi with rape. Toi and Pegs, realizing there is no way to challenge the rape charges, steal the baby moments after she is born in Dee's home. Dee is taken to the hospital where she regains consciousness; not knowing Toi has stolen the baby, she searches the hospital nursery for her daughter and "sees" a vision of her child. Her daemons, exorcised in the birthing process, no longer prevent Dee from feeling love, even if the love she feels is for a child who is not physically present. The play ends in the motel room in Sudbury with Toi holding the baby and calling to his "Mum", a staring Pegs,

who appears to have had a stroke or died. Toi, unlike Dee, cannot come to terms with his maternal influences and ends the play the same way he started; with a sense of abandonment and fear of isolation.

The often traumatic strains that such extreme parent-child relationships can put on people is summed up with the title of the play. On the positive side, the phrase, "I am yours" suggests a giving of self. This is represented by Dee at the end of the play when she gives her "self" to her imaginary child. Although the child is not physically near her, the fact that she is able to give herself over unconditionally to someone means Dee is able to at last feel and give love, something that she struggled with throughout the play.

Despite Dee's eventual growth as a loving, all giving person, for most of the characters in *I Am Yours*, the phrase and the locket become symbols of their entrapment and dysfunctional relationships. "I am yours" becomes a kind of perverted, obsessive phrase that conveys the sense of forcing love on someone else. The phrase comes from the German phrase *Ich Bin Dien*, a small section of the poem read aloud on stage by Raymond at the end of the first act. The fact that the title is a translation is significant in that it signifies the convoluted meaning of the phrase. This phrase is not a love exchange, but rather it is a power game

implying "you are mine and essentially you are stuck with me". The rest of the poem verifies this, "You are locked in my heart/ The key is lost/ You will always have to stay inside it..."(I,xxiix,157). The fact that it is read at the end of the first act prepares the audience for the second act, which is about power. In the first act, Thompson establishes the various relationships and camps; in the second act, the characters test each other's loyalty. The locket, when Dee puts it around Mercy's neck before they go into court with the charge of rape against Toi, ensures Mercy's unconditional support for Dee in the court case.

Other ideas can also be constructed from the play's title. Cynthia Zimmerman points out the inherent themes of the play through a close observation of the title:

...the central preoccupation of the play is the parent-child bond: one that is not chosen. Originally it is the child who is to wear the locket that says 'I Am Yours' and each time the locket is given it is clear that to the giver 'I Am Yours' means 'you are mine'... The [German] verse suggests the self is a possession, a prized object imprisoned by the other (185).

The idea of imprisonment is furthered in Act 1 Scene 4 when James Brown's song, "Prisoner of Love", begins to play in the blackout. Love becomes a negative emotion as characters desperately try and force their love onto others. It is clear from Dee's and Toi's interactions with their maternal figures that they are not totally individual subjects, but that they are governed or controlled by a maternal force which either keeps them prisoner by being overbearing, as Pegs does to Toi, or by keeping the child at a distance, as is the case with Dee. As George Toles explains, it is Dee's constant struggle to gain her mother's love which makes her as unstable as she is:

Dee's profound fear of her mother's "inhuman" strength and her complete regression of a hatred for her that cannot be justified become entangled with the still arduous internal struggle to find some way of giving her mother a small form of love - or submission- that will appease her (126).

"I am yours" sums up Dee's relationship with Mercy, Toi's relationship with his mother, Dee's relationship with both Pegs and Toi. As Toles suggests, "The phrase operates as the formula of an evil spell or curse that somehow binds all the figures in the play together" (124).

If Toi's and Dee's maternal relationships are the key to their subjective crises then how is such a thing manifested through a playscript. As was mentioned, one way is through the stage landscape, but another way is through language codes. Even though Dee uses the Symbolic Order to her advantage (she is, after all, able to trump up a false charge of rape against Toi, using manipulation and the power of language) and is able to manipulate language to more than survive adequately and function in society, she does have moments in the play where her language becomes significantly metaphoric. This resort to metaphor and the type of images Dee uses can be traced back to her relationship with her mother and the repressed hatred she has for her. Toles says that "Dee [has a] profound fear of her mother's inhuman strength"(126). This inhumanity comes through in Dee's use of animal metaphors at key moments in the play. She uses animalistic and violent metaphors to describe her states of mind and her dreams: her orgasms in her dreams are described in a masochistic way, "I have these dreams, I have orgasms in my sleep, I wake up with my nipples hard but the the dream, the dream that carried it was so horrible, so horrible that..."(I,xi,140). The dreams become even more perverse and masochistic when Mercy suggests the horror within Dee: "...were you devouring Mummy's brains and spitting out her teeth..."(I,xi,140). Dee describes the

emergence of her animal from behind the wall: "Like a shark banging at the shark cage and sliding out." (I, xi, 140) and later: "...a lion, breaking through the wall a lion roaring all the stones breaking, flying, roaring." (II, xxix, 165). All the animals used to describe Dee's inner fears are aggressive, carnivores which are noted for their hunting and killing abilities.

All of these animal images become more significant when Dee's reaction to the physical presence of her mother is examined. The audience is able to gain insight into Dee's character through the speeches of Mack, who is able to voice Dee's inner fears. Because Dee is unable or unwilling to talk about her hidden fears, Mack becomes her mouthpiece. In fact, Mack becomes the person all the other characters confide in, because he is the most unified and stable one and the one who is able to decipher and interpret the others' sometimes strange language codes. He helps Dee see the physical reaction she has to her mother:

MACK Your mother, your mother. Remember the first time I went up to meet your mother; you were going on about how scared you'd been on the highway, how you would never drive on the highway again and your mother in front of all of us, your mother turned to you and said, "Why? Why do YOU want to live so much?" Remember what you did? Remember what you did?...Remember how you shook, you shook in the sleeping bag with me all night you shook with your head in my arms? (I, vi, 123).

Such an intense physical reaction to the presence of her mother illustrates Dee's inability to articulate truly her love to anyone around her without succumbing to the violent and extreme feelings that her language conveys.

Interestingly, it is her relationship with Mack which receives the majority of her psychotic behaviour:

DEE [crying] You're the only person I ever loved, don't believe me, don't believe me when I say those things I was just cutting my own face, really I love you, I...please?...please? Mackie, I am asking you with my whole being please...stay?

MACK Once more, and I'm gone, I mean it, forever.

...[DEE smiles. They are facing each other. After quite a silence they go to kiss very tenderly, but just as their lips meet, DEE speaks]

DEE Youuuuu sucker, you believe me? I HATE you, I still hate you, I was just scared to be alone, don't you get it, I'm using you I'M USING YOU, YOU WIMP. [she starts to hit him across the face] You suck, you suck, you suck, get out, get out, get out. [she pushes him physically] Get out! Go!!...[MACK leaves] No, stay! Please stay, please stay! Go! Get out, get out! Stay! Go! [she puts her head back and wails] MAAAAAACKIEEEEE MACKKKKKIEEEEE MAAACKIEE.

[As DEE wails 'MAAACKIE' we hear a siren, louder and louder. She collapses onto the floor]

MAACKKKKIE what's happening to me?
MAAACKIE MAACKIE MACKIE (I,vi, 126-127).

She decides on one action but then another one ruptures that train of thought and takes over until another emotion bubbles up to take that one over and so on. She literally becomes the extreme of the Kristevan subject on trial, with repressed feelings rupturing her Symbolic discourse a little too violently so that the two languages cease to sit side by side but rather fight for articulatory control. Love and hate overlay one another to create a subjective crisis in a character who is unable to come to terms with either. With animalistic and violent metaphors, the repressed hatred for her mother becomes too overpowering and inhibits Dee's connection with Mack - the one person she could love and depend on to help her out of her crisis.

As Cynthia Zimmerman notes, Mack is the "compassionate" (198) individual and his understanding of and insight into Dee's animal behind the wall allows him to succinctly describe how he sees her internal daemons. He accurately connects her psychological problems to her fear of her mother. He points out that Dee physically shook all night after visiting her mother (I,vi,123). Mack's ability to recognize Dee's psychosis, and more importantly, to articulate that psychosis for the audience, makes him an

important character in the play, as he becomes the audience's messenger - a fact Thompson reinforces by having him come out onto the ramp, which places him in direct contact with the audience. The fact that he owns a bookstore symbolizes his awareness of language and his "bee" monologue becomes a commentary on the two psyches at work in the play. He is the one who can distinguish between the semiotic at work underneath the Symbolic Law:

[MACK comes out on ramp the same way TOILANE did, addressing the audience.]

MACK First just one, buzzing around, then two, three we barely notice, then wham! someone gets stung, somethings going on - what, what is it? ... and there standing there, six feet high, there, this... honeycomb, dripping, drenched, pouring out ...honey into the store, this...structure...thousands of bees, fifty thousand BEES, living there all the time, serving the queen, all the time, while we, on the other side - doing cash, taking inventory - these bees were building, building, making. The pest people, they get this SPRAY, this green shit and they carve these
 HOLES in it
 They CARVE
 Her fear about things...behind walls?
 Her...eyes? (I,xii,143).

The Queen Bee in the hive represents the maternal influence in both Dee's and Toi's lives. As well, the bees become symbolic for the semiotic, as it continues to survive and live underneath the conscious state, a state which lives by the Symbolic Law. As Mack says, the bees continue to make

their nest as the store clerks take inventory and do cash, things which allow people to survive in the Symbolic Order. This law represses that semiotic influence like the pest people exterminate the bees. Interestingly, the bees invade and build a nest behind the walls of a bookstore, probably the best representation of the Law of the Father.

Love and hate connect Dee with Toi, the other character in the play who oscillates between the all consuming love he feels for Dee and a fury to declare war on the two sisters to take his child rightfully. Toi is spurred on to such actions by his mother, Pegs, and, thus, like Dee, finds himself under the influence of his maternal figure. Also, like Dee, his subjective crisis can be traced through his highly imagistic and metaphoric language. Toi closely resembles Alan from *The Crackwalker* in terms of his language codes and subsequent inability to interact successfully with others. Like Alan, he uses metaphors and similes to communicate with those around him and, like Theresa, uses body language to express inner feelings of desire and love. He articulates his attraction for Dee through a description of her feet, "Hey! You got the most beautiful feet! I been meaning to tell ya I like the way they are so long...must be size ten, eleven, eh? [Dee runs away] I like the way they are so long!" (I,iii,120). His language then progresses to

pure metaphor and images as he describes the object of his love to Mack:

TOI I just want to tell someone, okay? I just want to tell someone that I seen the face of the woman that's gonna have my baby. She don't even know me, man but she gonna have my baby cause ever since I first seen her, in a white skirt with long leather shoes I felt something. GREEN get it? Like something GREEN like FLASH through our guts, together and I knew that I will spend my life, like interguttet with this lady, I KNEW MAN AND I KNOW that when we make love and I don't use that word lightly, it's gonna be like MAJOR WEATHER, I think you know what I mean like MAJOR VIOLENT WEATHER (I,v,123).

The connection Toi feels for Dee is primordial - he can only sum up her impact as GREEN. Green implies a pastoral, romantic connection with nature. Again, Toi sees his relationship with Dee as romantic, a notion which he voices when he sees himself as Dee's knight in shining armour. Green also implies envy; an emotion Toi feels towards Mack. Envy ultimately overrides his romantic vision and his primordial feelings override the pastoral, calm romantic vision. Thompson juxtaposes the image of green with body images, such as "interguttet", and their sexual relationship is compared to "MAJOR VIOLENT WEATHER" which implies a torrential or destructive force, not the calm, serene natural force implied by green.

Feet imagery appears again when Toi expresses how much he loves Dee. He uses feet images to show how much he wants to protect Dee. He says: "I mean...I mean...I mean that I would lie down on a bed of white hot coals for you to walk over, right on my back"(I,viii,132). He describes their eventual union to Mack by saying "I'm gonna hold her till she's nothing but a warm puddle under my feet"(I,v,123). The heroic image of saving Dee from a bed of hot coals gives way to the more all consuming image of the warm puddle. Again, nature provides the basis for Toi's language and, like Theresa in *The Crackwalker*, who often used childlike images such as "pooh", Toi uses the childlike image of a warm puddle to suggest the control he wishes to have over Dee. He wants her to succumb to his presence, which again enforces the themes implicit in the title. "Warm puddle" also conjures up images of the labour process, which foreshadows the bizarre delivery scene later in the play - a scene where Dee is totally under the control of Toi and Pegs. Such an all-encompassing relationship between Toi and the object of his love, also, echoes the relationship he has with his mother except, in that case, it is Toi who is the warm puddle and Pegs who has control. Unfortunately, Toi is unable to make such a relationship happen with Dee because of the language barrier. His metaphors may accurately describe his feelings towards Dee but they are ineffective

against someone who can manipulate the Symbolic Order as well as Dee can.

It is interesting that the foot connection can be traced to Pegs, his mother, who says on her first entrance in the play, "You gotta do something about those socks, Toi, all the men in this family have bad feet." (I,vii,127). The connection between feet and Pegs is made clear through this exchange and the influence that Pegs has upon her son is enforced. The feet in this case are "bad feet" not the lovely long feet that Toi sees as Dee's main feature, and interestingly, it is the men who have bad feet; Toi follows in the footsteps of his father and other relatives as his feet become a metaphor for the questionable choices he makes in his life.

Dee's and Toi's subjective crises can be traced through the collection of vivid and revealing stage signs. *I Am Yours* marks Thompson's progression as a playwright by her controlled ability to incorporate these stage signs into a seamless presentation. This type of dramaturgy is characteristic of expressionism, where the inner psychological landscapes are physically represented on stage through lighting, staging and sets. But unlike Glidden's rotting insides, or his therapeutic sphagnum moss or Cape's and Pascal's game of ball, the stagecraft of *I Am Yours* is less shocking and more contained. The stage signs in *I Am*

Yours become a physical landscape of inner desires and rupturing emotions that parallel the characters' turmoil towards their maternal figures.

Physical stage signs further expose fragmented and shifting subjectivities. The most obvious stage signs to do this are Dee's canvas paintings, which rupture the action of the play and offer insights into the progression of Dee's internal turmoil. In addition, the stage paintings are another signal to the audience of shifts in Dee's continuing battle for subjective unity. The first stage painting is a fingerpainting made by Dee and described as "...a large black blob, in a frenzied attempt to depict the animal behind the wall" (I,vi,123). This painting appears before Dee becomes pregnant, but the "frenzied" description illustrates her desperate need to control her "animal". She does realize that the daemons lead her to violent psychotic exchanges with others, such as the one she has with Mack in the scene which opens with the above stage directions. However, Thompson connects Dee's inner daemons with her mother's influence as the next stage painting points to a shift in her subjective crisis. Thompson shifts from the Symbolic to the semiotic. The black blob progresses to "...a black line inside a brilliant yellow circle..." (I,xiii,142). This stage painting, representing the pregnancy test that Dee just underwent, is a vivid and startling stage sign meant to

express physically the beginning of Dee's subjective crisis. Only Dee and the canvas are lit at this point, and for the audience this would be a very clear sign that not only is Dee pregnant, but, because it is a stage painting and connected to the first one, this pregnancy will seriously influence how Dee deals with her daemons.

For the rest of the play, the stage painting oscillates between "[a] grotesque painting of a ten-week-old fetus" (I,xv,143) to "a beautiful one of a four-month fetus" (I,xvi,146) and each time the description foreshadows scenes where Dee either controls her daemons and loses herself totally in the semiotic realm or succumbs to their power and loses hold of the Symbolic Order. As Kristeva points out, to immerse oneself totally in the semiotic means a total degeneration into insanity. The most interesting stage description which incorporates a stage painting is in Act I, Scene 16, when "[a] grotesque painting of a three month fetus is replaced by a beautiful one of a four-month fetus". It would appear from the stage direction that there could be a crossfade from one painting to another, indicating time passing. Through one lighting change and two paintings, the audience is signalled that Dee is ready to accept the challenge of the pregnancy. The change from "grotesque" to "beautiful" also indicates Dee's subjective shift, she has regained control of her daemons and can use the pregnancy to

her advantage. In the scene that follows this stage direction, Dee asks Mack to come back and be a father to her child, which he does until the truth comes out about Dee and Toilane.

The audience, during the play, becomes attuned to the stage paintings' significance, so that by the final painting, which is "*a grotesque painting of a nine-month-old fetus*" (II,xxix,164), there is another shift in Dee's subjective state. In the following scene Dee has to face literally her inner fears of motherhood as she goes through the labour process - a process that is characterized by ruptures, as one being is detached and delivered from another being. It is the delivery and becoming a mother herself which frees Dee of the hatred she has for her mother. There is a connection between mothers which Kristeva explains:

By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother, she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself. She thus actualizes the homosexual facet of motherhood, through which a woman is simultaneously closer to her instinctual memory, more open to her own psychosis, and

consequently, more negatory of the social,
symbolic bond (*Desire in Language* 239).

At the end of the play, it does not matter that Dee only imagines she sees her child; the most important thing is that through her pregnancy and labour she was able to confront her psychosis and come to understand the hatred she had for her mother. The process is finished and her subjective crisis is over.

Complementing the physical stage signs is a collection of sound signs that provide signals to the audience of changing states of mind and also enforce the idea of lost childhoods and memory displacements. Sounds can provide for the audience a sense of rhythm, as is the case with Mack and Mercy "chopping green peppers, hard on large wooden block" (I,xviii,148). Other sound cues are meant as ruptures, as is the case with the sirens. The first siren occurs early in Act I when Dee goes through her psychotic episode with Mack; "As Dee wails 'MAAACKIE' we hear a siren, louder and louder. She collapses onto the floor" (I,vi,127). Sirens can indicate emergencies, wars, air raids, or help. In Dee's case, the siren signifies Dee's call for help, as she can no longer control her rapidly deteriorating subjective state. The siren also links the previous scene with the Pegs' introduction into the play. Now the siren takes on the added

significance of a warning siren as Pegs is the force in the play who demands people get out of her way or else be consumed by her will. This is further established in Act II when Pegs spurs Toilane into action against Dee and Mercy:

TOI I will...I will... I WILL DE...CLARE WARRRR!

[the siren starts up now, the same siren that sounded when DEE was screaming earlier]

I DE...CLARE...WARRRR!

I DE...CLARE...WARRRR!

I DE...CLARE...WARRRR! (II,xxiii,160).

This time the siren becomes a call to action and acts as an audible indication of that. Toilane's unwillingness to act has been shattered by Pegs. This indicates his shift to action, but unlike Dee, whose shifts in subjectivity are progressive in liberating her from her repressed baggage, Toilane's shifts do nothing more than enforce the influence and control Pegs has over him.

The inability or ability to face repressed fears is further made clear to the audience with the slamming of and knocking on doors. The first sound that is heard is "the slam of the door" (I,ii,119) as it slams on the collective nightmare that Dee and Toilane are sharing at the opening of the play. The slamming of the door suggests the slamming down of repressed memories and fears which both Dee and Toilane struggle to control. This is indicated in the stage

directions immediately following Dee's door slam: "*DEE in her apartment, has also been having the same dream, but she can be willing 'the creature' that torments her imagination to stay behind the wall, and not enter her being*" (I,ii,119). The door slamming at the top of the play indicates an unwillingness of both parties to deal with their inner fears and provides for the audience a sound cue which clearly defines a picture of two characters undergoing internal distress.

Doors slamming signify a closure between two spaces; closed doors and knocking express a desire of someone to enter another person's internal space. The knocking episodes signal to the audience that there is a turning point happening in the play. There is a lot of entering through doors in *I Am Yours* and a lot of the entering is accompanied by knocking. The most significant time when someone knocks and is let through the door is seen when Dee allows Toilane to enter her apartment after persistent knocking. "*TOILANE makes his way up to DEE's apartment. She is lying on the floor. He knocks again and again (I,viii,131)*". The scene transpires into Toi convincing Dee to "let her go" (I,viii,132) and have sex with him. It is here that Dee conceives and it is this pregnancy which allows Dee to face and finally purge the hateful and guilty feelings she has for her mother. In this case, the intrusion, although on the

surface it seems menacing and threatening (Toilane later becomes obsessive and a little less patient with Dee's avoidances and rejections), does help bring about Dee's eventual 'rebirth'. Each knocking episode creates a subjective crisis within Dee and forces her to face the repressed fears of alienation and hatred towards her mother.

Knocking is also threatening, as it is when Toi and Pegs persistently knock at Dee's door right before they confront Dee with the truth about her pregnancy:

[Knock, knock, knock at the door; repeats]

MACK *[joking]* Go Away! Go away!

MERCY I'll get it.

MACK No, I'll get it.

MERCY No, I'll get it.

MACK No I'll get it.

MERCY No I'll get it.

MACK Okay, you get it.

[MERCY gets it. It is PEGS and TOILANE. PEGS pushes MERCY out of the way] (II,xx,153).

In this scene, the knocking is accompanied by pushing, as Pegs and Toilane, once allowed through the door, become aggressive and forceful in their accusations. Here the intrusion of Pegs and Toilane into Dee's space results in a disintegration of the wife, husband, sister trio. It becomes

another turning point for Dee, as Mack leaves her, this time for good, and she has to face the pregnancy without his support. The knocking is also, by this time in the play, a signal to the audience that something is about to happen. This sets them up for the final 'knocking' scene, when Toilane and Pegs come to apologize to Dee for the trouble they put her through. This scene turns into a bizarre delivery scene where Toilane and Pegs force Dee and Mercy to go through labour in front of them. This is the end of the subjective crisis for Dee; as she goes through labour, she literally purges the repressed emotions from her psyche and, as she gazes to the audience at the end of the play, she is able to come, finally, to an understanding about her mother and, as Thompson says, "*She is infused with love*" (I,xxxv,176). Interestingly, in the same stage direction, she "*opens the door*". The door to her inner consciousness and repressed fears is no longer closed or locked and the path between the repressed fears based on the maternal function and the Symbolic Order represented by the audience is clear and easily negotiated.

Mothering, motherhood, and lost childhoods are all main themes in *I Am Yours*. Dysfunctional relationships with parents cause repressed feelings to simmer under Toi's and Dee's conscious expressions. The repression of the internal or hidden worlds of these characters is articulated through

unique language codes and vivid and striking stage signs. Kristeva's maternal function and the bond between mother and child become the guiding forces under the subjective unity of each character. Dee and Toilane struggle with their maternal relationships and, although Dee manages to purge the repressed fears she has towards her own mother by becoming a mother herself, Toilane continues to be entrapped by his overbearing mother. As in her two previous plays, Thompson uses a language based on primordial urges. Sex, bodily functions, body parts, become bases for language codes which reflect each character's shifting subjectivities. Like Theresa's "pooh" and emphasis on her body as a communicatory device, Toi and Dee often convey messages to others through body language, sexuality and primordial desires. However, the language in *I Am Yours* is much more accessible to more conventional audiences than her previous work, *White Biting Dog*, where there was more of an emphasis on the relationship between one's fractured subjectivity and the consequential fractured linguistic codes and surreal stage signs.

In *I Am Yours*, a stage language reminiscent of expressionistic drama parallels the linguistic codes and, because of the physical representation of the unconscious, the audience becomes acutely aware of characters' inner turmoils. Dee's disintegration of self and her eventual

a beautiful picture of an unborn child. The play's soundscape - knocking and sirens - echoes the unconscious will trying to establish itself in the characters' consciousness and actions. What makes *I Am Yours* such a tight piece of theatrical craftsmanship is Thompson's ability to combine seamlessly the two languages - the language of the characters along with the language of the stage. The fractures and jarring shifts so prevalent in *The Crackwalker* and *White Biting Dog* make way to smooth transitions from semiotic rumblings to Symbolic Order logic in *I Am Yours*. There is more of a sense of the two languages existing side by side, complementing each other, as the characters in *I Am Yours* struggle to understand and survive their inner daemons.

Conclusion

Many of Judith Thompson's characters speak from their bodies; they speak with their instincts and use their bodies to convey meaning and to communicate with those around them. Cynthia Zimmerman explains Thompson's belief that the centre or core of each character is his/her blood and flesh:

The "blood" for Thompson is equivalent to Ibsen's "soul"; it is the core of personality, the essence of character. Her choice of metaphor ...is instructive. It points directly to the kind of spontaneous, physicalized emotionality, the gut-level responsiveness shared by her characters. Propelled by their unknown unconsciousness, unrestrained by an inhibiting ego, her creations are driven creatures, volatile and intense (181).

This "physicalized emotionality and gut-level responsiveness" exemplifies Kristeva's notion of a chora regulated subjectivity. Instinct becomes the basis for action. But each character must also contend with the Symbolic Order; a world that does not allow for the chaotic articulations and seemingly mad ramblings that result from such an instinct-based subjectivity. Each character must find a balance between the chora and its instinctual rumblings and the more ordered world of the Symbolic Order. It is this struggle for balance which makes the characters Kristeva's subjects on trial and which gives Thompson's drama its tension and theatricality. If one allows the semiotic, with its rumblings and instinctual drives, to dominate one's life, then, in all likelihood one will be labelled a misfit and silenced, like the Indian Man in *The Crackwalker*. To allow the Symbolic Order complete control over one's subjectivity means a life filled with empty rhetoric, like Glidden's cliched ramblings and meaningless discourse in *White Biting Dog*.

According to Kristeva's language theory, the family institution is one of society's inhibiting factors. Inhibiting factors, including social institutions such as the family, are necessary for a regulation of the instinctual unordered chora and ultimately necessary for survival, but society has placed too much emphasis on these

institutions and their rules are too constrictive and do not allow for the repressed chora to be heard. What is so interesting about Thompson's plays, and what connects her to Kristeva, is the fact that she allows characters who have active and vocal semiotic discourse to have their say on stage. What they do say is often not what a lot of theatre goers want to hear - after all, society has spent a lot of time and energy repressing and silencing its "mad" and "delusional" inhabitants. Thompson's freeing of her characters' inner desires becomes the basis for her unique and disturbing language. Thompson further illustrates her characters' subjective struggle by creating vivid and disturbing stage signs which metaphorically expose the characters' inner conflicts. Thompson, through linguistic units and stagecraft, challenges the traditional notion of family and familial roles.

The Crackwalker, *White Biting Dog* and *I Am Yours* can be read as a family trilogy. Thompson works out of a family drama tradition that includes Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill and August Strindberg, but she takes her examination of traditional family roles one step further and shows how each family member is trapped in a role that he or she cannot live up to. As a result, these members fracture and split apart, due to the pressures of who they truly are and who society dictates they should be. Theresa's body language

and her instinctual drive for survival rupture the attempt by Alan to make her a wife and mother. She is unable to confine herself to society's social boundaries and ends the play the same way she starts; using her body to propel her through life. Alan, although more mentally mature than Theresa, is also reminiscent of a small child caught in an adult world. He oscillates between his instinctual drives and the more Symbolically acceptable position of father and husband. However, he fails miserably as a father and commits one of the most socially unacceptable crimes, infanticide. Following the death of his son, the see-saw battle between his identity as a father and his true, more instinctual self becomes too much and he eventually falls into the cracks of society. His semiotic chora completely takes over by the end of the play and he ends up sharing space with the Indian Man, a character representing the mentally ill and ostracized of society.

White Biting Dog brings the family unit out of the gutter life found in *The Crackwalker*, but the issues and problems associated with familial life are the same. In this play, Thompson points out that the patriarchal father is a diseased and decaying figure. Even though most of these characters are well educated, they experience problems with language construction and execution. They are unable to stop their inner desires and fears, and their primordial drives,

in the form of dashes, expletives, and metaphors, rupture the more socially acceptable language of the Symbolic Order. Family roles are constantly pushed to the limits through physical relationships, as son kisses mother, son seduces mother's boyfriend and son and father destroy the guardian angel, Pony.

I Am Yours completes the trilogy with an examination of the mother figure. Thompson presents Dee and Toi as characters who are unable to move beyond their fear of their mothers. The language in this play is filled with striking images of daemons and monsters, as both Dee and Toi try to work through their anger and fear. Dee manages, with the help of her pregnancy, to exorcise the hatred and fear she feels for her mother. Dee literally becomes Kristeva's maternal function, as the urges and desires associated with motherhood and pregnancy help Dee exorcise her fears. Despite the fact that Dee's new baby is kidnapped, the void created by this exorcism is filled with the love she feels for her baby, creating a mentally healthy and subjectively stable individual. Toi, on the other hand, despite the fact that he has Dee's baby, is unable to escape the control his mother has over him, and, as a result, at the end of the play, he is a confused, hopelessly lost, individual. Both Dee and Toi interject their socially acceptable dialogue

with images and metaphors associated with animals, violence and hatred.

Because Thompson is a playwright, one has to read her stage signs as an extension of the metaphors and symbols at work in her scripts; her stage signs illustrate the psychological landscapes of these individuals on trial and rupture the action of each of the three plays. *The Crackwalker* is set on the margins of society; the Indian Man exists on the streets and in the gutters - places Alan frequents as he degenerates into psychosis. Dramatic forms, such as monologues, become empowering tools, as each character is allowed a chance of uninterrupted attention to communicate as best they can with the audience. Stage images, such as Theresa's holding a disconnected phone and Alan screaming into a television set, depict the problems these two characters have communicating with the rest of society.

In *White Biting Dog* Thompson incorporates multiple stage signs to present her characters' psychological landscapes onstage. Spot lighting enhances a character's feeling of isolation, mystical lighting increases the surrealism of the Race family's actions and stage drumming provides a suitable "underneathness", as Pony calls it, to Cape's and her's mystical association. The most visible stage sign is Glidden's sphagnum moss, a cure for a terminal

disease that, ironically, contributes to his illness. The presence of moss on the stage means that the rest of the Race family, as well as Pony and Pascal, have to physically deal with Glidden's illness, a move away from the more traditional characteristic associated with family dramas where family diseases are hidden from the individual members. The audience also witnesses the sphagnum moss exploding from Glidden and this visual sign tells them that the patriarchal head of the family and, by extension, the patriarchal family unit, is diseased and rotting away. *White Biting Dog* is a confirmation that the socially conditioned roles associated with the traditional family unit are unattainable and that attempting to conform to these roles means a denial of more instinctual and primordial urges; urges associated with Kristeva's notion of the repressed chora.

I Am Yours completes the family trilogy with a study of the mother, more specifically, the feelings and desires of children towards overbearing or distant mothers. Thompson illustrates through a comparison of Dee and Toi, the effect a pregnancy can have on an individual's ability to confront and sort through issues associated with maternal figures. Dee and Toi both have to contend with maternal influences, and it is their struggle with the repressed fears and desires towards their mothers which propels them through the

play. The language, although at times heavily metaphoric and uniquely Thompsonesque, gives way to a stage sign system which visually reflects the fractured nature of the characters. Dee's inner psyche is traced through a collection of fetal paintings, and at the end she literally sees the light in a vision of her newborn baby, as she comes to terms with her repressed fears and exorcises her distant mother's control over her life. Toi, at the other extreme, remains under the influence of his mother and the affect of this influence is seen in the final scene, where he sits with an unconscious or dead Pegs, incapacitated and unable to decide what to do next. Like *White Biting Dog*, lighting becomes a central stage sign and isolates and heightens certain character's monologues. More than the other two plays, *I Am Yours* presents a collection of stage signs which physically present a collection of characters struggling with identity and subjectivity.

Thompson's family trilogy of child, father and mother illustrates how roles within a family unit are confining and restricting. Their struggles become struggles between who they are supposed to be, according to social rules, and who they really are, according to their inner desires, fears, hatreds and instincts. Each character tries desperately to play Barthes "language game" (*Elements of Semiology* 14), but each character find that their instinctual desires continue

to bubble and rupture their more socially acceptable language, making them examples of Kristeva's subject on trial, as they constantly negotiate between the Symbolic Order and the semiotic. Thompson gives the normally socially silenced and ignored a chance to voice their thoughts and dreams in a language that puts the onus on the audience to decipher and make sense of what they say. By doing so, Thompson places the audience in positions similar to those her characters inhabit - positions where a lot of effort is directed towards comprehending a sign system that they do not understand. In Judith Thompson's plays what is seen by the more Symbolically oriented audience as psychotic language and mad ramblings, are in fact, intricate linguistic and stage sign systems which present, through dialogue and stage images, these characters' hidden fears and desires.

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