

Restoring the Maternal Genealogy: Kate Atkinson's *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*

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Mother-daughter relationships have been among the key themes at issue in discussions of British women's writings. Many critics have pursued the way the mother has been placed within a patriarchal social context. Often combined with feminist and psychoanalytic readings, these studies of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women's writings have often seen the position of the mother as 'the Other.'¹ In her psychoanalytic reading of nineteenth-century women writers' literary texts, Marianne Hirsch points out that in women's fiction in the nineteenth century the mother is placed "into the position of silenced other" (52), obviously, within the hegemonic social structure. Hirsch goes on to write:

In order to write, nineteenth-century women writers reenact the breach that, in the terms of culture and the novel, alone makes plot possible. To do so they must separate their heroines from the lives and the stories of their mothers. Plot itself demands maternal absence. (67)

By referring to the daughter's—"heroines"—separation from the mother, Hirsch suggests that the daughter needs to find a way to get around the patriarchal definition of the mother within "the position of silenced other." According to Hirsch, such an alienation of the mother from the hegemonic society could cause a chasm between the mother and the daughter. The solution is "maternal absence."

Whereas the social structure of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries is to a large extent the context of patriarchy, that of the post-war Britain is more diversified in terms of class, race and gender. Post-war Britain saw a remarkable change in racial structure due to an enormous number of immigrants surging into Britain around the mid-century. A statistic reveals that the number of immigrant population between 1931 and 1961 amounts to 340,000; more markedly, it is after

World War II that not only Irish and other European immigrants but also the Caribbean and South Asian immigrants swarmed into Britain.² Likewise, the diversity in gender orientation, particularly in same-sex relations, is marked as the characteristic of the post-war Britain. As for the social class, an educational structure in the post-war British society helps the ascending of the status of working class as Brian Harrison points out.³ Yet, in spite of the diversity in class, race and gender after World War II, the role of housewives was still demanding: “On marriage the wife embarked upon childbearing, child rearing, and housekeeping—roles then relatively demanding” (Harrison 29). As such, it could be argued that based on those diversities the social context of post-war Britain presents an alternative form of mother-daughter relationships.

Kate Atkinson’s *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* (1995), winner of the Whitbread Book of the Year award in 1995, explores the ways in which the daughter struggles to perceive the mother within the context of post-war Britain. The novel opens in 1951 with the moment of the mother Bunty conceiving Ruby Lennox, the narrator and the heroine of the novel, and closes with Bunty’s death in 1992. Ruby, the youngest daughter of a lower-middle class family in York, strives to establish her maternal tie with Bunty in vain in the main plot while restoring her maternal genealogy in the footnote chapters following the main chapters. The main plot is set between 1951 and 1992; the footnotes begin with the 1880s when Ruby’s great-grandmother Alice gives birth to Nell, the mother of Bunty. A fairy-tale plot lies underneath the female characters’ pursuits of identity in the novel, associating Ruby with Alice, Nell and Bunty. Through the failure of the fairy-tale plot the novel eagerly seeks to link the post-war mother-daughter narrative with the earlier mother-daughter relationships.

This paper explores the ways in which Atkinson illustrates the mother-daughter relationship within the context of post-war Britain in *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*. By examining the way the footnote chapters are interwoven with the main plot, I would argue that Ruby restores her maternal genealogy by way of reconstructing her relationship with Bunty. The critical reception of this novel mainly focuses on Atkinson’s postmodern definition of history, for instance, by examining the dichotomous tension between “the personal and the political domains” (García 143), the “fantastic fairy tale and factual history” (Tolan 276) the novel demonstrates, or by arguing for Atkinson’s challenge to the conventional notion of family (McDermott 68). In this paper I will argue for Atkinson’s attempt at restoring the maternal genealogy through Ruby’s perception of her maternal bonds within the context of post-war Britain in *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*.

1. The Maternal Bond within the Social Context of the 1950s

Ruby and Bunty build up a problematic relationship from the opening of the novel. Ruby finds it difficult to identify Bunty as her mother due to Bunty's failure at meeting a fairy-tale plot. As a foetus Ruby does not like her mother's name: "Bunty' doesn't seem like a very grown-up name to me—would I be better off with a mother with a different name?" (11). She wishes to have a mother named "plain Jane, a maternal Mary . . . an Aurora, a Camille" (11-12). Ruby is preoccupied with the problem of naming. Hence, Ruby as a foetus cannot identify Bunty with the word 'mother': "Bunty's name will be 'Mummy' for a few years yet, of course, but after a while there won't be a single maternal noun (mummy, mum, mam, ma, mama, mom, marmee) that seems appropriate and I more or less give up calling her anything" (12). She then calls her mother 'Bunty' throughout her life. Not only is she preoccupied with the naming of her mother, but also with the naming of herself. As a new-born baby, Ruby fantasises being named "Dorothy" (43), reminding readers of the heroine in the 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, "Miranda" (43), of the 1948 film *Miranda*, or "Eve" (43), of the 1950 film *All About Eve*, all of which were fairy-tale names and popular around the period of Ruby's birth in 1952. These names suggest not only those cultural allusions but also "a wealth of biblical, royal, literary . . . allusions" (282) as Fiona Tolan notes. Through her yearning for a fairy-tale plot Ruby denounces to build a maternal bond with Bunty.

In the novel, Ruby encounters difficulty in accepting Bunty's negative attitude toward pregnancy as well as her name. Ruby rejects Bunty's dream on the night of her conception since it is far from what Ruby thinks the mother's dream should be. On the first night of her conception, Bunty dreams of "dust-bins" (12). In the dream, Bunty struggles to move two heavy dustbins, but loses control of one of them when she hauls it; the debris is scattered (13). The scattered mess in the dustbin implies Bunty's obsessive anxiety about her domestic duties including impending mothering. Ruby continues: "Despite the mess, the dreaming Bunty experiences a flush of pleasure when she sees how tidy her rubbish looks" (13). Bunty's self-satisfaction with her tidy rubbish suggests that she is striving with her anxiety about her domestic duties. Her dream continues: while she is struggling with the one dustbin, the other is beginning to develop the personality of her husband George (13); in the end, Bunty finds that "it's the George dustbin, grown into a lumbering giant and now towering over her, about to suck her into its grimy metallic depth" (13). Bunty's dream as such implies that pregnancy deprives her of her freedom and she loses control of her own life. Seeing the negative connotation which Bunty's dream

suggests, foetus-Ruby thinks: “I want a mother who dreams different dreams” (13). She goes on to impose her image of an ideal mother upon Bunty: a mother who dreams “[d]reams of clouds like ice-cream, rainbows like sugar-crystal candy, suns like golden chariots being driven across the sky” (13). What this dream suggests is a happy, fairy-tale mother who is ecstatic at the prospect of having a child.

Ruby’s difficulty in accepting Bunty because of her dream about “dust-bins” is strengthened when she perceives Bunty’s negative attitude toward mothering. When Bunty learns of her pregnancy, she is resistant. Ruby notes: “a terrible idea forms in Bunty’s head—she’s pregnant!” (25). Becoming desperate, Bunty then breaks a mirror into pieces by throwing a shoe (25). Bunty’s negative feeling continues after she gives birth to Ruby. When Bunty sees the newborn Ruby, her reaction is stark: “She takes a quick glance and pronounces her judgement. ‘Looks like a piece of meat. Take it away,’ she adds, waving her hand dismissively” (40). Her indifference to Ruby is repeated when she sees a-week-old Ruby: “[Bunty] never speaks to me . . . and her eyes avoid me, sliding over me as soon as I enter her field of vision” (42). Again, when Ruby’s sister Patricia is pleased to see Ruby smiling at her, Bunty’s attitude is thus: “‘That’s just wind,’ Bunty says dismissively” (42). Ruby understands that Bunty’s repeated dismissals indicate a genuine indifference to Ruby.

Disapproving of Bunty’s negative attitude toward mothering as such, Ruby identifies Bunty as a false mother. Bunty’s feelings about mothering lead Ruby to confirm that “I do not believe that Bunty is my real mother” (42). Ruby goes on to define her ideal mother figure: “My real mother is roaming in a parallel universe somewhere, ladling out mother’s milk the colour of Devon cream. She’s paddling the hospital corridors searching for me, her fierce, hot, lion-breath, steaming up the cold windows” (42). Ruby yearns for a mother who, unlike Bunty, “search[es] for [Ruby]” in the maternity ward in a hospital. Imagining her as a breast-feeding mother with “mother’s milk the colour of Devon cream,” Ruby is associating her ideal mother with one in fairy tales. In the end, given Bunty’s dismissive reaction, Ruby thinks:

I’ve been given the wrong mother and am in danger of embarking on the wrong life but I trust it will all be sorted out and I will be reunited with my real mother—the one who dropped ruby-red blood onto a snow-white handkerchief and wished for a little girl with hair the colour of a shiny jet-black raven’s wing. (42-43)

Confirmed by Bunty's rejecting attitude toward baby-Ruby, Ruby has the sense of an alienation from the mother. Ruby repeatedly creates the image in which she as a heroine is forced to be with her wicked mother—"the wrong mother." By the phrase "in danger of embarking on the wrong life" Ruby compares her situation to a tragic heroine's in a fairy tale. Ruby's yearning for a real mother continues throughout her life. At the age of sixteen Ruby still identifies herself as a fairy-tale princess in adversity and expects the situation in which her "real mother . . . begins her story, the story of how her real child, the blood-red jewel, was replaced in the cradle by a changeling" (283). She still believes the possibility of herself being "a changeling" as often occurs in a fairy-tale plot.⁴

Not only as a negative mother but also as an unwilling housewife Bunty discloses herself to be. She seems to loathe her domestic duties. In Chapter One, Ruby in her mother's womb says that she could hear Bunty's endless monologue: "*Why didn't anyone tell me what it would be like? The cooking! The cleaning! The work! . . . And as for babies, well . . . the broken nights, the power struggles . . . the labour pains!*" (14). Later in the chapter, Ruby notes Bunty's repeated resentment of wifehood: "*I spend my entire life cooking, I'm a slave to housework—chained to the cooker*" (24). It could be argued that Bunty is "chained" not only "to the cooker" but also to her married life, or to be more specific, the social definition of a housewife. In the end, Bunty leaves the house for a week when Ruby is six, leaving a note saying that "*Dear George, I have come to the end of my patience*" (134). Her note shows that Bunty renounces her duties not only as a wife and a mother of four—Patricia, Gillian, Pearl, and Ruby—but as a manager of George's pet shop.

However, considering the social circumstance of the 1950s, a different perspective on Bunty from Ruby's is provided. As Ruby realises, Bunty's anxiety about mothering and housewifery is shaped by social expectations that she should struggle to be 'a good wife and mother.' The word 'good' refers to the way the post-war British society forces her to behave. She attempts to meet the social standards of ideal wife- and motherhoods, following the guidelines. As a foetus, Ruby explains Bunty's feelings when she goes out with three-year-old Gillian to the park: "Housework must be done. On the other hand, children are *supposed* to play in parks" (18). Ruby then narrates: "Bunty has read the childcare section in her *Everything Within* book ('Bringing up Baby') that says so" (18). A considerable number of the books about childcare had been published since the previous century⁵, and *Newnes Everything Within* (1933) could be one of the possibilities for

Bunty's bible "*Everything Within*." The words "must" and "supposed to" indicate that Bunty obsessively tries to follow the guidelines of mothering which are thought to meet the standard which society requires. Similarly, Ruby narrates that Bunty does not buy cakes at shops "because Bunty believes shop-bought cakes are a sign of slutty housewifery" (22). Obviously Bunty is obsessed with the idea that cooking is one of the essential domestic duties. In Chapter Seven, eight-year-old Ruby narrates that Bunty keeps house properly: "Bunty would no more leave a chip pan unattended than she would mix her whites with her coloureds on washday" (184). Those standards for mothers and housewives in the 1950s drive Bunty into her obsession with being 'good'; hence, it could be noted that the social circumstance generates Bunty's anxiety about mothering and housewifery.

In addition, social trends in the 1950s dismiss Ruby's longing for a fairy-tale mother, a mother who breastfeeds. In bottle-feeding the newborn Ruby, Bunty seems happy about following maternity guidelines. Ruby describes her newborn babyhood at the maternity ward: "[w]e're nearly all being bottle-fed, there's an unspoken feeling that there's something distasteful about breast-feeding. We're fed on the dot, every four hours, nothing in between, no matter how much noise you make" (41-42). Ruby's babyhood experience at the hospital reflects the predominant method of western mothering in the 1950s. According to Wenda R. Trevathan, by the end of World War II most babies were bottle-fed in the United States and Europe for hygienic reasons and the convenience of working mothers (231). It is thus one of the scenes in which the misunderstanding between Ruby and Bunty is dramatised. Ruby criticises Bunty for not feeding her as a real mother in a fairy-tale plot should do. Ruby's narrative discloses that what Bunty thinks best for a baby does not necessarily correspond to the baby's need, or undoubtedly Ruby's image of a real mother in this case. Ruby calls such a rule of feeding "the ceremonial feeding ritual" (42). The words "ceremonial" and "ritual" both suggest that such a feeding method undermines an interaction between mothers and babies. Ruby's yearning for breastfeeding continues throughout her childhood as her yearning for a real mother does. When she is eleven, Ruby is "both repelled and fascinated" (208) by the neighbour Mrs. Roper's breastfeeding her baby since Ruby has never seen anyone breastfeeding a baby in reality. It could thus be argued that the social trends of the 1950s undermine the maternal bond between Ruby and Bunty in this aspect. Ruby's conflicting feelings toward Bunty's mothering and housewifery could be seen as the outcome of the social context of the 1950s.

We should also note that the 1950s Britain underwent a gradual shift in the social

perception of mothering—from a predominant mothering method to the multiple. It was in the 1950s that an alternative maternity guideline was provided by Donald W. Winnicott, a paediatrician, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst, whose theory ‘good-enough mothering’ has influenced mothers through his articles and radio talks. Atkinson herself talks about the influence of Winnicott upon her conception of the novel in both an interview and an article.⁶ ‘The good-enough mothering’ theory, which Winnicott formulates in his essay “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena” (1951), is said to have relocated the standard of how a mother should behave. Winnicott explains: “The good-enough mother . . . starts off with an almost complete adaptation to her infant’s needs, and as time proceeds she adapts less and less completely, gradually, according to the infant’s growing ability to deal with her failure” (14). He claims that the mother who is not perfect helps to contribute to the formation and growth of the infant’s identity. From this perspective, it could be argued that to some extent the concept of ‘the good-enough mother’ alleviates the stresses that mothers in the 1950s must have felt. In *Landscape for a Woman*, pointing out Winnicott’s influence upon mothering in the 1950s, Carolyn Kay Steedman writes that she feels how much her mother was relieved by Winnicott to whose radio talks she often listened (91-92). The popularity of Winnicott’s theory suggests the pressures the mothers might have felt from conventional maternity guidelines.

2. The Maternal Bond in the Footnote Chapters

In spite of the failures of the maternal bond between Ruby and Bunty in the main plot, the footnotes to each chapter relate stories of maternal genealogy—of Bunty, Nell, and Alice—which fill the gap between Ruby and Bunty. The footnote to Chapter Three reveals that Bunty fails to take advantage of the chances the war might offer of experiencing her fairy-tale plot regarding marriage. She originally sees the war as offering a new chance: “Bunty had great hopes for the war; there was something attractive about the way it took away certainty and created new possibility” (87). Yet, the footnote reveals that Bunty fails to take advantage of the uncertainty she finds in war: “all those coins tossed in the air were falling back to earth with a clatter in rather dull and predictable positions” (98). The uncertainty is compared to two sides of a coin. Ruby’s narrative continues: “In the end, Bunty’s war had been a disappointment. She lost something in the war but she didn’t find out until it was too late that it was a chance to be somebody else” (99). By “the chance to be somebody else” Ruby refers to someone like Betty, Bunty’s sister, who

emigrates to Canada for “a new life” (98) with her fiancé towards the end of World War II.

As Ruby narrates that “[t]he Second World War for Bunty was not so much a matter of getting a husband as a personality” (84), Bunty’s marriage to George is apparently a sad compromise. Readers learn that Bunty has met and become engaged to Buck, an American soldier from Kansas, during the war. Although “[Buck] wasn’t quite everything Bunty had dreamt of” (97), Bunty anticipates a new life, her life in the United States (97). However, he has left her to marry another woman (97). It is near the end of the war when Bunty meets George (97-98). Bunty decides to marry George because, as Ruby narrates, “with the war now drawing to a close, the possibilities were beginning to fade” (98). George himself wishes to marry Bunty since “she’d be a big help in the shop (because she’d once worked in one), unaware that Bunty had no intention of working after marriage” (15). It is obvious that George has chosen Bunty just to meet his need. Bunty’s marriage as an outcome of uncertainty is grounded on their misunderstandings of each other.

Hence, George’s indifference to Bunty is among the main reasons why Bunty is overwhelmed by her motherhood as I have discussed. Ruby notes that while Bunty is giving birth to Ruby, George is picking up a glamorous woman in a bar, telling her that he is single (40). He is irresponsible not only as a husband and a father but also as a shop owner. Ruby describes George as “my absent father” (40). She implies that he is absent in both literal and metaphorical senses since George is hardly involved with the lives of Ruby and Bunty. When Ruby is six, Bunty runs away from home for a week, but George does not care. Ruby notes that “[t]he idea of Bunty having left us . . . hasn’t occurred to him” (131). Without worrying about Bunty, he takes his children for a holiday in Whitby with his possible lover Doreen (137-44). As such, it could be argued that Bunty’s marriage as an outcome of the uncertainty of the war troubles thus affects her relationship with Ruby.

The footnotes further disclose that Bunty’s failure of a fairy-tale plot is closely associated with the lives of her maternal ancestors. Alice, Nell and Bunty all share the failure of a fairy-tale plot regarding marriage. Alice represents herself as a Victorian absent mother in a literal sense. Alice accepts a marriage proposal from Frederick because she loathes her teaching job, one of the only two options left to her after her parents’ deaths (32). In Ruby’s narrative in the footnote to Chapter One, Alice marries Frederick who pretends to be a good man but reveals his real character—“a sullen drunkard with an insatiable appetite for gambling on anything” (32)—once he marries Alice. Alice is forced to work hard as a working-class wife

after Frederick loses his family farm and becomes “a gamekeeper” (32). In the 1880s Alice lives a miserable married life, as Ruby narrates, “quite unable to face the unwashed clothes, unfed children and unsatisfied husband that comprised her lot in life” (296). Margaret Llewelyn Davies, an editor and General Secretary of the Co-operative Women’s Guild, emphasises the adversity in which working-class women had suffered for several decades in the introduction to *Maternity: Letters from Working Women* (1915), a collection of letters by working-class women. Davies writes that besides their poor medical and hygiene conditions working-class women suffered from their inferior position in the house: “In plain language, both in law and in popular morality, the wife is still the inferior in the family to the husband” (7). This situation corresponds to Alice’s domestic situation in the late Victorian period in which, as Ruby narrates, “she was being slowly suffocated by [her situation]” (296). Alice’s situation seems to be similar to Bunty’s in the 1950s but is more serious in terms of legal, economic and other circumstances.

The late Victorian working-class social context impedes Alice’s building up the maternal bond with her children. In Alice’s case, the attempt to grab a change for a fairy tale princess is dramatic. She decides to run away with Jean-Paul Armand, a travelling photographer, and with “his *creak-creaking* chariot” (298) they go off to Marseilles (298, 301). However, Alice’s attempt at diving into a fairy-tale plot ends in vain, back in a penniless life in Sheffield (304). The Great Wars prevent Alice’s attempt to restore the maternal bond with her children. The First World War breaks out when Alice is desperately going back to England to “recover her children . . . even if she had to sell her body on the streets in order to raise the fare” (302). She finally returns to the house she had left thirty years ago, but cannot find her children: “She darted down every yard, calling out the names of her lost children, *Tom, Albert, Lillian, Nelly*, but they did not answer her call” (303). Searching for her children throughout her later life, Alice is killed in the Blitz in 1940 without being reunited with them (304). Alice is found dead, clasping tightly “an old-fashioned photograph of five children” (304). It could be noted that the novel dramatises the late Victorian working-class mother as an absent figure whose maternal bond with her daughters (and sons) cannot be restored due to the impediment by society.

Alice’s absence affects her daughter’s life; like Alice, Nell experiences the failure of a fairy-tale plot. Nell’s decision to marry is prompted by her loathing of her stepmother, Rachel, to whom Frederick gets married after Alice disappears (45). Like Bunty, Nell fails to take advantage of the possibilities the war might offer. Nell loses her fiancé, Percy, of peritonitis (44) and ends up marrying Frank who

survives the war (68). While wishing to start a new life, Nell is uncertain whether she is willing to enter into marriage, even to Percy. Ruby narrates: “To have been ‘Mrs Percy Sievewright’ would have given her a shape and identity that seemed to be denied to plain Nell Barker” (45). Like Alice, Nell feels that even a marriage to Percy deprives her of her identity. However, she marries to the survivor, Frank (68-69). The footnote to Chapter Five discloses Nell’s miserable feelings on honeymoon (148). Nell is not brave enough to embark on a new life after World War I, although her sister Lillian takes up a new life by leaving Liverpool for Canada with her son Edmund (99) just as Bunty’s sister Betty does toward the end of World War II. From her war-time experience, Nell comes to have a pessimistic view of life: “Nell had adopted the philosophy that, generally speaking, things tended always to get worse, rather than better” (85-86). Nell’s decision to marry Frank could be prompted by the ratio of women to men after the Great War. In *Singled Out*, Virginia Nicholson notes that the First World War deprived Britain of nearly 750,000 men who died as soldiers (xiii) and also shows the 1921 Census figures which reveal there were 1,720,802 more females than males in the population of Britain (xvi). It could be argued that, pushed by her stepmother and such a social circumstance, Nell abandons her fairy-tale plot or the possibility of taking up a new life. As such, not only Bunty’s but Nell’s and Alice’s attempts at a fairy-tale plot are prevented by social circumstances and their problematic maternal relationships.

What connects Ruby with Bunty is Ruby’s engagement with her maternal ancestors. In Ruby’s perception of her maternal genealogy, domestic items such as “a pink-glass button” (32), a “clock” (11), and even a physical expression a “false smile” (122), passed down from one generation to the next, play a significant role. The silver locket is originally Alice’s: it is the one “her grandfather had given her when she was born” (31). When Alice disappears during the night, she slips the locket, in which her blond hair is coiled, under the pillow of Ada, Nell’s sister (123); however, the locket is taken by their stepmother Rachel who then burns Alice’s coiled hair from it (124); the locket is then handed over to Nell by her sister Lillian, who finds it among Rachel’s belongings after her death (127). Nell gives the silver locket to Bunty before her marriage to George. Ruby narrates the reason thus: “[Nell] had meant to leave it, after she was dead, to her eldest, Babs, but Bunty’s spirits seemed so low, considering she was about to get married, that Nell gave it to her instead” (99). The silver locket appears in Chapter Two: in the midst of her labour, Bunty clutches the locket around her neck (39). The locket connects Alice with Nell who fails to establish the maternal bond, and the same could be said of Nell

and Bunty. The locket further connects Bunty with Alice through childbirth. After Bunty's death, Ruby inherits the silver locket (328) about which she narrates the maternal connection in the footnotes.

Likewise, the clock plays a significant role since Bunty conceives Ruby to the chimes of midnight on a clock at the opening of the novel (11). It has once belonged to Alice—"the clock once belonged to my great-grandmother (a woman called Alice)" (11)—and like the silver locket the clock is originally "[Alice's] mother's" (31). After Bunty's death it is taken over by Patricia who now lives in Australia (328). The pink glass button, which Gillian swallows (23) in Chapter One, is originally from Alice's pink blouse. The button is found and kept by Rachel after Alice's disappearance (32). Lillian hands it over to Nell with Rachel's other belongings after her death (127) and Nell then keeps it in her button-box (23).⁷ Besides, Nell's "false smile" (122), which she has learnt through her relationship with Rachel, is taken over by Bunty and Babs (102) which could remind Ruby of Nell even after she dies. "Ena's George the Sixth Coronation tea-spoon" (93) and a "ring" (69) are also among the domestic items. Nell's neighbour Ena Tetley's teaspoon is found in her back garden after she and her baby are killed in the Great Air Raid, and Nell places it on the mantelpiece in their house as a memory (93-94). Bunty takes the teaspoon with her "as a strange, silent *memento mori*" (99) with the silver locket when she marries. Ruby narrates: "Bunty always polished Ena's spoon regularly and kept it as clean and shiny as a new coin" (99). Nell's marriage ring is handed down to Bunty's sister Bab's twin daughters Daisy and Rose for their christening presents thirty years after her marriage (68-69). As such, those domestic items and the facial expression, through which Ruby connects herself with her maternal ancestors or her maternal ancestors with each other in the footnotes, serve as Ruby's restoring her maternal genealogy.

3. The Mother-Daughter Relationship in Post-War Britain

In spite of her aspiration for a fairy-tale plot, Ruby ends up by following the same path in marriage as her maternal ancestors. Ruby's desire for a fairy-tale plot still continues when she is eighteen. In Chapter Twelve, in which Ruby's close friend Kathleen marries to her boyfriend by leaving a man of high promise who "will get into computers and move to California" (310) just as Bunty and Nell have done, Ruby thinks: ". . . I think it's safe to say that poor Kathleen has just made the wrong decision" (310-11). "The wrong decision" is the very impression Ruby must have had for Bunty's marriage to George and Nell's marriage to Frank as I have discussed

in the previous section. To take a fairy-tale path, Ruby meets Gian-Carlo Benedetti, an Italian whom Ruby later discovers to be an illegal immigrant, to marry and run a chip shop after failing her A-level exam (310). Just like George's reason for marrying Bunty, Gian-Carlo's reason to marry Ruby is one of convenience: "[she is] unaware then the reason he asks [her] is because he is . . . about to be deported" (311). Ruby becomes estranged from Bunty over a year due to Bunty's disapproval of their marriage (312). After "some truly wretched years" (312) with Gian-Carlo, Ruby leaves the house with her twin daughters Alice and Pearl (313). In spite of the similar path to Alice's, Ruby does not have to give up her children for a new life. Rather, as a translator Ruby makes use of the linguistic skill she has acquired through her international marriage (332).

It is at the time of Bunty's death that Ruby comes to accept her mother despite the fact that Bunty does not meet Ruby's standard of a fairy-tale mother. In the final chapter, meeting dying Bunty, forty-year-old Ruby still expects Bunty to make "a death-bed confession ('I am not your real mother?)" (325), but such a perfect fairy-tale plot element never occurs. Nevertheless, after Bunty dies, Ruby notices:

I had thought that when she died it would be like having a weight removed and I would rise up and be free of her, but now I realise that she'll always be here, inside me, and I suppose when I'm least expecting it I'll look in the mirror and see her expression or open my mouth and speak her words. (327)

This is the moment Ruby accepts her mother as genuinely her own and the failure of her fairy-tale plot. Ruby's discovery in the mirror in the latter half of the quotation suggests that she realises her selfhood within her maternal genealogy and her connection not only with Bunty but with her maternal ancestors whose "(physical) expression" and "words" Bunty has inherited. It is in this scene that Ruby recognises her connection with her maternal ancestors depicted in the footnote chapters. Patricia then says to Ruby: "people are given the mother they need for a particular incarnation" (327). This sentence summarises Ruby's perception of her relationship with Bunty.

It could therefore be argued that by restoring her maternal genealogy Ruby reconstructs her relationship with Bunty. Toward the end of the novel, Patricia says to Ruby that "[t]he past is what you leave behind in life, Ruby" (331). However, Ruby replies: "Nonsense, Patricia . . . The past's what you take with you" (331). For Ruby, the past is what makes the present Ruby within the history of her maternal

genealogy. Her daughters' names corroborate this point. Alice is Ruby's great-grandmother whose lost life Ruby restores in the footnotes. Pearl is her twin sister who dies in her infancy. Due to amnesia by Ruby's shock of Pearl's death, Pearl does not appear in Ruby's narrative until Chapter Eleven when Ruby retrieves her memory (287-95). Although Pearl is not referred to in Ruby's childhood memory in her narrative, the re-reading of the novel confirms that Pearl is implicatively in Ruby's narrative even when she is in her mother's womb. As a foetus Ruby wonders: "why do I have this strange feeling, as if my shadow's stitched to my back, almost as if there's someone else in here with me?" (16-17). The "shadow" is foetus-Pearl. Ruby's realisation of "the past" leads her, now a translator and a poet, to begin a project, "a cycle of poems based on the family tree" (332). She continues that in the poems "[t]here will be room for everyone . . . for they all have a place amongst our branches" (332). Not only her own genealogy but Ruby also names "the contingent lives of Monsieur Jean-Paul Armand and Ena Tetley" (332), people involved with the family; the former is the man with whom Alice has eloped and the latter is Nell's neighbour whose teaspoon Nell has inherited to Bunty.

By discussing the way the mother-daughter relationship is represented within the post-war context, I have argued that Ruby reconstructs her relationship with Bunty by restoring her maternal genealogy in *Between the Scenes at the Museum*. In an article "Night in the Museum" Atkinson explains about the title of this novel. The Museum is referred to the Castle Museum in York which "was founded by Dr John Kirk, a North Yorkshire country doctor who . . . collected everyday objects and wanted to keep them safe for future generations." To this description she adds: "Which for me would be a pretty good description of *Behind the Scenes*."⁸ By saying so, Atkinson confirms the significance of the domestic items to link Ruby with her maternal ancestors which I have discussed. I would therefore argue that in *Behind the Scenes at the Museum* Atkinson makes an invaluable contribution to contemporary women's fiction writing on post-war mother-daughter relationships.

Notes

1. In *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Luce Irigaray denounces the conventional concepts of woman as 'the Other' to explore her philosophy of the feminine. In her text, Irigaray undermines Simone de Beauvoir, who explores socially and historically constructed feminine identity as the negative other, man's object, and

- Sigmund Freud, who analyses woman as less than object, as void, empty, and non-existent, and Jacques Lacan's concept of the feminine which marginalises woman as an Other, based on the objectification of the maternal function.
2. Annual Abstract of Statistics 1997 shows that 220,000 immigrated into Britain between 1931 and 1951 and 120,000 between 1951 and 1961 (Peach, et al. 129). As for the Caribbean and South Asian immigrants into Britain, see Peach, et al. (128-75).
 3. See the sections 'Sexuality in Question' in Harrison (234-49) and 'The Social Structure' in Harrison (16-28).
 4. The role of a mother—a real mother and a stepmother—in fairy tales have often been discussed in a psychoanalytic reading which was prevalent in the late 1980s and 90s. Pointing out the Grimm Brothers' revision to the original stories regarding the role of a mother, Marina Warner argues for the patriarchal engagement with fairy tales (212).
 5. See Dena Attar (255-351).
 6. Atkinson talks about her naming of one of the characters after the Winnicottian Teddy in his concept of 'transitional objects.' See her interview.
 7. There are originally three pink glass buttons as Ruby narrates in the footnote to Chapter One: the first one is found by Ada who threads and wears it round her neck, but is later got away by Rachel; the second button is found by Tom who then loses it; the third one is found by Rachel who keeps in her button box (36). The button in Nell's button box is possibly the third one kept by Rachel.
 8. See Atkinson, "Night in the Museum."

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