



Mother and Child

Some Teachings of Desire

Mary Watkins

4/26/86

MY DAUGHTER RACHEL is now a few months past her first birthday. Her rage at me is like a clear, shrill siren. Before her first birthday she showed some bouts of anger at being constrained: being diapered, being in her highchair. But as soon as she could begin to walk a few months ago, her anger concentrated into tantrums that can sustain themselves over several minutes. Interestingly, the cause seems always to be the same. She will have a direction she wants to go in, something she is interested in, involved with, when often for reasons of practicality—my wanting to get somewhere else or do some other thing—I interrupt her. With her whole being she protests. She lies on the ground—mud puddles or kitchen floor do not deter—begins to scream and kick her feet. If I try to pick her up, her body straightens like a board and loosens my grasp. I relinquish her to the floor, along with whatever or wherever I was hoping we might do or head. I sit beside her, until I can hold her, and together we can go on her way or mine. (Though to be truthful, the tantrum leaves her more malleable, more susceptible at the end of it to *my* control, *my* direction.)

My initial shock at such a hearty display of rage at me from this dear one has turned to respect, a kind of awe. Her spontaneous rage, autonomous of her control, seems bent on teaching me not to interrupt her, to allow her to follow her desire. When I am a good student, I find out something about how to hang on with my own

teeth to desire, how to throw my body into the fray and to deliver whatever passion is needed to sustain a simple continuity from the arising of desire to its satisfaction.

As Rachel stiffens with protest and the options for my response flash before my mind's eye, her behavior occasions my seeing into a developmental history of desire—how such moments of a young child's desire in the presence of another can go awry. This other person we call "mother," not because it is mothers who are most prone to error, but because, first, in our culture we have left most of the work of child rearing to mothers, a novel and recent cultural arrangement that appears not to be that conducive of sanity in either child or mother. Second, our developmental theory takes analogies between adult thought/behavior and fantasies about early mother-child relations as a causal, factual relation. Thus all pathology is returned to the mother. That the culture has by and large abandoned children—to a single person—and neglected children, segregated and abused children is not seen in such theorizing. One focuses instead on the primary person left to do most of the hard work of caring for the child—the mother. So by "mother" let us read instead "the harboring one" or the "mothering one"—be that father, older brother, daycare teacher, mother, grandmother, siblings, neighbors—the one who is attempting to mother the child at any particular time.

All mothering ones want and need the child at times to want to do what the mothering one wants to do—to provide no resistance to following his/her own desire. Some mothering ones need this more than others because they require a sense of being and remaining in control. At the root of this is the person's incapacity to be nourished by the child's being present to his own desire. The mother can achieve the child's conformity to her desire through overt displays of power and control and/or subtly—or not so subtly—withdrawing her attention and affection from the child until the child mirrors her intentions. Sometimes the mother's affection is not restored just by the child's conformity of behavior, but the child must also yield up a convincing affect, pretending to self and other that his desire is happily the same as mother's. The overt subjugation of the child's desire can be rationalized by extolling the virtues of manners, orderliness, of not spoiling children, of "good" behavior (i.e., conforming, non-independent).

If the adult is alienated from her own desire, if she has accepted

the fulfilling of social form as a substitute, then she will be unable to value a child's spontaneous desire. Fulfilling desire can make you late, get you dirty, make you too noisy or too quiet. It can add to or diminish your activity level. You might not fit in.

The mothering one can also achieve her ends by systematically misreading the child's desire, causing it to look like her own. At the beach, she says, "You don't really want to go back into the water now. It is so cold." The truthful words are not uttered: "I'm bored. I'd prefer to go, but it looks like you'd have fun swimming some more."

All of these efforts at conforming the child's desire to the adult's continuously interrupt the child's spontaneous activity. Once this is done enough, the child becomes disoriented, out of touch with desire. Protective of her own vulnerability in this situation, desire shrinks back, becomes private, silent. To defend herself from frustration, negation, feelings of helplessness, impotence, and rage, the child learns to become unaware of her own desires. The child may simply be confused and not know what she wants, or she may actually adopt the adult's desires as her own, to ensure her more wholehearted acceptance and valuing by the narcissistic adult. Docility and malleability again come to the fore, once again evoking the "love" and affirmation of the mothering one.

It is interesting and understandable that young children recognize that such a child is little fun, is a "goody goody." He rarely initiates play as he is so used to taking his cues from others. His range of affect and behavior is narrow, his actions tentative, waiting for approval. He is too concerned with pleasing to be open to abandon or the joy of self-assertion. His eyes often cast down when he is spoken to. They lack sparkle. Once he is older, however, his receptivity may be as valued by friends as it once was by family. He is a "natural" listener, speaks more cautiously, opens up rather tentatively. He allows for others to a fault.

The young child whose desire has been continuously interrupted becomes unable to be alongside that place in herself from which desire arises. The child becomes depressed—which really means cut off from that source of energy within that unfolds as one enters desire and acts to fulfill it. The child may experience an unending boredom. Though she is surrounded by a vastly interesting world, the impulse to partake has been silenced. When there is not a total silence, when some desire breaks through, there is often

then a negative judgment, internalized from the adult, that retires the desire with self-condemnation and attempts to bring one's feeling and behavior more in line with the expected and the approved.

To many an adult the advent of desires in the young child announces a profound sense of threat. The relative docility and malleability of the very small baby which confirm the adult and often allow the baby to be adapted to the adult's way of being—all this recedes. In its place is often a most vocal little person who is thoroughly open to giving his heart, body, and soul to execute his desires over against the parents'. Indeed, the toddler is quite willing to engage in activities that are defined as forbidden simply to exercise his desire over against the others'.

One mother ignores all of her child's protests and cries. Her doctor explains that all young children will cry and carry on a certain number of hours each day anyway. A father takes his children to the beach and tethers them to a stake in the ground so that they will be "safe," i.e., so that he will not have to be a part of their wild, excited exploratory behavior. He will read the Sunday papers. Another parent describes her two-and-a-half-year-old as spoiled for not wanting to play alone while she cleans house and talks on the phone. Another one his her three- and four-year-old boys at a shopping mall, screaming that they are acting like animals because they want to use the stores as a playground, to run and jump. These examples may sound extreme, but only because their ignoring, rethuring, and deprecation of desire are so fully and literally enacted. We have a thousand ways of more subtly discouraging and tethering desire. That all of these situations arise from the simple clash of desires is easy to see. That each child receives a message about her desires from the interaction is also clear.

These early clashes of desire and their negotiation are amongst the earliest struggles between parent and child and are repeated daily over years. They weave a great deal of the psychic atmosphere between child and parent, and more gradually they weave as well the internal psychic atmosphere with respect to desire that the child carries forth from childhood into adulthood.

5/23/86

It is 5 A.M. I haven't been able to sleep. My mind has tossed up its worries to me in a most relentless fashion. I realized during the day that depression had set in, that I had lost a sense of wanting to do anything. Rachel, now one and a half, has been sick for three weeks. Each day she demanded that I hold her, not leave her for even a moment. At the time it was simply necessary. When she would try to venture out, her energy could not sustain her. She would fall on the floor, calling for rescue and the safety of my arms.

I disengaged from the rest of my world, cancelled patients, friends, writing, walks. I sat with her watching *Dumbo* and *The Black Stallion*, over and over. I lay with her while she took her fitful naps. Sang to her, read to her—all in my arms.

As of yesterday she is finally well. For both of us this is a difficult transition. She has forgotten about most of her toys. She clings to me defensively, uncertain of what to do otherwise—though clearly she is in possession of her energy. After wandering with me aimlessly about the house in the morning, she happened upon the right idea. She motioned wildly to the radio, as though remembering the magic of dance. Music on, she began to move by herself, or, rather, the music could now move her. She began to giggle and dance wildly, arms askew in abandon. We both laughed, so happy to see desire enliven her again.

Then, later, I heard a banging on the back door. I found her legs badgering the door, trying to get it to yield to her desire to go outside. I went to get her sweater, obviously too frustrating a move. She started screaming and then weeping furiously to be cut off from the one thing she knew would work for her, the one thing she could do at the moment that would allow her a state of simple joy.

I understand and respect her desperation. It can be extremely hard to move back into a relationship with one's desire after being estranged from it. A nexus of situations—her illness, adoption difficulties with our next child, a patient in real trouble, concern over a friend's illness—has drawn me away from myself. Yesterday some open time emerged for the first time in a month, and I did not know what I wanted to do. I lay down. I walked. I did errands, returned phone calls, worried. All this was filling the space but

provided no movement, joy, release, or connectedness. I felt rather dead inside, except for a small ache deep in.

Today I get out of bed at 5 A.M. to give myself the chance of coming upon myself before Rachel wakes up, before patients arrive, before my son's birthday party. Some hope arises as I lie on the couch and feel the day begin to unfurl itself. The mist over the pond is very thick. Birdsong pierces the dullness of the fog, as does a pink dogwood tree down the hill, its blossoms bringing the light first to this grey early morning. I know I will be very tired tonight, but tiredness is not what worries me anymore.

As I lie here quietly on the couch, the house begins to disturb me. Its formerly sheltering holding transmutes into a sense of its isolating me from the early morning. It keeps the moist air and chill from my skin. It muffles the sounds of birds calling to one another. I suddenly feel as though if I could arise and walk in the dawn that I might evade not only the barrier of the house's walls but a wall within myself as well, something separating me off. I go to find my shoes.

11/10/86

It looks as though Rachel and I are getting nowhere today. She refuses to let me put on her diaper, then her dress, next her shoes. Anxious to get the dressing over with, I wrestle her to the ground, practically sitting on her as I force her tiny shoes over her lopsided socks and protesting toes. A thin sweat appears all over me this cold November morning. I have things I must do today. Errands to run, food to get. I want to feel like I'm getting something accomplished today, that I'm in control of the chaos about me. Rachel has other ideas.

I must have served the wrong cereal. The dog is eating it up off the floor. The pots and pans are pulled out of the cupboards, along with the spoons and spatulas. This percussion band of Rachel's is making it impossible to walk in our small kitchen. With a wild laugh Rachel scampers away as I approach her sternly with a hairbrush. Now she is hiding under the armchair. She has turned into a fierce lion, threatening to scratch the lady with the brush. I wish I had clipped her nails yesterday when I thought about it. I continue my approach, she darts under the table, and the lamp on top rocks

but does not crash to the floor. She's got me now. It's either war or surrender.

I drop down on the floor, and with this surrender finally it all seems funny to me. I start to laugh, and she follows suit. I drop the brush. She invites me to be a mother lion and to come into the den of the coffee table with her. She happily knocks off her shoes with the edge of the couch, no small feat for someone still under two. She practices being fierce with her paws, but no longer toward me. The mother lion is proud of this cub's ferociousness. Then she surprises me. She picks up the hairbrush and indicates that I, the mommy lion, should comb her mane. As I do, my young cub nuzzles her cheek on my neck and allows me to restore her curly confused mane to a more velvety state.

Do you think it is silly that I feel joy as I comb her mane, joy at this small moment when her desire and mine effortlessly crisscross? In love it is imaged as mutual orgasm; in friendship it is effortless conversation that satisfies both partners as it winds into hours. Here, mother and child, each of our desires has transformed the other's; both are satisfied in this new moment, not anticipated before, where playing in the image together, desire and satisfaction are one.

As if this were not enough, she lifts her paw for the tattered sneaker. The ageless koan echoes in the living room, jubilant at being affirmed once more: FIRST BEING, THEN DOING. FIRST BEING, THEN DOING.

1/6/87

Rachel, almost two, has heartily begun to need me to help her unfold her images. She beckons me over to her tiny red chairs, points to where I should sit and where I should place her younger sister so that a train full of bunnies can take off for Boston. This train must make a great many stops in our living room, for Ani and I have been so beckoned at least ten times a day for the past several weeks. If I am busy doing something else—like feeding the dog—when Rachel is compiling her train and so ask her to wait, she appears momentarily undone, grows more insistent, and may even cry from frustration. She has had a spontaneous image which she cannot yet fulfill and thereby enjoy by herself. She needs my

presence, my physical and wholehearted participation, to help her bring her desire into reality. Once on the train we are all happy and content.

The repetitive nature of some make-believe can at times strain the mother's patience. Over and over again she is asked to interrupt whatever flow of activity she is involved in to help the child birth the imaginal scene. But when she does, the young child appears to gain confidence in the unfolding of a spontaneous image. She learns the pathway from image and desire to creation and delight. It is a path that once well-worn will require less mediation by the outer mother and more by the inner.

D. W. Winnicott describes an "ordinary mother"—let us read "ordinary mothering"—who is devoted to her baby.¹ This mother does not feel that *she* must constantly enliven her baby. She knows that there is a spark of life in her child which will develop, which is not due to her, which is not under her control, which she need not even "understand." She need only provide a right atmosphere for it to flourish. The child does not depend on the mother for growth and development; he is a "going concern" of his own. This ordinary mother allows her infant "to lie back and float," to be removed from the necessity of being a reactor to mother's liveliness, mother's initiative and desires. It is in this lying back and floating that the baby can experience his own liveliness, his own desire to live.

The ordinary mother learns through her love and devotion the geography of the baby's desire. She knows that now he wants to suck, and now to snuggle, now to be comforted. This calibration of her being to his being does not mean that disillusionment is foreign to the baby, but rather that it is meted out in small enough doses so as not to destroy the baby's perception of the world as a place where one can get one's needs met in an atmosphere of caring.

The mother's attitude toward the baby's feelings communicates strongly how she feels about the free arising of her child in his difference from her and, at times, his neediness over against her own needs and desires. The ordinary devoted mother Winnicott describes intuitively sorts through and selectively responds to the baby's feelings. Rage is not rejected as destructive to baby or mother; sadness is not coaxed away by tickling and bobbing on knees. The mother trusts in a natural recovery from sadness and

anger. She does not worry that the child will lie submerged, helpless in a feeling unless she intervenes.

This "ordinary mothering" evaporates when rage, sadness, and depression are feared. Indeed, in therapy when the therapist shies away from the intense transference feelings, she promulgates again a critical lack of ordinary mothering. Like the parent, she infers by not focusing on the feeling that what arises spontaneously cannot be trusted, perhaps not survived, that it has little value and should be subordinated to the supposedly rational. Why is it so important as parent, as therapist, not to give these messages? Feeling, as imagining, is a way of coming upon the self. When one reaches the depth of a feeling, one has come upon something which can never be taken away. It is as though there is some truth there, some real piece of oneself. And though it may not be the whole truth or a completed reality, it is substantial. When one holds oneself or is held back by another from the depth of a feeling, diffuse anxiety often substitutes for direct feeling, preventing the communion with oneself. Confusion, fear, lack of connectedness, vagueness, fog-giness ensue. The therapist again and again asks "what are you feeling?" not because it takes up the hour, but because she wishes to keep open a space in which feelings can emerge, develop, recede.

Winnicott points out that this movement into, through, and out of a feeling is so treasured as a complete experience that "sometimes you will find your child being naughty to us to feel guilty and cry, and then feel forgiven, so eager is he to recapture what he has experienced in true recovery from sadness."² Though the child may try to replicate this spontaneous recovery from a feeling, what is so special and deeply faith-building is the very spontaneity and autonomy of these recoveries. This we all have experienced through our own depressions, losses, and rages.

The mother's attunement to her child allows his own initiative to emerge and be fostered. Winnicott describes following a baby play with a spoon, attentive to the beginning, middle, and end of the baby's game, not terminating it for lack of time before the child feels finished and his impulse has moved on. A ten-month-old baby boy sits on his mother's knee while she talks with Dr. Winnicott. Winnicott places a spoon halfway between himself and the mother and watches the baby reach for it and then be overcome with reserve.

It is as if he thought, "I had better think this thing out: I wonder what feelings mother will have on this subject. I had better hold back until I know." So he will turn away from the spoon as if nothing were further from his thoughts. In a few moments, however, he will return to his interest in it, and he will very tentatively put a finger on the spoon. He may perhaps grasp it, and look at mother to see what he can get from her eyes. . . .

He gradually finds from his mother's eyes that this new thing he is doing is not disapproved of, and so he catches hold of the spoon more firmly and begins to make it on his own. He is still very tense, however, because he is not certain what will happen if he does with this thing what he wants to do so badly. He does not even know for sure what it is he wants to do.

We guess that in the course of a little while he will discover what he wants to do with it, because his mouth begins to get excited. He is still very quiet and thoughtful, but saliva begins to flow from his mouth. His tongue looks sloppy. His mouth begins to want the spoon. His gums begin to want to enjoy biting on it. It is not very long before he has put it in his mouth. Then he has feelings about it in the ordinary aggressive way that belongs to lions and tigers, and babies, when they get hold of something good. He makes as if to eat it.

We can now say that the baby has taken this thing and made it his own. He has lost all the stillness that belongs to concentration, and wondering, and doubt. Instead he is confident and very much enriched by the new acquisition. I would say that in imagination he has eaten it. Just as the food goes in and is digested and becomes part of him, so this which has been made his own in an imaginative way is now part of himself and can be used. How will it be used? . . . He will put it to mother's mouth to feed her, and he will want her to play at eating it. Mind you, he does not want her to bite it really, and he would be rather frightened if she actually let it go into her mouth. It's a game; it is an exercise of the imagination. He is playing and he invites play. What else will he do? He will feed me, and he may want me to play at eating it too. He may make a gesture towards the mouth of someone on the other side of the room. Let everybody share this good thing. He has had it; why shouldn't everyone have it? He has something he can be

generous with. Now he puts it inside his mother's blouse where her breast is, and then rediscovers it and takes it out again. Now he shoves it under the blotting pad and enjoys the game of losing and finding it again, or he notices a bowl on the table and starts scooping imaginary food out of the bowl, imaginatively eating his broth. . . .

Now the baby has dropped the spoon. I suppose his interest began to get transferred onto something else. I will pick it up and he can take it again. Yes, he seems to want it, and he takes up the game again, using the spoon as before, as an extra bit of himself. Oh, he's dropped it again! Evidently it was not quite by chance that he dropped it. Perhaps he likes the sound of the spoon as it falls on the floor. We will see. I will hand it to him again. Now he just takes it and drops it quite deliberately; dropping it is what he wants to do. Once again I give it back to him, and he practically throws it away. He is now reaching out for other interests, the spoon is finished with; we have come to the end of the show.

We have watched the baby develop an interest in something, and make it part of himself, and we have watched him use it, and then finish with it. . . .

What have we learned watching this little baby boy?

For one thing we have witnessed a completed experience. Because of the controlled circumstances there could be a beginning, a middle, and an end to what happened; there was a total happening. *This is good for the baby.* When you are in a hurry, or are harassed, you cannot allow for *total happenings*, and your baby is poorer. . . .

Do you see how the middle of things can be enjoyed (or if bad, tolerated) only if there is a strong sense of start and finish?

By allowing your baby time for total experiences, and by taking part in them, you gradually lay a foundation for the child's ability eventually to enjoy all sorts of experiences without jumpiness.³

Though the object of our desire shifts from spoons to other things as our life goes on, is not the process of patiently allowing our movement toward, through, and away from the object of our desire the same? And is not this allowing for a total happening, a

completed experience, at one and the same time an advent into being, into presence? In this being present the distinction between inner and outer erodes, because the desire that arises inwardly allows us to cross over into the world of things and others with a smooth motion.

It looks like a simple sequence of moments, the boy with the spoon. But what if no spoon had been provided? What if the mother had given an inhibiting look in her eyes? What if the adults imposed their own ideas about what to do with the spoon before the baby himself could arrive at his desire? What if mother had so wanted to talk with Dr. Winnicott that her desire to have the baby disappear silenced or agitated him? What if the mother disliked the baby's drooling and sloppy tongue or was embarrassed by them and interrupted the play? What if she or Dr. Winnicott ignored the boy's effort to share his spoon games or failed somehow to see and appreciate and join in with his joyful owning and sharing of the spoon? What if mother's timidity disallowed the losing and recovering of the spoon down her dress? What if the adults wanted him to stop this game and so prematurely interpreted dropping the spoon as an ending rather than a new version of recovery? Or what if they wanted him to persist in this engrossing game even when he was finished and was ready for the next happening?

No one of these miscalibrations is disastrous, thank goodness, for there are so many ways to go wrong. But what should be clear is how there will arise in any dyad certain repetitive patterns of allowing and disallowing desire, their characteristics dependent on who the partners are. These patterns become internalized over time, shaping the way each of us moves in relation to the free arising of desires, images, and feelings.

When I go to my writing desk, I too place before myself a spoon of some sort, something of possible interest, or there is something there placed by someone else. Perhaps my being does not gravitate toward it but tosses up some other thing. Do I condemn myself for not having the "right" interest this sunny morning? Do I call myself names: self-absorbed, lazy, lacking in discipline? Do I threaten that nothing will come of anything because I am not attending to what I am supposed to? Or do I wait patiently and with interest to what has caught my eye and energy? Do I have faith that this attending and respecting will lay the ground for some good happening to occur, particularly for the possibility of being present to my

own aliveness and allowing work or whatever to flow from this place?

Perhaps the spoon placed before me, after some hesitation, does become interesting. Do I have a critical commentary going on about not getting into it fast enough or immersing myself too fast and too thoroughly in my relation with it? Can I allow for the mess of mouthing it? Am I critical of myself when I drop it for a moment—to answer the phone, get a cup of tea—as though thinking that I have finished with it prematurely? Or do I allow for dropping and rejoining, forgetting and rediscovering to happen several times this morning if it needs to? And when I share it with myself—and then with others—how do I and they greet it: ignoring it, overtaking it, making it the ego's or theirs? Or does this bridge to others and back to myself happen smoothly, not alienating me from what I have been doing and yet still making the time richer through the sharing? In a short morning of work, are there not just as many ways to go wrong internally as there were for the little boy playing with the spoon in the presence of his mother and Dr. Winnicott?

For those who gain adulthood without having had ample freedom to experience the arising, the doing, and the fulfillment of desire, this “ordinary mothering” must be learned—be it through psychotherapy, meditation, walking, dancing, abiding with oneself. Otherwise, the “mothering” which one has suffered—be it interruptive, distorting, maligning, or negating of desire—will be repeated internally.

Winnicott describes a psychic atmosphere provided by some actual mothers, but his description also fits an internal atmosphere necessary for the lifting of depression. This “ordinary mothering” allows extraordinary, seemingly simple moments to arise and fall away—the kinds of moments that allow us to be glad we are alive, even amidst adversity.

3/15/88

Today the snow finally melted from under the swings. The surface of ice on the lake by our house gave way to the swaying water beneath it. Finally the whole lake is moving again. My daughters

and I search foolheartedly for crocus and tulips, but we do not mind being foolish. They will shoot their stems into this cold air soon. It might well have been today.

I pass by my husband's rosebushes. One is ungainly, tall, withered, and brown. I think perhaps it should have been cut back in the fall or pruned now. It is taller than all the rest, but it no longer looks promising. I remember at our last home that I, like my husband now, could not believe that I was supposed to cut back the rose stems so close to the ground. It seemed safest to let them keep climbing and growing in their own way. But after five years of such little faith on my part, they bloomed weakly and were not happy, but tangled, thin, bony.

Some Buddhists say not to encourage virtue directly but to cut back on error—impatience, anger, greed, wrong speech, holding grudges. Then when space is freed from these negatives, spaciousness is possible and virtue has room.

It has been hard to keep pruning my life. One shoot takes off in one direction, off-balancing the rest, casting much of my life in its shadow. I try to prune but do not do it radically enough, anxious that no new growth will appear and that I will be left with bare stems that will themselves slowly wither. I give up one piece of work and cling to the next. Each day I must learn more about pruning, and I must tend to it. Or else I get lost once again in the overgrowth, the tangle, the struggle of one against another, each choking the other out. I grow tall, strained, unable to support what blossoms there are with my thin stems. I fall over. The blossoms thin, their faces next to the moist earth, rotting, decomposing, until there is no sight of them. Shoots, then small, unfurling leaves appear.

For me what needs to be pruned again and again is what I do out of fear of emptiness, rather than out of desire for the thing in itself. Sometimes I see this fear when I realize I have not let a friendship change from a former intensity to what it needs to be now—more space and distance surrounding it. Sometimes I start a work project with good intention and desire, but once into it realize my judgment was wrong and that staying invested in it serves only my self-image. Sometimes I glimpse this fear when I reach for a glass of wine rather than sit in the stillness. Over and over again I feel it intensely when I have left things unpruned for a while, and a sense of

spaciousness seems strangled out by a welter of activity that is not thriving, activity that can only draw on my ego's energy because it is no longer connected to the heart's desire.

In times that go well, it seems my pruning shears are in my back pocket. Every now and then I clip the faded blossoms as I stroll. I cut back stems and branches with sureness and with faith that this enforced rest will give a possibility for new beginning. I don't let the garden get too crowded, but neither do I enforce a spindliness.

Now with little people to love and struggle with, pruning seems too pale a word almost. I reach down and yank out whole plants, throwing them over my shoulder. Not just spindly roses but flowering trees, lush bamboos. All this to make some room. The pre-motherhood tending of bonsai—requiring just the right light, moisture, solitude—has given way utterly to the muck and mud of community gardening. Rachel and Ani are throwing in seeds more quickly than I can dig holes. Things are coming up everywhere, and I have no idea what they are. It is a different way to garden. Rachel picks the strawberries by pulling the plant from the ground. Ani waters the bricks by stepping on the flowers.

There is a male fantasy in developmental psychology that goes this way: the mother's maternal preoccupation makes her baby's desires her own. This taking on of the child's agenda is imagined as an effortless process, aided by maternal hormones and female proclivities toward caretaking. It is not always like this in our culture. Though raised to be nurturant, women are also taught to retreat to their own subjectivities, to take care of themselves in solitude, to identify themselves as individuals, and to experience their own desire over against the other's.

Coming to be with one's first child bulldozes these notions, as psychic survival requires finding joy in the other's satisfaction, in finding a way to surrender what cannot be accomplished during the child's early years, in wiping away large portions of one's identity that require separateness and solitude to maintain. None of this comes "naturally," easily. Each refigures our understanding of desire away from a personalistic, individualistic, privatistic model: my desire, internal, private; my desire to have and to do; my desire experienced as need, as right. In its stead, the arising of desire comes to be experienced as grace, its satisfaction seeming not as important as its advent. The mother's psychic reality becomes gradually restructured so that satisfying the child's desire is often

experienced as sweeter than satisfying any of her own. Thus the child's desire has really become the mother's in this baffling psychic melange called mother and child. But this has not occurred naturally, suddenly, always, or for all time.

3/20/88

It is 5 p.m. The sink is filled with dirty dishes, the laundry baskets with muddy overalls and damp socks the size of my thumbs. There are five phone calls to return, one of them urgent. On the dining table lies three days of unopened mail. Yesterday I had an idea that I've not yet written down and which now seems dull and dim. I've been up since 5 A.M., and Rachel hasn't taken a nap. Dinner is unbought and unmade. My mind occasionally stumbles on the fact that I have to give a lecture tomorrow and the further fact that momentarily I can't remember what it is on, much less what it is about, sends shortlived streaks of panic through my limbs.

My daughter Ani, now just two, is placing a mother, father, and baby on the back of a black stallion. She indicates that they are us—her mother, father, and she—and wants me to sit on the floor beside her to enjoy this scene.

I take my pruning shears from my back pocket and snip these undone things away. I fall to the floor and pick up the baby who has fallen from the horse.

We are simply here together now. A spaciousness begins to wrap around us. The horse wants to run across the table, and so we help by holding our friends, ourselves, on his back. We are laughing, having such a great ride, being jostled, falling off every once in a while with a wild whoot.

1. D. W. Winnicott, *The Child, the Family, and the Outside World* (Middesex, England: Penguin, 1964), p. 27.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-78.