

Who is the Mother?

Sarah Inman

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself. They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

Kahlil Gibran

Who is the mother and who the child? I cannot say. I only know that my eldest child gave birth to me. Before her there was nothing but confusion and pain. I watched the first fluttering of my belly for hours on end with awed amazement. I was a galleon in full sail breasting the world.

There was no fear at the birth although it went on and on. Eventually she was dragged out of me. I was ill and scarcely conscious, but when, after three days, she was given to me, there was instant recognition. Here was life. From that time to this, thirty years on, she has never ceased demonstrating to me that being alive is a tenable position. Because of her I have had to live myself, albeit reluctantly a lot of the time. She held me until I was ready to make my excavations into the catacombs of the past and then was there for me when I needed her.

What I discovered was shame, generations of it, deeply buried and shrouded in layers of respectability. And strength, an amazing life force in the abused women of my family. My mother did try to kill me. She swallowed ammonia early in the

pregnancy — and early in the War. It was 1940. But somehow we both survived. I don't think she tried to kill herself again although there were devastating provocations. She, bravely, stayed alive for me. I locked her out of my heart; she wasn't safe. She died twelve years ago and I am only just getting to know her. I can invite her into my house now and put my arms round her and tell her I love her and understand. I have been back to the place of her birth and mended the roots she so savagely lopped. Perhaps I have given birth to her.

She came from Guernsey, a tiny granite island studded with prehistoric sites. When I am there I can feel my links with two ancient statues of the goddess. They are worn, desecrated and split, but still stand proudly guarding Christian cemeteries. So when you ask for my thoughts on mothers and mothering, what can I say? There is an ancient bond that has survived and will survive the vilest depredations of man. And perhaps it is this deep, impenetrable bond that drives men into such impotent acts of violation. But that, my children, is another story.

Sarah Inman is a trainee psychotherapist at the Serpent Institute.