CHAPTER – 3
Paradigms of the Maternal-Feminine Desire: A French Feminist Reading

A feminist reading of the five fictional works by McMillan, Donoghue, Hannah, Shriver and Maracle prove that they are the most evident and successful manifestation of the theoretical possibilities conceived by the French feminists that propagate “maternity” as an effective discursive power solely residing in women irrespective of their culture or age. The select women’s fictions – *Mama, Room, The Things We Do for Love, We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* – give a clear configuration to the theoretical concepts shared by the French feminists. A century ago feminists envisioned an ideal world anticipating a creative space for woman. However, woman is still held indefinitely in bondage, she exists in the Symbolic neither by nor for herself. In spite of this, valiant attempts have been made by feminist thinkers to find a space for women in the semiotic system. During the past decades, most notably, female French theorists have used poetic modes of speech to explore and rediscover the power of the “maternal-feminine,” and thereby to subvert the phallocentric system that perpetuates the discrimination and subordination of women-mothers. For the French feminists, the exploration of the “female body” constitutes the evolution of a new poetic called the
“maternal-feminine” that gets handed down the generations of women as the undying source of creativity. Thus, the French feminists, through their theoretical arguments, share the wonderful possibility of “maternal continuity” among women of all cultures and ages. Thus, by bringing back the focus on the living Maternal in every Woman, by re-establishing the Woman-Mother as the unchallengeable Creator, the French feminists celebrate the beginning of a new era of thought which is strong enough to terminate the dominance of the patriarchal discourses.

Thus, French feminists play an integral role in the evolution of maternity discourses which constitute a new feminist discursive realm that marks “maternity” as woman’s identity. Maternity discourses, therefore, propagate this female identity, this maternal identity, as the core of women’s being; this maternal identity is continuous, plural, in-process among women of all ages and cultures. French feminists like Cixous and Irigaray argue for the revival of the “maternal-feminine desire,” the Woman-Mother’s desire. This “maternal-feminine desire” is the endless “desire-to-mother” in every girl, in every woman, irrespective of their culture or age. The innate and endless “maternal” instincts in every woman constitute the desire for life. In other words, for woman, “maternity” is a way of re-living her self. Cixous describes this maternal-feminine desire as “a desire to live . . . a desire for the
swollen belly” (Marks and De Courtivron 126). Like Cixous, Irigaray also speaks about this “maternal-feminine desire” from which springs a power that gets transmitted endlessly among women of all generations. Irigaray clearly points out this maternal power in every woman-mother as she refers to “the mother in all women, . . . the woman in all mothers” (Lodge 418). Thus, the maternal connection which women share, as French feminists argue, establishes a unique woman-to-woman relatedness that poses a strong threat to patriarchy. Like Cixous and Irigaray, Kristeva’s understanding of the “maternal-feminine” body is also founded on her claim that “maternity” positions woman in a kind of corporeal contiguity with other women, satisfying the infantile desire-to-mother. Kristeva’s concept of “semiotic chora” refers to a maternally-oriented realm of signification that revives the “maternal-feminine desire,” the Woman-Mother’s desire. In other words, this “semiotic” is the dimension of language that follows the manifestation of the maternal libidinal economy. Thus, French feminists’ notion of “maternal-feminine desire” as a force that generates woman-to-woman relatedness, mother-to-mother connectedness, serves as a determining factor in the evolution of maternity discourses as a distinct feminist theoretical stream. This chapter analyses the select five works of fiction by women authors to unravel this woman-to-woman relatedness, this maternal connection.
among women irrespective of their culture or age, manifest in them. This helps to revive the “maternal desire” residing in every woman, and thereby emerge as effective literary attempts initiating the evolution of maternity discourses.

McMillan’s novel *Mama* excellently illustrates the woman-to-woman relatedness, which French feminists speak about, and also proves to be a fictional narrative that revives the “maternal-feminine desire” which is otherwise repressed by patriarchy. In this novel, the woman-to-woman relatedness, the maternal connection among women, is clearly revealed in the wonderful friendship shared by the two women-mothers, Mildred (Mama) and her sister-in-law Curly Mae. Out of Mildred’s friends, the only one she truly liked and trusted was Curly. There exists a wonderful bond between Mildred and Curly throughout the novel until Curly falls sick. It is Curly, a mother to seven, who at times emerges as Mildred’s eternal fellow-companion and supports the woman-mother all through her times of struggle and emotional breakdown. For instance, it was Curly who drove Mildred to the hospital when the woman-mother gave birth to her first child Freda while Mildred’s husband Crook was away in a motel room with another woman Ernestine. Moreover, despite Crook being her brother, Curly, at an instance, in one of her emotional outbursts at the man, runs out of control while expressing her anger at her brother following the man’s act of torturing Mildred. At this
instance, Curly, while talking to her sister-in-law Mildred, expresses her anger at Crook:

“Kill him,” slurred Curly Mae, as she fell back in the recliner on Mildred’s sunporch . . . “And if he put his hands on you again, the sucker deserve it. I don’t care if he is my brother, what give him the right to disfigure you? . . . A skunk is a skunk,” Curly said . . . “You need something to protect yourself with. A gun’ll scare a niggah . . . Now you tell me, what make more sense? To be waiting in here scared with these kids, or be holding something to get his ass on out of here? Remember the last time you called the police? How long it take’em to get here? Forty-five minutes, and you know it take ten minutes from uptown. You could’a been dead . . . .”

“Milly,” she said, “I’ll tell you what. I let you hold my gun till you get him out of here . . . .” (McMillan 18-19)

Thus, as revealed here, it is Curly who encourages and supports Mildred in beginning her life anew with her five kids by throwing Crook out of the house and divorcing him. This instance, in a way, serves as an illustration of the unimaginable understanding which the woman-mother Curly has for her fellow woman-mother Mildred. This intense friendship shared by Mildred and Curly in *Mama* is an interesting manifestation of
the woman-to-woman relatedness, the mother-to-mother connectedness, a unique bond among women-mothers which is powerful enough to cause the surrender of the patriarchal man/father Crook.

Another instance in *Mama* that reveals the eternal bond of friendship between Mildred and Curly is the one which makes a reference to the birthday gift which Curly presents to Mildred on her forty-eighth birthday:

. . . the doorbell rang. Now who in the hell could that be this time of morning? Mildred stepped onto the rug . . . and went to the front door. Curly stood there grinning. She had something in her hand, but Mildred couldn’t see what it was . . . “It’s your forty-eighth birthday, Milly. I ain’t forgot. After all these years I done known you, you thank I forgot? I got something for you in that bag. It ain’t much, but I was thanking about you.”

“You didn’t have to do that, girl . . . What is it?”

“I ain’t telling you. Wait and see.”

. . . Mildred closed the door, . . . She reached down and picked up the brown paper bag Curly had left and opened it. It was a photograph inside a wooden frame. Mildred couldn’t believe her eyes when she saw the faded picture of her, Curly . . . standing outside the Red Shingle. Hell,
that was . . . at least . . . thirty years ago. She was pregnant with Freda, she remembered, . . . had gone to the Shingle to celebrate . . . And happy and everythang . . . She pressed the picture to her chest and in her reflection from the mantelpiece mirror she saw there was writing on the back. She turned it over. “We always was family. Remember us that way. Love, your sis’-in-law, Curly.” Mildred’s tears came quickly as she walked up the carpeted stairs to her attic bedroom. (McMillan 288-92)

This instance, again, embodies the intense love and understanding shared by the women-mothers, Mildred and Curly, which in turn uncovers the woman-to-woman relatedness, the mother-to-mother connectedness, in the novel *Mama*.

In *Mama*, another illustration of the French feminist notion of woman-to-woman relatedness occurs in the novel’s depiction of the deep bonding between Mildred and her daughter Freda. The mutual understanding of Mildred and Freda is explicitly revealed at various instances throughout the novel. An instance of this mutual concern, love and understanding between Mildred and Freda occurs when the woman-mother explains to her daughter how she was running out of money and hence would not be able to manage for the sewing machine
which the girl had asked for as the Christmas present. Mildred and Freda
converse in understanding terms:

When Christmas was two days away, Mildred hollered to
Freda from her bedroom. “Can you come in here for a
minute?” Freda came to the doorway. “Close the door,
baby.” Freda closed it . . . and stood in front of it . . .
“Freda, your mama gotta explain something to you and I
want you to try to be a big girl and listen to what I’m
saying, okay?” . . .

“Okay, Mama, but you know I’m already a big girl.”

“Yes, and Mama appreciate everythang you’ve done
around here, from watching these kids for me like they
was yours, and keeping this house in running order when
I ain’t here. You been doing a helluva job, baby, playing
the mama, and you know I been working hard to make
things better for all of us . . . Well, baby, mama’s money
is real low and I got some decisions I gotta make and
quick . . . all I want is to see y’all, all of you, happy. I can
only get a few toys for the little ones, you understand
me?”
“Yes,” Freda said, beginning to understand what Mildred was getting at . . . Freda was trying . . . to be as strong as Mildred . . .

“Mama was just wondering if you could be a big girl and wait until after New Years, when everything’ll be on sale . . . By February, I’ll get you that sewing machine I heard you talking about. At least lay it away. Can you just let the other kids enjoy this Christmas? Can you do that for your mama?”

“Yes, Mama, I can wait,” Freda said before she knew it . . . Freda . . . didn’t want Mildred to think she was being a baby about this whole thing . . . The two of them sat there stiffly, like starched shirts, but underneath, Mildred and Freda mourned for themselves. Finally, Freda stood up and walked to the door. With her back to Mildred, she said, “It’s okay, Mama. I can wait. I told you I was a big girl and I meant it.” She closed the door softly behind her. (McMillan 44-47)

Thus, here, both Mildred and Freda show a unique and deeper understanding of each other as women which stands beyond the imagination of patriarchy.
Throughout the novel *Mama*, Freda, as a woman, relates and connects herself with her mama Mildred. Moreover, the maternal connection among women of all generations, the “maternal continuity,” which French feminists argue for, is manifested in Freda’s extraordinary joy while playing “Mama” to her sisters and brother in Mildred’s absence in the house: “Freda loved the power she had playing mama. She didn’t want to go skating because, just like Mildred, it was rare that she was alone and had time to herself” (McMillan 84). Freda, in the novel, gradually realizes that her real identity, her real self, takes shape and colour in her relatedness to her Mama, Mildred. In the novel, Freda even makes her sisters and brother openly accept her as their mama during Mildred’s absence in the house:

“. . . Mama ain’t here. And when she ain’t here, who’s the mama around here?”

“You are, Miss Smarty, you are.” (McMillan 88)

Here, we find Freda enjoying her temporary or momentary maternal power while acting mama to her younger ones in Mildred’s absence. Freda’s joy at playing a substitute for her Mama, in turn, testifies to the revival of the endless “maternal desire” in every girl, every woman.

This revival of the “maternal desire” in Freda, thus, reflects the “maternal continuity,” the woman-to-woman relatedness, between Mildred and Freda which, in turn, generates a kind of eternal friendship
that the woman-mother and her daughter share. An instance of this wonderful feeling of Mildred and Freda being eternal friends occurs when the woman-mother visits her daughter in California:

When she spotted . . . Freda at the arrival gate, Mildred hollered out, “Here I am!” . . . She kissed her oldest daughter real fast, . . . and pushed Freda away so she could get a good look at her . . . Her daughter had already started to move up in the world, and Mildred was proud . . . Once they had settled into Freda’s apartment, Mildred walked to the picture window and looked up into the hills. This sure was pretty . . . “This place ain’t bad, ain’t bad at all. I’m proud of you, baby.” There. She’d said it. And that’s all Freda had been waiting to hear.

“Thank you, Mama. I’m glad you are.”

. . . That night the two of them . . . crawled into Freda’s double bed and said goodnight to each other . . . It was so quiet, to Freda it felt like they were the only two people in the world. She was thinking about all the times she used to sneak in bed with Mildred . . . Freda loved nestling up next to Mildred’s warm body. “Is that you, Freda?” Mildred always asked, knowing full well it was . . . “Get on in here, girl,” Mildred would say, and
she’d lift the covers back and act like she was shuffling around to make room for her, but really wouldn’t move an inch. She loved the way her daughter felt against her skin.

“Mama, you asleep?” Freda asked Mildred now . . . “If you can scrounge up the plane fare for everyone to come back out here, I’ll help you find a job and a place to stay.”

“That’s sweet, Freda, but I have to thank about it. You talking about making a pretty big move. Now go to sleep, we’ll talk about it tomorrow.” Mildred closed her eyes and tried to wipe the grin off her face. She had made up her mind this afternoon that she was coming back . . . Freda had sure changed. She was so much sharper and alert, even sounded wiser. And she wasn’t just her daughter any more, this person was her new friend. (McMillan 155-66)

Mildred’s realization of her daughter, Freda, being her “new friend” strengthens the implicit suggestion of the eternal friendship, the woman-to-woman relatedness, between the woman-mother and her daughter. Moreover, this woman-to-woman relatedness which Mildred and Freda share, mirroring the endless maternal connection among women of all
generations, explicitly finds expression as Freda finally returns to and reunites with her Mama in the end of the novel:

... Mildred reached for her daughter as if she were a gift she had always wanted and had finally gotten. Freda pressed her head into Mildred’s bare shoulder ... Mildred’s breasts felt full against her own, and Freda couldn’t tell whose were whose. They held each other up. They patted each other’s back as if each had fallen and scraped a knee and had no one else to turn to for comfort. It seemed as if they hugged each other for the past and for the future. (McMillan 307)

This instance, thus, demonstrates how Mildred and Freda, as women, share a wonderful feeling of relatedness or connectedness which is in turn accompanied by an incredibly intense love and understanding for each other.

Also, in the beginning of the novel Mama, there is a reference to the undying “maternal desire” in Mildred:

Motherhood meant everything to Mildred. When she was first carrying Freda, she didn’t believe her stomach would actually grow, but when she felt it stretch like the skin of a drum and it swelled up like a small brown moon, she’d never been so happy. She felt there was more than just a
cord connecting her to this boy or girl that was moving inside her belly. There was some special juice and only she could supply it. And sometimes when she turned over at night she could feel the baby turn inside her too, and she knew this was magic. Mildred watched her first baby grow like a long sunrise. She was so proud of Freda that she let her body blow up and flatten for the next fifty-five months. Having babies for Mildred was unique every time. (McMillan 15-16)

Mildred’s “maternal desire,” referred here, is an excellent illustration of the French feminist idea of the “maternal-feminine desire,” the “desire for the swollen belly,” residing in every woman. Further, the instance mentioned above also serves as an effective demonstration of the “semiotic” dimension of language which is marked by the manifestation of woman’s “maternal desire,” woman’s undying “desire-to-mother,” that terminates patriarchy’s repression of the same desire. Therefore, in short, McMillan’s novel Mama proves to be a brilliant literary move that successfully revives woman’s maternal desire and celebrates woman-to-woman relatedness.

Like Mama, Donoghue’s novel Room is also an incredible piece of fiction that bears testimony to the woman-to-woman relatedness and also the undying “maternal desire” in woman. The novel delves deep
into the literary possibilities for woman-to-woman relatedness, the maternal connection among women of all generations. *Room* explores the woman-to-woman relatedness, the “maternal continuity,” in the relationship between Ma and her mom (Jack’s Grandma) to a certain extent. Unlike Grandpa (Ma’s dad), who is a typical representative of patriarchy, Grandma (Ma’s mom) clearly understands Ma better, and feels free and happy to accept Jack as a “treasure” and as “the bravest little guy in the world” who has brought her baby (Ma) back (Donoghue 233). But for Grandpa, he feels it really difficult to accept Jack as his grandson since the boy merely reminds him of Old Nick, the pervert who destroyed the life of his daughter. However, for Ma, Jack reminds her “of nothing but himself” and the only other character in this novel who shares a similar thought is Grandma (Donoghue 294). The only character to whom Jack feels a sense of proximity in the absence of his Ma is Grandma. Once, when Grandma comes to visit Jack and his Ma in the Cumberland Clinic with books for them, Jack is filled with excitement:

> Later Grandma comes, I know her face this time. She’s brung books from her hammock house, three for Ma with no pictures that she gets all excited and five for me with pictures, Grandma didn’t even know five was my best best number. (Donoghue 246-47)
Even this accidental instance in the number of books shows the identity of minds.

In *Room*, in fact, Grandma is the only character who eloquently reassures Ma and expresses her readiness to take Ma and Jack as a treasure, as two miracles. There is an instance when tears roll down Grandma’s face as she says to Ma: “Sweetie . . . all I think when I look at you is hallelujah” (Donoghue 247). Grandma calls Jack her “favorite grandson” (Donoghue 267). When Ma undergoes treatment for neurotic disorder in the Clinic, in the interim, Jack is taken away to live along with his Grandma. During this period marked by the absence of Ma for a short while, it is his Grandma who takes care of Jack reading books, telling stories, singing songs, playing games for him. In fact, Ma has learned and developed her artistic self – her taste for reading books and singing songs, for instance – from her mom, Jack’s Grandma. Ma has also passed on the same artistic tradition to her son, Jack. For instance, even the slightest thing like a saying which Ma used to tell Jack before he went to bed in the night, “Night-night, sleep tight, don’t let the bugs bite,” is in fact a mere repetition of what Grandma used to say to Jack’s Ma when she was a kid (Donoghue 319). Similarly, Grandma does for Jack what she used to do for Ma when she was a kid. Her feeling for Ma is so intense that even after her daughter has become a mother, she still
feels apprehensive of her daughter’s biological mother as she talks with Jack while sitting in the hammock at her house:

“I used to sit like this with your Ma when she was a baby.”

“Did you give her some?”

“Some what?”

“From your breast.”

Grandma shakes her head. “She used to bend back my fingers while she had her bottle.”

“Where’s the tummy mommy?”

“The --- oh, you know about her? I have no idea, I’m afraid.”

“Did she get another baby?”

Grandma doesn’t say anything. Then she says, “That’s a nice thought.” (Donoghue 372)

Instances like these reveal what French feminists often think about: there exists a “mother” in every “woman.” That is, women are “always wild about kids,” they would “babysit for free” (Donoghue 233).

The desire to give birth, the desire to nurture, the desire to create – the “maternal-feminine desire” or the “desire-to-mother” – is an innate quality that characterises the female world. At an instance when Grandma expresses her opinion to Ma, after Ma returns from the Clinic,
to take Jack back to their new apartment, about how terrible it must be not to have any pictures of Jack when he was a baby and a toddler just to remember him by, Ma’s face becomes all blank and she says: “I don’t forget a day of it” (Donoghue 374). Later on, as Grandma helps Ma and Jack in getting shifted to their new apartment, there comes another interesting exchange of thoughts between Ma and Grandma that stands as a wonderful manifestation of the woman-to-woman relatedness French feminists speak about:

Ma puts her arms on Grandma and stops her moving for a minute.

“Thanks.”

“Should I run out for anything else?”

“No, I think you’ve thought of everything. ’Night, Mom.”

Grandma’s face is twisted. “You know—-”

“What?” Ma waits. “What is it?”

“I didn’t forget a day of you either.” (Donoghue 377-78)

Here, the last statement of Grandma that she had not forgotten a day of her daughter growing-up which, in turn, corresponds to Ma’s comment about how she herself could never forget a day of Jack being a baby or a toddler, reveals the wonderful power of the immeasurable experience of mothering. This maternal connection between Ma and Grandma, the woman-to-woman relatedness, the “maternal continuity,”
in *Room* presents a lively and successful “politically-oriented” collective identity shared by women-mothers that renders them the power to challenge the foundation of patriarchal social order represented by Old Nick, Grandpa and so on.

The novel *Room*, thus, constitutes an effective manifestation of the endless innate “maternal desire” in every woman that in turn generates an extraordinary relatedness or connectedness among women-mothers. This “maternal desire,” this woman-to-woman relatedness, gets revealed implicitly in the context when Ma introduces her son, Jack, to her mom, in the Clinic. This context is described in the voice of Jack as follows:

A person comes in and runs at Ma . . . Ma’s laughing and crying at the same time . . . .

“Oh, Mom.” That’s Ma saying. “Oh, Mom.”

“My little---”

“I’m back.”

“Yes, you are,” . . .

“Did you miss me?” Ma starts to laugh . . . .

The woman is crying too . . . She’s still got Ma all tied up in her arms . . . I never saw Ma hug a someone else.

. . . Ma pulls her mask down, smiling and smiling.
The woman’s staring at me now. “I can’t believe it, I can’t believe any of this.”

“Jack,” says Ma, “this is your grandma.”

So I really have one.

“What a treasure.” The woman opens her arms . . . She walks over at me . . . .

“He’s very affectionate,” says Ma, “he’s just not used to anyone but me.”

“Of course, of course” . . . Grandma comes a bit closer. “Oh, Jack, you’ve been the bravest little guy in the world, you’ve brought my baby back.”

. . . “Lift up your mask for a second,” Ma tells me.

I do then snap it back.

“He’s got your jaw,” . . . Grandma says.

“You think so?”

“Of course you were always wild about kids, you’d babysit for free . . .”

They talk and talk. (Donoghue 232-33)

This instance serves as an excellent illustration of woman-to-woman relatedness between Ma and her mom (Grandma) from which springs an unimaginable understanding that the two women-mothers share. Moreover, in this instance, Grandma makes a reference to the intense
“maternal desire” in Ma as she says how Ma was “always wild about kids” and “would babysit for free.” This reference made by Grandma implicitly testifies to the undying “maternal desire” in every girl, every woman. It is also important to note how Grandma, here, feels eager to point out that her grandson (Jack) resembles her daughter (Ma). Therefore, Jack (the child) comes to represent Ma (the woman-mother) herself, and she represents her own woman-mother in an identification which brings herself (Ma) into contact with Grandma’s maternity. The above mentioned instance, therefore, implicitly represents the “semiotic” dimension of language which manifests the unending “maternal desire” in woman. It is with this “maternal desire,” the desire-to-mother, that woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes her own mother and they form part of the same continuity. This “maternal continuity” among women, this extension of maternity from woman-mother to her daughter (from Grandma to Ma) poses a strong challenge to patriarchy. This idea gets illustrated in the novel Room. For instance, Ma sings the same songs, tells the same stories that her mom (Grandma) used to sing and tell for her; Grandma readily accepts Jack as her brave and favourite grandson at the very first sight of the boy; she is the only character who truly encourages and supports Ma to begin her life anew with her son Jack. Moreover, Ma, like her mom, distances herself from her dad (Grandpa) who cannot accept Jack as his grandson.
wholeheartedly. We can, therefore, interpret this as Ma’s rejection of patriarchy represented by Grandpa by repeating for Jack the same acts – like singing songs, playing games, reading books – which her mom (Grandma) used to perform for her when she was a kid. This, in turn, suggests how the “maternal continuity” among women, the undying “maternal desire” in every woman, can equip themselves with a unique and unmatchable power that is strong enough to cause a breach of the patriarchal dominance.

The novel *Room*, thus, gives expression to one of the most important concepts put forward by French feminists – the economy of “maternal desire” in every woman. Ma, in *Room*, can be understood as a literary invocation of this economy of “maternal-feminine desire” which is open, productive, creative. This “maternal desire” in Ma is clearly revealed in the context in which she describes to Jack her experience of giving birth all alone by herself in the tiny room:

. . . remember the cord that goes to the belly button
. . . the girl baby, it got tangled when she was coming out, so she couldn’t breathe . . . I could feel the top of her head, it was all slippery, I pushed and pushed, I was shouting, ‘Help, I can’t, help me---’ . . . She came out blue . . . She never opened her eyes . . . The cord was all knotted around her neck . . . The ‘her’ part of her,
that went straight back up to Heaven . . . Maybe it really was you, and a year later you tried again and came back down as a boy . . . I was ready, this time I wanted it to be just me and you . . . You were born with your eyes open. (Donoghue 255-57)

At this instance, we come across such a liberation of woman’s “maternal desire,” the desire-to-mother, in Ma’s desire to experience the wonderful moment of “giving birth all alone by herself” with immense strength and determination. Thus, this instance implicitly manifests the “semiotic” dimension of language which gives expression to the repressed “maternal desire” in woman.

In Room, though the trauma behind the experience of mothering a boy under hostile circumstances is unimaginable, Ma’s “giving birth to Jack” was “the best thing” that she had ever done during the seven long years of her incarceration in the tiny room. This, in turn, reflects the undying “maternal desire” in Ma as a woman. This “maternal desire” in woman gets revealed in the voice of Ma when she, after being admitted to the Cumberland Clinic, is interviewed by a media person:

“Believe me,” the woman is saying to Ma, “we’re just trying to help you tell your story to the world.” She looks down at the paper in her lap. “So. You found yourself pregnant for the second time, in the hell hole where you’d
now eked out two years of your precious youth. Were there days when you felt you were being, ah, forced to bear this man’s—"

Ma butts in. “Actually I felt saved.”

“Saved. That’s beautiful.” . . . The woman . . . glances down at the paper and looks up at Ma again. “On that cold March day five years ago, you gave birth alone under medieval conditions to a healthy baby. Was that the hardest thing you’ve ever done?”

Ma shakes her head, “The best thing.” (Donoghue 291)

Thus, for Ma, “maternity,” in a way, is an extraordinary experience of reliving her self, a unique experience that “saved” her identity as a woman. Hence, for Ma, the experience of mothering in such hostile circumstances is never a loss or sacrifice. For example, at an instance, Ma even tells Jack: “Well, by the time you’re one hundred, I’ll be one hundred and twenty-one, and I think my body will be pretty worn out . . . I’ll be in Heaven getting your room ready” (Donoghue 387). Ma’s experience of mothering, therefore, marks the accomplishment of the undying “maternal desire” in her which, in turn, is the source of the woman-mother’s power – a power that remains alien to the male world, a forbidden paradise for patriarchy.
Another instance in the novel that implicitly manifests the “maternal desire” in Ma is the reference to Ma’s painting of Baby Jesus in which the Virgin Mary is cuddled in her mother’s lap while Baby Jesus is playing: “. . . painting of Baby Jesus playing . . . Mary’s there too, she’s cuddled in her Ma’s lap that’s Baby Jesus’s Grandma . . .” (Donoghue 22). In a way, Ma’s painting can be taken as an expression of the woman-mother’s unending desire to relate or connect herself with her mom (Grandma). An instance of the “maternal desire” in Ma also occurs as she narrates the birth of Baby Jesus to Jack:

What started Baby Jesus growing in Mary’s tummy was an angel zoomed down, like a ghost but a really cool one with feathers. Mary was all surprised, she said, “How can this be?” and then, “OK let it be.” When Baby Jesus popped out of her vagina on Christmas she put him in a manger but not for the cows to chew, only warm him up with their blowing because he was magic. (Donoghue 22-23)

For Ma, Jack is “miracle,” magic, like Baby Jesus was (Donoghue 282). This, in turn, reveals the creativity of Ma’s unending “maternal desire.”

In *Room*, we also come across instances which implicitly reveal the “maternal desire” in Ma through the voice of Jack. One such instance
occurs when Jack describes how he waits for Ma to roll him up inside a rug as part of their plan to escape from the locked room:

I wait for Ma to roll me up. Instead she just looks at me. My feet my legs my arms my head, her eyes keep sliding over my whole me like she’s counting. “What?” I say. She doesn’t say a word. She leans over . . . she just touches her face to mine till I can’t tell whose is whose. (Donoghue 167)

This instance also serves as an implicit manifestation of the undying desire-to-mother in Ma. Similarly, there is also another instance in the novel where Ma implicitly suggests how her “maternal desire” is endlessly realized in her experience of mothering Jack as she agrees with her son’s view that she was all sad till the boy “happened” in her “tummy” (Donoghue 3). A similar instance revealing the undying “maternal desire” in Ma which she embraces and cherishes comes when Ma revisions “The Little Mermaid” tale and narrates it to Jack:

This mermaid is sitting on the rocks one evening, combing her hair, when a fisherman creeps up and catches her in his net . . . he brings her home to his cottage and she has to marry him . . . He takes away her magic comb so she can’t ever go back into the sea. So after a while the mermaid has a baby . . . But whenever
the fisherman’s out fishing she looks around the cottage, and one day she finds where he’s hidden her comb . . . And she runs away to the rocks, and slips down into the sea . . . she takes her baby, Jacker Jack, with her, he’s all knotted up in her hair. And when the fisherman comes back, the cottage is empty, and he never sees them again. (Donoghue 84)

In this context, we find that Ma, by revisioning the fairy tale of “The Little Mermaid,” by attributing the same with the power of maternity, symbolically connects her own life with the revisioned tale; she connects herself with the character of the “Little Mermaid-as-mother” while telling the story to her son. Thus, this instance not only manifests the “maternal desire” in woman but also bears testimony to the woman-to-woman relatedness or the mother-to-mother connectedness. All these instances prove to be vivid illustrations of the “semiotic” dimension of language that manifests the “maternal-feminine desire.” Thus, in short, Donoghue’s novel Room emerges as an effective literary attempt demonstrating how woman’s “maternal desire” and the woman-to-woman relatedness finally free the woman-mother from the hold of the repressive chains of patriarchy.

Like Mama and Room, Hannah’s novel The Things We Do for Love is also a fictional narrative that eloquently gives expression to the
French feminist notions – the woman-to-woman relatedness and the undying “maternal desire” in woman. In the novel *The Things We Do for Love*, the woman-to-woman relatedness is manifested in the relationship between Angie and her mama Maria DeSaria. For Angie, her “Mama’s kitchen” always symbolizes a sense of woman-to-woman relatedness that revives her undying “maternal desire.” An excellent illustration of the woman-to-woman relatedness occurs in the beginning of the novel when the narrator refers to Angie’s return to her mama and sisters:

> Angie smiled. So much of her time had been spent in this kitchen . . . no matter how old she got or what direction her life took, this would always be home. In Mama’s kitchen, you were safe and warm and well loved. Though she and her sisters had chosen different lives and tended to meddle too often in one another’s choices, they were like strands of a single rope. When they came together, they were unbreakable. She needed to be a part of that again; she’d been grieving alone for too long.

> She stepped into the kitchen . . . Livvy and Mira surged forward, enfolded her in a hug . . . They held her tightly; Angie felt the wetness of tears on her neck, but nothing was said except “It’s good to have you home.”
“Thanks.” She gave her sisters one last tight hug, then went to Mama, who opened her arms. Angie stepped into the warmth of that embrace. As always, Mama smelled of . . . the scents of Angie’s youth. Mama hugged her so tightly that Angie had to draw in a gulp of air. Laughing, she tried to step back, but Mama held on. Angie stiffened instinctively. The last time Mama had held Angie this tightly, Mama had whispered, *You’ll try again. God will give you another baby.* (Hannah 6-7)

This instance clearly manifests the woman-to-woman relatedness, the maternal connection among women of all generations. Angie regains her strength, her real identity, as she enters her “Mama’s kitchen” – a space that symbolizes the “maternal continuity” among women from which springs a unique notion suggesting that women-mothers are “like strands of a single rope.” In other words, throughout the novel, in this relatedness or connectedness to her mama, Angie is reliving her self. Thus, in the novel, “cooking” is something that reaffirms a sense of continuity among women-mothers (Angie and her mama Maria), a continuity that is beyond the reach and understanding of patriarchy (Conlan). This is referred to in the novel appropriately:

Poor Conlan. Fourteen years of marriage and he still didn’t understand the dynamics of the DeSaria family.
Cooking was more than a job or a hobby; it was a kind of currency . . . her sisters still worked in the family restaurant. That was real work . . . (Hannah 4)

This notion of “cooking” as the source of “maternal continuity” among women is further illustrated in the context where Angie’s mama encourages her to learn how to cook. This happens at an instance in the novel, after Angie accepts Lauren as her daughter:

On a rainy Monday in late April, Maria decided that Angie needed to learn how to cook. She showed up early, carrying a big cardboard box full of supplies . . . Maria led the way to the counter and began pulling ingredients out of the box. By the time Angie made it . . . to the kitchen . . . there was a mound of flour on the butcher block and a metal bowl full of eggs alongside it . . . For the next hour, they worked side by side. Maria taught . . . how to scoop out the center of the flour and fill the hole with just the right amount of eggs, then to work the dough carefully so it didn’t get tough . . . “Well,” Maria said at last, “I must go now . . .”

Angie laughed. “Thank God” . . . “I think I’ll stick with the restaurant’s leftovers.”
“Someday you will be sorry, Angela,” Maria sniffed, “that you ignored your heritage.”

Angie put an arm around her mother, held her close. “I’m just kidding, Mama. I appreciate the lesson. Tomorrow I’ll get out a cookbook and try something on my own. How would that be?”

“Good.” Maria hugged . . . said good-bye, and left the house. (Hannah 384-86)

This instance also serves as an implicit manifestation of “maternal continuity,” the woman-to-woman relatedness, a “heritage” that gets handed down the generations of women.

Another instance in the novel that effectively illustrates the woman-to-woman relatedness, the mother-to-mother connectedness, which the two women-mothers – Angie and her mama Maria – share, occurs when Maria once visits Angie at her house. Once, after getting Lauren ready for a school dance, Angie is suddenly struck by a fit of loneliness as the girl leaves for the dance. This is the instance when Maria visits Angie:

Angie backed into the house and closed the door. The silence seemed oppressive suddenly . . . She felt herself slipping down a slope she knew too well; at the bottom it was lonely and cold . . . She climbed into her . . . bed,
pulled the covers up to her chin, and closed her eyes.  

Sometime later, she woke up. Someone was calling her name . . . She crawled out of bed and stumbled down the stairs. Mama stood in the kitchen, her clothes dappled with raindrops, her red-splattered apron still in place . . .

“You are not fine.”

“I will be.”

. . . She took Angie by the hand and led her toward the sofa. They sat down, cuddled together the way they’d done when Angie was a girl. Mama stroked her hair.

“It was fun helping her get ready for the dance. It wasn’t until later . . . after she’d left . . . that I started thinking about . . .”

“I know,” Mama said gently. “It made you think of your daughter.”

Angie sighed. Grief was like that; both she and Mama knew it well. It would sometimes feel fresh, no matter how long she lived. Some losses ran deep, and time moved too slowly in a lifetime to heal them completely.

“I lost a son once,” Mama said into the silence that fell between them.

Angie gasped. “You never told us that.”
“Some things are too difficult to speak of. He would have been my first.”
“Why didn’t you tell me?”
“I couldn’t.”
Angie felt her mother’s pain. It connected them, that common loss, brought them to a place that felt like friendship. (Hannah 147-49)

Here, Angie is painfully reminded of her daughter Sophia, who had lived for only a few short days. As Lauren leaves for the dance, it is her mama who comes to her relief genuinely relating herself with Angie as a “woman-mother.” This instance can, therefore, be considered as a brilliant illustration of the woman-to-woman relatedness, the mother-to-mother connectedness, that Angie and her mama Maria share. This, in turn, breeds a sense of eternal friendship – an incredibly extraordinary understanding for each other – between the two women-mothers. Moreover, the instance mentioned above also hints at the undying “maternal desire” in every woman as both the women-mothers (Angie and Maria) express their pain of losing a child.

In *The Things We Do for Love*, the French feminist notion of woman-to-woman relatedness also finds expression in the relationship between Angie and Lauren. In the novel, the wonderful relationship between Angie and Lauren, their deeply intense friendship, generates a
unique space of woman-to-woman relatedness that poses a strong threat to patriarchy by rendering the patriarchal representatives like Conlan weak, vulnerable and yielding. The woman-to-woman relatedness between Angie and Lauren is explicitly revealed in their conversation following the pregnant girl’s emotional breakdown at being forced by everyone to think about her baby’s adoption:

Angie stopped her with a touch. “Honey . . . What’s going on?”

“I can’t talk about it.”

“So it’s the baby.”

Lauren heard the tiny crack in Angie’s voice when she said *baby*. “I don’t want to talk to you about it.”

Angie sighed. “I know. And I know why. But I’m not that fragile anymore.”

. . . Lauren looked at her. The understanding in Angie’s eyes was her undoing. “How did you handle it? Losing Sophia, I mean.”

Angie sat back on her heels. “Wow. No one ever asks me that head-on.”

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have---”

“No. We’re friends. We can talk about our lives.” (Hannah 338)
This instance uncovers the sense of eternal friendship which Angie and Lauren share, revealing their understanding for each other. Like Angie, Lauren also understands woman’s feelings as she expresses her deep concern over Angie’s pain at the loss of her daughter Sophia. The unimaginable understanding for each other among women, which Angie and Lauren share, is further revealed in the rest of their conversation:

Angie sidled up beside Lauren, put an arm around her.

Together they stared into the crackling fire. Angie felt the old grief move into her again, squeezing her chest until it hurt to breathe. “You’re asking how you live with a broken heart,” she finally said.

“Yeah. I guess.”

Once the memories were there, Angie had no choice but to gather them close. “I held her; did I ever tell you that? She was so tiny. And so blue.” She drew in a ragged breath. “When she was gone, I couldn’t seem to stop crying. I missed her and the idea of her so much. I let the missing become who I was . . . then Conlan left me and I came back home and that’s when the most amazing thing happened.”

“What?”
“A bright, beautiful young woman came into my life, and she reminded me that there was joy in the world. I started to remember my blessings . . . Life has a way of going on, and you do your best and move with it. A broken heart heals. Like every wound, there’s a scar, a memory, but it fades . . . I know it’s hard for a teenager to believe, but it’s true.”

“Maybe.” She sighed. “Everyone wants me to think about adoption.”

God help her, Angie’s first thought was Give me the baby. She hated herself for it . . . She battled the feelings, put them aside long enough to ask quietly, “What do you want?”

“I don’t know . . . but I can’t just give away my baby.”

She turned to Angie. “What do I do?”

“Oh, Lauren,” Angie said, pulling her into her arms . . . “I’m here for you.” For the first time, Angie dared to touch Lauren’s stomach. “And there’s this little person who needs you to be strong . . . Whatever you decide, you’re not alone.” (Hannah 338-40)

This instance also emerges as an effective manifestation of the woman-to-woman relatedness, the maternal connection among women of all
generations. Another instance, in the novel, that clearly demonstrates the woman-to-woman relatedness between Angie and Lauren occurs towards the end of the novel, after Lauren returns home with her baby, to Angie:

“We were so worried about you,” Angie said, moving a step closer.

Lauren looked down at the baby in her arms. “I know I promised him to you. I just . . .” She looked up. Tears filled her eyes.

“Oh, Lauren.” At last, Angie closed the gap between them. She touched Lauren’s damp cheek in the gentle kind of caress she’d dared so easily in the past. “I should have told you more about what it was like. It’s just . . . it was so hard to think about the day I had Sophie. The few minutes I held her. I knew when you looked into your baby’s eyes, you’d be as lost as I was. That’s why I never decorated the nursery. I knew, honey.”

“You knew I’d keep him?”

“I was pretty sure.” (Hannah 429-30)

Here, we come across an explicit expression of the woman-to-woman relatedness, the mother-to-mother connectedness, between Angie and Lauren as women-mothers. Lauren, at this instance, burst into tears
realising how she hurt Angie’s feelings by running away from the hospital in the middle of the night with her newborn baby-boy after promising Angie her baby. On the other hand, Angie could easily relate or connect with Lauren as a woman-mother, and she understands the girl’s feelings. Hence, she welcomes Lauren’s return with extreme joy and relief. This woman-to-woman relatedness, this eternal friendship, between Angie and Lauren runs throughout the novel, and their intense friendship – the “maternal continuity” – is so strong that all the patriarchal interruptions like those made by Conlan are rendered futile as the man/father is finally forced to accept the choices of Angie and Lauren in their life.

In the novel, there are also several instances that reveal the undying “maternal desire” in Angie. One such instance is Angie’s recurring “baby dream”:

Angie’s dreams that night came in black and white . . .
She was in Searle Park, at the merry-go-round, waving at a small dark-haired girl who had . . . blue eyes . . .
Slowly, the girl faded to gray and disappeared; it was as if a mist had swept in and veiled the world . . . The images were watery and uncertain . . . She woke with a gasp . . .
She shouldn’t have tried to go back in time; it hurt too much. (Hannah 233)
This “baby dream,” which recurrently haunts Angie after the death of her daughter Sophia, manifests the undying “maternal desire” in the woman. Every time Angie wakes up from her dream, she finds herself in tears. But soon when she begins her life anew with Lauren, Angie once notices that there are no tear marks on her cheeks as she wakes up from her “baby dream.” The fact that Angie’s dream never made her cry again after Lauren came to live with her testifies how the girl has revived Angie’s undying “maternal desire.” Moreover, the unending “maternal desire” in Angie, which is reflected in her dream, is endlessly accomplished in her act of emotionally or psychologically playing “mother” to Lauren. For example, Angie always comes to Lauren’s help whenever the girl emotionally breaks down:

Angie came up beside her, put an arm around her . . .

Lauren leaned sideways. As always, Angie was able to calm her so easily, with just a---

*mother’s*

---touch.

“Thanks,” Lauren said . . . (Hannah 328)

This instance, thus, bears evidence to how there exists an endless “maternal desire” in every woman as in Angie. The undying “maternal desire” in Angie also finds expression in the context where Angie takes
her camera, which her mama had once gifted her with, to get some snapshots of Lauren after getting the girl ready for the school dance:

Angie stood in front of her dresser. The top drawer was open. There, buried among . . . socks, was her camera. 

*To take photos of my grandbabies,* Mama had said when she’d given Angie the camera . . . Angie sighed. For years, she had used this camera all the time, documenting every moment of her life. She was there, year after year, snapping pictures at . . . birthday parties, baby showers, preschool graduations. Somewhere along the way, it had begun to cause her pain, this looking through the viewfinder at a life she wanted desperately but couldn’t have. One by one, she’d stopped photographing her nieces and nephews. It simply hurt too much to see her loss in color . . . Angie had put the camera away for good.

She grabbed the camera, refilled the film, and went downstairs. Lauren stood at the fireplace with her back to the flames. The golden glow wreathed her . . . Angie . . . started snapping photographs. She kept taking them, one after another, until Lauren laughed . . . (Hannah 143-44)
This is, again, an instance which, by showing how Lauren reawakens the Maternal in Angie, clearly and strongly hints at the undying “maternal desire” in the woman. All these instances in the novel, thus, constitute the “semiotic” dimension of language which manifests the repressed “maternal-feminine desire.” Therefore, Hannah’s novel *The Things We Do for Love* is a literary attempt that proves to be an effective illustration of the woman-to-woman relatedness and the undying “maternal desire” in every woman, which French feminists speak about.

Like the novels analysed above, another novel that bears traces of woman-to-woman relatedness and hints at the undying “maternal desire” in woman is Shriver’s *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. The novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* carries traces of woman-to-woman relatedness in its references to the relationship between Eva and her mother Sonya Khatchadourian. Eva’s mother is the only woman character in the novel who really shares a deep understanding with the woman-mother. She is, in fact, the only person who, unlike the rest of the patriarchal world outside, never emotionally troubles Eva by asking “why” her son Kevin committed the massacre. For instance, Eva, in one of her letters, addresses Franklin and says: “. . . why? It’s what they all want to ask---my brother, your parents, my coworkers, the documentary makers, Kevin’s psychiatric consult, the . . . web-page designers, though interestingly never my own mother” (Shriver 194). It is Sonya, Eva’s
mother, who genuinely comes to feel for and support her daughter after her grandson Kevin is arrested and jailed, following the murders he committed. Eva, in one of her letters, makes a reference to the great relief and comfort she received while making a phone call to her mother during the very same night of the massacre-day, offering immense strength and support. Eva recollects:

In fact, I trace the flowering of my present . . . grace to a gasping phone call the night of Thursday itself. To whom else was I to turn but my mother? . . . I could tell from her collected, formal greeting, Hello, Sonya Khatchadourian speaking, that she hadn’t seen the evening news.

Mother? was all I could manage---plaintive . . . The ensuing heavy breathing must have sounded like a crank call. I felt suddenly protective . . . how would she confront the vastly more appreciable terror of a murderous grandson? For pity’s sake, I thought, she’s seventy-six, and she already lives through a mail slot. After this, she’ll never pull the covers off her head.

But . . . she wasn’t even surprised? She was somber but remained composed, and for once, even at her advanced age, she acted and sounded like a real parent. I could depend on her, she assured me . . . Most of her
extended family had been slaughtered, her very husband picked off by Japanese like skeet; Kevin’s rampage fit right in. Indeed, the occasion seemed to liberate something in her, not only love but bravery, if they are not in many respects the same thing. Mindful that the police were bound to expect me to remain on hand, I declined her invitation . . . Gravely, my . . . mother offered to fly to me. (Shriver 131-32)

This instance excellently illustrates the woman-to-woman relatedness, the mother-to-mother connectedness, between Eva and her mother Sonya. The great support and help which Sonya offers Eva over the phone, in turn, restore the immense strength in Eva as a woman-mother. The instance mentioned above, therefore, exposes the incredible level of understanding between the two women-mothers, Eva and Sonya.

The novel We Need to Talk About Kevin also hints at the undying “maternal desire” in Eva at several instances. Eva, at one such instance, even goes to the extent of explicitly declaring that “everything that made” her “pretty was intrinsic to motherhood” (Shriver 61). A similar instance that hints at the undying “maternal desire” in Eva occurs when she, in one of her letters, recollects her experience of becoming a mother:
I don’t know what exactly I’d foreseen would happen to me when Kevin was first hoisted to my breast. I hadn’t foreseen anything exactly. I wanted what I could not imagine. I wanted to be transformed; I wanted to be transported. I wanted a door to open and a whole new vista to expand before me that I had never known was out there. I wanted nothing short of revelation, and revelation by its nature cannot be anticipated; it promises that to which we are not yet privy . . . my expectations of motherhood were high, or I wouldn’t have agreed to go through with it. I’d attended hungrily to accounts from friends: You have no idea what it’s like until you have one of your own. Whenever I allowed that I was less than enamored of infants and small children, I was assured: I felt the same way! Couldn’t stand other people’s kids! But it’s different---it’s totally different---when they’re yours. I loved that, the prospect of another country, a strange land . . . . (Shriver 95)

Here, Eva eloquently expresses her intense desire to experience “mothering” as an exploration into the until-then-unexplored foreign land, the ever-new paradise endlessly alien to patriarchy. This instance, therefore, hints at the unique and endless “maternal desire,” the undying
desire-to-mother, in Eva. This is further illustrated when Eva, at an instance, declares to Franklin that she would like to get pregnant for the second time. Eva recollects:

I closed my eyes, cupping the back of the armchair . . . Honestly, I’d no idea what I was going to say until I said it. “Franklin, I want to have another child.”

I opened my eyes and blinked. I had surprised myself. It may have been my first experience of spontaneity in six or seven years . . . “I’d like us to start trying to get me pregnant right away.” (Shriver 244)

This instance also manifests the endless “maternal desire” in Eva which in turn bears testimony to the innate “desire-to-mother” in every woman. This innate and endless “maternal desire” in Eva is so strong and intense that, despite Franklin’s initial protests, the woman-mother still manages to conceive for the second time and give birth to her daughter Celia. Thus, in Shriver’s novel, the undying “maternal desire” in Eva, which is repressed by patriarchy, is powerful enough to manifest itself and win over the patriarchal man/father (Franklin). Moreover, the novel ends with Eva implicitly expressing her hopes for her son’s return from the prison in future as she gets the second bedroom in her apartment ready and clean with a copy of Kevin’s favourite book *Robin Hood* lying on the bookshelf. This, again, can be taken as an instance that hints at the
undying “maternal desire,” the endless “desire-to-mother,” in Eva. All these instances in the novel that hint at the undying “maternal desire” in Eva constitute the “semiotic” dimension of language which manifests the repressed “maternal desire” in woman. So, Shriver’s novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* can also be regarded as a literary attempt that includes instances illustrating French feminist notions – the woman-to-woman relatedness and the undying “maternal desire” in every woman.

Another work of fiction, like the fictional narratives analysed above, that contains instances illustrating the French feminist notions of woman-to-woman relatedness and woman’s undying “maternal desire” is Maracle’s collection of short stories *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style*. One such instance, in the collection, that demonstrates woman-to-woman relatedness occurs in the story “First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style,” as the Woman-Mother (the narrator) narrates the Salish flood narrative:

> When the flood hit us . . . The women who survived made it to the top of some very large mountains with the help of one sister or another. The heroes in most of our flood stories are women—sisters who saved . . . other sisters, their children, or sacrificed themselves for expectant mothers and the like. The women did not generally rescue men. At least, if any woman did rescue a man, that story
did not get handed down in my family... my mother and grandmother used to say that women did not try to save the men... (Maracle 6-7)

This instance clearly illustrates the woman-to-woman relatedness, the “maternal continuity” or the mother-to-mother connectedness, as a unique and endless power that gets handed down the generations of women-mothers, posing a strong threat to all the patriarchal narratives. This illustration of the strength of woman-to-woman relatedness is further carried on to the context that makes a reference to the relationship between the two sisters in the Salish flood narrative, who first settled and began their life anew on the valley floor at the ocean’s edge after the flood:

As the waters receded, one... pair of sisters, one of whom had rescued the other, climbed down from the mountain on which they had waited out the flood... They were determined to make a go of it on the valley floor at the ocean’s edge. They constructed a lean-to from woven cedar mats and began life anew... They were running out of food. Because one of them was now pregnant, the other gave up her share of food to feed her pregnant sister and the young child. Sacrificing for her
sister, the child and the baby on the way, she did not survive. (Maracle 7-8)

Here, again, we come across an excellent illustration of the incredibly intense understanding among women. Another instance in the story “First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style” illustrating the woman-to-woman relatedness occurs in the context that makes a reference to how, in the Salish flood narrative, the other women who survived the flood join the surviving woman-mother and her children on the valley floor:

From the mountaintops, other women who had survived the flood saw the smoke of the woman’s fire and noticed . . . the clearing . . . They decided to leave the mountains . . . When they arrived at her camp, she invited them to join her and her children. Together they realized they could create a village of survivors . . . It was good to have so much company . . . . (Maracle 10)

This instance suggests the hopes of women in the Salish flood narrative, who survived the flood, of creating a village of women survivors and their children. This, in turn, manifests the notion of woman-to-woman relatedness. The story “First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style” also hints at the undying “maternal desire” in every woman as the women survivors in the Salish flood narrative eagerly and
patiently wait with determination for their chance to use the man, who arrives in a canoe, and become pregnant again and again:

... they retreated one at a time to the lean-to with him. He managed to satisfy the first two but was exhausted by the time the last woman entered the lean-to. He could not arouse himself. He felt so guilty, but the last woman . . . wasn’t worried; he wasn’t going anywhere for a while and she would have her chance to become pregnant. (Maracle 12)

This instance, by suggesting the intense “desire-to-mother” in every woman, bears testimony to the undying “maternal desire” in woman that endlessly transmits itself among women of all generations. The instance mentioned above, therefore, demonstrates the “semiotic” dimension of language – one which is marked by the manifestation of the “maternal-feminine desire,” dismissing and even terminating patriarchy’s repression of the same desire.

Another instance in Maracle’s collection First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style that hints at the continuity that runs among generations of women, the woman-to-woman relatedness, occurs in the story “Blessing Song” as the Woman-Mother (the narrator) describes her experience of sharing a unique sense of relatedness or connectedness
with her daughter and granddaughter while making a boat-trip to Puget Sound to watch the killer whales:

We have come to watch the whales, my granddaughter, my daughter and myself . . . my girls and I quietly watch and wait. The water slaps at the boat, the waves deepen as we come closer to the congregation . . . We look at one another and chuckle, our grip on one another’s arm tightens. On the horizon, we see them, a super pod of resident killer whales . . . My granddaughter stands behind us as though we could actually protect her . . . We stand pressed up against one another. The biggest of the whales swims within six feet of the boat, stands straight up and murmurs at us . . . I feel a song being pulled from some place deep inside me . . . The song emerges from my daughter and me as we stand there before this mammoth . . . The very moment the song ends, the whale slaps the water . . . We remain quiet and just stand there, arms still locked together . . . The song forced from us by the whale reminds us that our lineage stretches back forever. It isn’t the song that matters . . . What matters is the closing of the gap between us; the creation of oneness
between three generations of . . . women doing what
every generation before us has done . . . (Maracle 29-31)

This instance clearly illustrates the “maternal continuity,” the
woman-to-woman relatedness, the maternal connection among women
irrespective of their age.

In Maracle’s collection, the woman-to-woman relatedness is also
hinted at in the story “Laundry Basket” in its reference to the
relationship, the eternal friendship, between the two women-mothers,
Marla and her friend Sara. Once Marla gifts Sara with one of her stories
which later turns out to be a crucial move in establishing herself as a
professional writer:

She had not realized how devoted she was to her
stories . . . Some she gave away to friends. She
remembered Sara. Sara had been the one to leave
when her marriage broke up. Now she was moving back
home to take care of her teenaged children whose father
had given up trying to raise them, leaving them to her
in disgusted frustration. The customs of divorce had all
changed in the last while. Men were gaining custody of
young children, then as the problems of biochemical
teenage revolution fell on them, they were returning
them to their mothers. She had several friends riding
in this canoe and Sara was special among them. She wanted to give her something, something intensely personal, something of her soul. A story that was close to her heart. Sara knew about publishers and had sent the story to some magazine. They wanted it. That’s all it took. (Maracle 51)

Here, as Marla gifts her “special” friend Sara with one of her stories that is close to her heart on her friend’s return and as Sara, on the other hand, makes the initial move in getting her friend’s story published in a magazine, we come across an amazingly intense mutual love, concern and understanding between the two women-mothers. This instance hints at the woman-to-woman relatedness from which springs immense energy and strength with which women-mothers can successfully survive against patriarchy. So, Maracle’s collection *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* can also be regarded as an effective literary attempt that contains instances hinting at the woman-to-woman relatedness and the undying “maternal desire” in woman.

Therefore, a French feminist reading of the select women’s fiction demonstrates how the select works of fiction harmoniously agree in their effective illustration and manifestation of the two wonderfully interesting French feminist concepts, those of “woman-to-woman relatedness” and woman’s undying “maternal desire.” These two
concepts discussed by Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva – the three pillars of French feminism – definitely open up an integral space for the “return” of the woman’s maternal body in the field of disciplines like literature, theory and philosophy. Following the feminist theoretical path set by the works of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva in recent French feminist theory and practice, one sees tendencies toward the centrality of woman’s maternal body, her vital creative powers. This, in fact, indicates that we are actually reaching the point where a new genre is being created, a realm of the “maternal-feminine.” Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva have insisted on the essentially subversive and immensely creative nature of maternity in patriarchal culture, without attempting to differentiate between the feminine and the maternal. This is because, as Cixous argues, the very fact of being “a woman” means that one “is never far from ‘mother’” (Marks and De Courtivron 117). Hence, as the French feminists like Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva have envisioned, the woman-to-woman relatedness and the undying “maternal desire” in every woman are the two concepts which together generate a new and distinct realm of maternity discourse, a “maternal-feminine” discursive space, in opposition to the oppressive patriarchal discourse. The five works of fiction selected for the study, in different ways, constitute this new “maternal-feminine” discursive realm. These five fictional works by women writers pose the woman-to-woman relatedness and the woman’s
undying “maternal desire” against the limits of death, of repression, of totalitarianism in patriarchy. In other words, these works of fiction revive and manifest the woman-to-woman relatedness and the woman’s “maternal desire,” the repression of which perpetuates an oppressive system like patriarchy. This analysis, therefore, proves the select women’s fiction as effective literary attempts which call upon women to rediscover and embrace their mutual “relatedness” and their “maternal desire,” and thereby make a strong political move to free their bodies from the endless years of oppressive torture in patriarchy.