

A Daughter's Struggle to Individuate in "Einstein's Daughter"

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A coming-of-age tale

The story's protagonist, struggles to escape her mother's and society's influences over her life in order to grow into her true identity

Element of Magical realism

- Einstein's *Special Theory of Relativity*—the relativity of time
- The protagonist uses her supernormal speed to travel back in time and explore her family history
- She hopes to use her knowledge of the past shape her future

"Einstein's Daughter" (1989)

—Claudia Smith Brinson

- The protagonist's struggle for autonomy demonstrates how mother-daughter relationships perpetuate patriarchal gender roles, which inherently marginalize women. Additionally, the protagonist's flight at the story's end suggests that women must reject biological essentialism and individuate from their mothers in order to fashion a sense of self that deviates from patriarchal norms.

Thesis Statement

- I. The daughter recognizes her mother's adherence to patriarchal norms.
- Lois Tyson
 - The ideal patriarchal woman: "modest, unassuming, self-sacrificing, and nurturing. She has no needs of her own, for she is completely satisfied by serving her family"

Textual evidence: pg. 401 (and more throughout the story)

The mother has internalized patriarchal femininity and accepted her duties to her husband as a housewife and as a mother to her child; she has accepted her lifestyle as normal and makes no effort to change her circumstances.

- II. The mother's adherence to traditional femininity and gender roles causes her to exert pressure on her daughter to conform to the same socially accepted norms.
- Nancy Chodorow
 - "the reproduction of mothering"
 - "the mother is very important to the daughter's psyche and sense of self, such that core psychological and interpersonal experiences for women can be understood in terms of this internal mother-daughter lineage"
 - "the mother-daughter relationship may overwhelm and invade both the mother's and the daughter's psyche"

- Connecting Chodorow to the story:
 - The mother's attempts to construct her daughter's behavior suppress the daughter's identity, which innately conflicts with traditional femininity.
 - Textual evidence Pg. 401
 - The mother social constructs her daughter
 - The child's behavior illustrates her innate divergence from the patriarchal female stereotype and precludes her determinacy to escape the housewife lifestyle

- III. As the protagonist matures, she quickly recognizes that patriarchal gender roles oppress and marginalize women, and this realization initiates her attempt to formulate an identity and a future in opposition to her mother's expectations.
- Nancy Chodorow "women experience a sense of self-in-relation that is in contrast to men's creation of self that wishes to deny relation and connection"
- As the protagonist rejects patriarchal norms, she begins to craft an identity independent of her "sense of self-in-relation" to her mother.

- The protagonist's rejection of patriarchal norms
- Pg. 401
- Using the relativity of time to think about the limitations set in place for men and women in patriarchal societies
- The daughter's understanding of the deficiencies of her mother's proposed lifestyle initiates the protagonist's individuation from her mother.

- IV. The protagonist's attempt to craft an identity and a future apart from the housewife lifestyle that her mother continually reinforces demands that she reject the notion of biological essentialism.
- Tyson
 - biological essentialism: the belief that women are innately inferior to men, . . . based on biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women.

- Rather than surrendering to the biological influence over her identity and her future, the protagonist determines to learn from the past in order to change the outcome of her own future.
- In the text: 402, 403, 404
- The daughter's rejection of biological essentialism empowers her to embrace a sense of self entirely independent from her mother's identity and expectations.

- V. The protagonist's burgeoning identity creates necessary conflict in the mother-daughter relationship and forces the protagonist to accept that her own aspirations are irreconcilable with her mother's lifestyle.
- The protagonist's "simple speed" enables her to break free from the bounds of patriarchal gender roles
- The mother actively works to suppress her daughter's desire for speed and movement (pg. 405, 406)

- In order for the protagonist to leave, the mother-daughter relationship must mature.
- The mother must acknowledge that it is her responsibility to allow her daughter to grow into her own chosen identity, regardless of her daughter's rejection of traditional femininity.
- The closing image (408)
- The daughter needs her mother to acknowledge their differences and willingly release her to "a now of [her] own making."

- The protagonist's relationship with her mother demonstrates how the mother's identity and ideology influences the daughter's sense of self.
- The daughter must individuate from her mother in order to grow into her true identity.
- The story's end suggests that mother-daughter relationships must move beyond the reproduction of patriarchal gender roles and permit subjective views of femininity in order to break the cycle of female oppression and marginalization.
- Ultimately, both mothers and daughters must embrace individuality and reject the concept of predetermined, uniform gender roles.

Conclusion