



CHAPTER 2

One Hand Clapping: The Loneliness of Motherhood in Lucia Berlin’s “Tiger Bites”

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Access to safe and legal abortions has been a concern for generations of women, and continue to be so today. During the last 50 years, immense progress in terms of women’s reproductive health has been made all over the world. However, as I began to write this piece in 2021, abortion was still heavily debated, and indeed an illegal practice, in many places. Naturally, the cultural and political discourse on the subject differs across the world. However, it is also, as Lynn M. Morgan and Meredith W. Michaels have pointed out, an issue subject to international debate,

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with both pro-life and pro-choice groups supporting each other globally (Morgan and Michaels 1999, 2). Indeed, the many women travelling abroad for the procedure convey the international scale of the issue. While I was working on “Tiger Bites,” a Lucia Berlin short story about a 19-year-old crossing the Texas-Mexico border to terminate a pregnancy, abortion rights in the US were crumbling.¹ In September 2021, new Texas legislation made practically all abortion illegal in the state (Astor 2021). This was followed by the Supreme Court’s overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in June 2022 (Liptak 2022).

We have yet to grasp the full impact of the Supreme Court ruling, even if reactions have been strong and immediate. One way of processing the events of the present and the memories of past experiences is through art and literature. Examining fictional stories of abortion can help us understand the cultural and political discourse concerning the subject. It can also give insight to the experiences of women regarding their reproductive health and possible options when it comes to their life decisions. As Heather Latimer writes: “fictional representations of reproduction offer a chance to examine reproductive politics outside cyclical frames concerned with rights and choices. [...] Fiction, like other forms of representation, responds to and reflects not only the culture in which it is produced but also that culture’s ideological gaps” (Latimer 2013, 5).

In Anglophone literature, early examples of depictions of abortion include the British authors Jean Rhys’ *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) and Aldous Huxley’s *Eyeless in Gaza* (1934), which researchers have described as groundbreaking in their openness and lack of judgment (Minogue and Palmer 2006). In the case of Canadian author Margaret Atwood, well known for novels about women’s oppression and resistance, *Surfacing* (1972) portrays an abortion which has primarily been discussed as reflective of problematic relations between Canada and the US, an interpretation that more recently has been criticized (Gault 2007). Previous research on how abortion is thematized in US literature suggests that it is a topic that is often avoided. Some have suggested that this is for fear of making the topic too complex and thereby unintentionally creating arguments for the pro-life movement (Bigman 2019).

¹This chapter concentrates on an American literary text, and thus the cultural and historical context of that story, but abortion is illegal or difficult to access in many parts of the world. For a map over the current abortion laws of the world, see <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/worlds-abortion-laws/>

However, there are also authors from the US who do examine the subject. One of them is Lucia Berlin (1936–2004), who wrote most of her stories in the 1970s and 1980s but became well known and critically acclaimed with the posthumous short story collection *A Manual for Cleaning Women* (2015). The experiences of motherhood and mothering that Berlin conveys connect different times and places to each other, and show the relevance of storytelling across generations.

In this essay, I present a reading of Lucia Berlin's short story "Tiger Bites," one of the stories in *Manual...*, which follows the trajectory of a young woman crossing the American border to visit a Mexican abortion clinic. Lou is a 19-year-old mother who travels home to El Paso, Texas, with her small child to visit her kin over Christmas. Her husband has just left the family, and Lou is expecting their second child. At the train station her cousin Bella Lynn meets her and convinces her to travel across the border to Mexico to have an abortion. At the clinic, Lou regrets her decision and returns without going through with the procedure.

The analysis will center on how the subject of motherhood interconnects with concepts such as place, home, loneliness and agency that become apparent in the depiction of the abortion clinic. I argue that while not explicitly activist, the story is political in Jacques Rancière's sense as it "makes visible what was invisible, it makes audible as speaking beings those who were previously heard only as noisy animals" (Rancière 2011, 4). This interpretation of the political becomes especially relevant in the descriptions of the medical procedures, as they illuminate events that have previously been carried out in secret. In an issue of *London Review of Books* (July 2022) primarily focused on the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, many authors made a similar point. Toril Moi writes:

Silence is both the tool and the effect of repression. Silence ensures that the pregnant woman's fear and desperation will remain unheard, unheeded, unacknowledged. It ensures that women dying from botched backstreet abortions will be discreetly buried, not publicly mourned as victims of a cruel and inhumane policy (Moi 2022, 13).

By exploring the complexities surrounding motherhood, choice and independence, as well as bearing witness to the consequences of inaccessible abortions and reproductive healthcare, Berlin makes a case for empathy and solidarity with the women about whom she writes.

Lou is the first-person narrator, which makes the storytelling personal and moving, but also, obviously, unreliable. Lou is evasive and slightly

sarcastic. As we will see, humor is used to defuse difficult topics and conversations, and I argue that Lou's relationship to family and motherhood affects the storytelling. It is worth noting that Lou is narrating from a double position of both mother and daughter. All mothers are certainly daughters, but Berlin makes it particularly evident, as Lou in her mind moves between her relationship with her mother and her relationship with her children and their future together. The point of view gives Lou narrative agency, as well as a possibility to express vulnerability both in her experiences at the abortion clinic and her feelings of abandonment by her own mother.

In the following sections, I begin by analyzing the visit to the abortion clinic itself, and the events taking place there. The next section addresses the mother figures in the story, examining the absence of "good" mothers and the potential for agency that their absence produces. The last section examines the places and homes that figure in the story, and how they connect to the maternal body.

AT THE CLINIC

The heart of the short story is the visit to the Mexican abortion clinic. Lou goes back and forth between chosen and not-chosen motherhood, and is apparently uncertain about the abortion. It is Bella Lynn who convinces her to go to Mexico, by telling her how hard it will be to find work or another man while raising two children on her own. Learning about the pregnancy, she also reminds Lou about her parents: "Your ma will just kill herself all over again when she hears *this* news" (Berlin 2016, 73). As Lou and Bella Lynn drive across the border, and Lou gets picked up by a car and taken to a clinic outside of the city, the reader understands that she is in fact returning: Lou has spent time in Juárez as a child and speaks Spanish.

At the clinic, there are 20 other American women, some of them girls with their mothers. Here, the narrative becomes detailed and time slows down. The description of the women bears witness from a time before legal abortion: "Every one of them looked frightened, embarrassed, but most of all, intensely ashamed. That they had done something terrible. Shame. There appeared to be no bond of sympathy between any of them; my entrance was scarcely noticed" (Berlin 2016, 77). The nurse's brief and clinical description of the abortion gives the reader an insight to the procedure:

At five o'clock the doctor will come. You will have exam, catheter placed in utero. During the night cause contractions but sleeping medicine, you won't feel bad. No food, water after dinner. Early morning spontaneous abortion most usually. Six o'clock you go to operating room, go to sleep, get D and C. Wake up in your bed. We will give you ampicillin against infection, codeine for pain. At ten car will take you to Juárez or to El Paso Airport or bus (Berlin 2016, 77).

The nurse's curt language shows her level of English—we are reminded that we are outside of the US—but it also reflects the general atmosphere of the clinic. The woman showing Lou in is “so devoid of usual Mexican warmth and graciousness it felt like an insult” (Berlin 2016, 76). There are signals of preconceptions about Mexicans and their culture in Lou's words, and an expectation to be treated in a certain way. The portrayal of the Mexican doctor also emanates from presumptions about Latin American men, describing him as dark, handsome, and sexist—feeling up his patients and being condescending to them in Spanish. It is not until Lou speaks back to him in Spanish that he becomes respectful. Lou's girlhood memories of Juárez come to an abrupt end at the clinic where she instead is forced to take responsibility for herself and for others.

When Lou arrives at the clinic and sees the other women, she changes her mind about the abortion. Everyone in the room seems essentially alone: “The young girls perhaps most of all, for even though two of them were crying, their mothers also seemed distant from them, staring out into the room, isolated in their own shame and anger” (Berlin 2016, 78). This reminds Lou of her own situation: “Tears started to come to my eyes, because Joe was gone, because my mother wasn't there, ever” (Berlin 2016, 78). However, Lou's perspective changes:

I didn't want to have an abortion. I didn't need an abortion. The scenarios I imagined for all the other women in the room were all awful, painful stories, impossible situations. Rape, incest, all kinds of serious things. I could take care of this baby. We would be a family. It and Ben and me. A real family. Maybe I'm crazy. At least this is my own decision. Bella Lynn is always telling me what to do (Berlin 2016, 78).

With the last three sentences, the narrative changes into present tense, stressing the thought process: “Maybe I'm crazy. At least this is my own decision. Bella Lynn is always telling me what to do.” Lou goes from being sad and abandoned by her mother to taking control over her life and

her actions. She realizes she is a mother herself and that she can create “a real family.”

The situation is at first devoid of sisterhood or care for each other. Everyone is alone, encapsulated in their own trauma. However, after changing her mind, Lou finds herself in-between positions of patient and caregiver. She must stay at the clinic overnight, and when the doctor realizes that she knows Spanish, she gets to help, translating and aiding the nurses. Particularly one of the young girls, Sally, is terrified and in need of soothing. Her mother is drunk and mentally absent, and watches as Lou and the doctor insert the long tube with the liquids to end the pregnancy. During the night, Lou wakes up and realizes the girl’s bed is empty. She finds her bloody and unconscious on the bathroom floor. Berlin writes: “Blood was everywhere. She was hemorrhaging badly, tangled up in coils and coils of tubing like a berserk Laocoön. The tubing had clots of bloody matter sticking to it. It arched and buckled, slithering around her as if it were alive. She had a pulse but I couldn’t rouse her” (Berlin 2016, 82).

Lou contacts the nurse who puts her to bed again and sedates her. When she wakes up in the morning, Sally and her mother are gone. The staff say that the girl is fine, but the reader is not reassured. Sally is likened to Laocoön, a name from Greek and Roman mythology with a long literary history. The mention of this mythical figure seems significant, in a story where literary references are rare. In one of the stories told about him, Laocoön is punished for breaking an oath of celibacy and having children, and thus the gods send giant snakes to kill him and his children (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Laocoön”). Other literary representations include that by Virgil in the *Aeneid*, where he is punished for warning the Trojans about the Greek wooden horse. Before the snake attack, Virgil describes Laocoön attacking the horse:

He broke off then
 And rifled his big spear with all his might
 Against the horse’s flank, the curve of belly.
 It stuck there trembling, and the rounded hull
 Reverberated groaning at the blow. (*Aeneid* II 71–75)

Laocoön, then, can be seen as both the attacked and the attacker. In the case of the wooden horse, its portrayal so close to that of a pregnant person, trying to destroy the enemy carried within is what kills the attacker. In both versions, pairing Sally with Laocoön means seeing Sally as

punished—rightly or not—for defying higher powers. However, the description of Sally on the floor is, more than anything, a searing image of a child in pain. Lying there, surrounded by bloody tubes, she appears as a fetus or a newborn child. In a way, Sally becomes the fetus that is aborted instead of the one in Lou’s uterus.

The detail and the precision of the portrayal of the abortion clinic give the scenes a strong sense of realism. This is also where Berlin is most empathic; in contrast to the rest of the short story, the shame and fear are not met with jokes or irony. Instead, the concern about Sally is real and piercing. However, when Lou leaves the clinic, Sally disappears from the story. Lou tells Bella Lynn about her experience, after which she concludes: “We Moynihans, though, we cry or get mad and then that’s that” (Berlin 2016, 84). The girls go shopping and drinking, and after they leave the hotel there is no mention of the clinic or Sally. While being a central part of the short story, Sally and the abortion clinic nevertheless appear as isolated incidents. Since Lou does not have the abortion, it is almost as if she was never there. What has changed is the fact that Lou has made a decision on her own, not only because her husband and mother have abandoned her, but also because she has realized that she can create a family on her own. The abortion clinic has confronted her with her loneliness and consequently made her realize her own agency.

DISTANT MOTHERS

While the story mainly centers on Lou’s decision to continue her pregnancy and become a mother again, it also contains several other mother figures, who are all equally distant and evasive. Marilyn Francus has written about the “spectral mothers” in Western literary history, which, she writes:

brings to the forefront the issue of haunting, which marks the ideological work of these maternal narratives: whether it is mothers who are haunted by absent children, or a preferred motherhood they cannot enact; or children who are haunted by an absent mother or a maternal ideal that their mothers fail to embody; or a society that is haunted by an ever-desired, ever-receding maternal ideal that domestic ideology cannot bring into being. The Western ideology of motherhood is aspirational, marked by hope, effort, loss, and desire (Francus 2017, 27).

Historically, Francus writes, normative and “good” mothers would not discuss their home life in public, which has meant that the few times that motherhood has been discussed or depicted, it has been the “bad” mothers who have been centered. The mothers in “Tiger Bites,” and indeed in most of Berlin’s writing, are failing the aspirational Western ideal of motherhood that Francus describes. I will now turn to how the absent and/or “bad” mothers of “Tiger Bites” create a space for Lou to grow into.

The three most important mothers in the story are those of Lou, Bella Lynn, and Sally, who all share similar traits: they are unsupportive and they are alcoholics. Sally’s mother sits passively by her daughter’s side, unable to care for her. Instead, it is Lou who has to explain the procedure to Sally and support her through it. Lou and Sally bond over their mothers’ drinking:

“Will your mama be alright?” I asked.

“She’ll be sick in the morning.” Sally lifted the mattress. There was a half-pint of Jim Beam. “If I’m not here and you are, this is for her. She needs it so she don’t be sick.”

“Yes. My mother drinks too,” I said (Berlin 2016, 81).

Excessive drinking is a common characteristic for Berlin’s mother figures. As Bella Lynn tells Lou: “your mama and my mama started drinking and fighting right off the bat. Mama went up on the garage roof and won’t come down. Your mother slit her wrists. ... She wrote a suicide note about how you had always ruined her life. Signed it Bloody Mary” (Berlin 2016, 70). Indeed, it might be said that lonely or hurt children are the true main characters of the story. “Tiger Bites” ends with Bella Lynn asking her father how she and Lou will cope, pregnant and left by their husbands. “Hope you two have knockout outfits for tomorrow’s party,” the father answers (Berlin 2016, 87). What is more, we never find out what happened to Sally, either before or after her visit to the clinic, although the doctor suspects that her father is responsible for her pregnancy. Bella Lynn, Lou, and Sally are all, in a sense, marked by their parents’ abandonment.

Francus partly explains the Western narrative of the “bad” mother as a source for the more interesting story: “the telling of the ‘bad’ mother tale allows the author and the reader the pleasure of moral superiority: to expose the ‘bad’ mother, and to criticize and punish her for her ‘bad’ behaviors” (Francus 2017, 29). This is not, I would say, the case in “Tiger

Bites.” The mothers are “bad” in the context of Western motherhood that we all recognize, but in the story they, like the women at the abortion clinic, are described matter-of-factly, without judgment.

Even though the overall feeling at the abortion clinic is a sense of shame, the narrative also has room for humor. The titular “tiger bites” allude to traumas that no one speaks about, that are met with jokes and money: “I used to think if a big old tiger bit off my hand and I went running up to my mother she’d just slap some money on the stump. Or make a joke ... ‘What’s that, the sound of one hand clapping?’” (Berlin 2016, 75). The one lonely clapping hand serves as a comical image of the severed family relations. Lou is abandoned by her mother, her husband, and the wider society, which does not offer her safe reproductive healthcare. Lou’s dry, sometimes sad, sometimes funny, account of this situation reproduces her mother’s joke.

In the introduction to the anthology *The Absent Mother in the Cultural Imagination* (2017), Berit Åström presents four explanations for the absent mothers of Western literature. The reasons mentioned are biographical, psychoanalytic, historical, or narratological (Åström 2017). Because of the auto-fictional nature of Berlin’s writing, and the repeatedly distant and problematical mother-daughter relationships she portrays, the biographical explanation does have some weight in analyzing the distant mothers in “Tiger Bites.” More interesting, though, is the explanation of the distant or dead mother as a narrative device. I do not claim that the mothers in “Tiger Bites” are portrayed as they are because of narratological convenience; on the contrary, they are very important for the construction and the content of the story. Although it might seem cynical to interpret the painful and problematic mother-daughter relationships simply as a way to drive the story forward, it is clear that the absent mothers leave a space for Lou to step into. Writing about mothers in Victorian novels, Natalie J. McKnight observes that an absent mother can instigate and motivate a character to act, as she “creates a vacuum that destabilizes the protagonists and therefore incites their development” (McKnight 1997, 18). I argue that this is the case in “Tiger Bites,” too. While Lou is already a mother, her experience at the abortion clinic gives her opportunity to see herself as *the* mother figure, in place of her own mother and the other disappointing mothers in the story.

PLACES, BODIES AND BORDERS

The issue of abortion is obviously linked to time and place, as legislation and cultural attitudes vary across geographies and historical time. It is also connected to wider political subjects; as Weingarten demonstrates, the American debate about abortion has been closely linked to eugenics and race politics (Weingarten 2014, 66). While race is not an explicit theme in Berlin's short story, the border between Mexico and the US is of great importance, and the dichotomy of home versus foreignness is highly relevant. Feminist scholars have made the connections between motherhood and nationalism for decades, and historically, the resistance against abortions has been connected to a fear of falling demographics (Yuval-Davis 1997, 26). The spatial aspects of Berlin's story, the idea of "home," and the crossings of geographical, political and bodily boundaries are therefore significant.

The story takes place sometime before the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* court case, which made abortion legal in the US. Therefore, Lou and the other women at the clinic have to go to Mexico. Coincidentally, her family home is in Texas, which was where the *Roe* case began, but also where, in 2021, all abortion was again essentially banned (Astor 2021). The hypocrisy and absurdity of the healthcare and judicial system is revealed in Bella Lynn's remark: "They can save your life and everything in Texas. They just can't do abortions" (Berlin 2016, 74). As *Roe v. Wade* was overturned in 2022, stories about people trying to leave the state to get access to abortions re-appeared. In an article for *The New Yorker*, pharmacists in Juárez were interviewed about American women coming to buy misoprostol, an abortion inducing medication (Taladrid 2022). The risks involved in taking medicine without professional guidance, not to mention the risk of crossing the border for the many undocumented people now living in the area, makes this a highly dangerous solution. With modern possibilities of tracking people's movements, Texas lawmakers are even threatening to make it illegal to help someone travelling out-of-state for an abortion, which in turn could possibly create a system of control of any pregnant person, legally binding them to one place (Noor 2022). For a contemporary reader, the location therefore comes with a sense of foreboding, as a contextually transformative place. Depending on what decade you place Berlin's story in, the meaning of an unwanted or complicated pregnancy will change entirely. At the same time, the history of abortion along the Mexican border illuminates the intergenerational trauma surrounding the

issue: the experiences of different generations of women are yet another blurred boundary.

In “Tiger Bites” various homes have been left and/or returned to. The home that Lou shared with her husband is gone, as he has left her to be an artist in Italy. Bella Lynn has a broken marriage behind her, too, and has just returned to her parents as her husband has gone to work at an oilrig. The money that Lou uses to pay at the clinic has been given to her by Bella Lynn, who in turn has received the money from her parents as an effort to console and distract her from the break-up with her husband. Within the wider theme of being a young woman creating a family, the story of Bella Lynn also serves a purpose of showing the importance of class and the arbitrariness of the law. As it turns out, not only abortion is illegal: “can you imagine, going down on your own lawful wedded husband is against the *law*?” (Berlin 2016, 72). The money, then, becomes both a symbol and material proof of the concerns of class and respectability that surround abortion, and indeed all sexual activities of women.

Conversely, the short story also depicts two homecomings. The girls are returning to the family ranch in El Paso to celebrate Christmas. The trip to Mexico is also a form of homecoming, since it turns out that Lou used to live there. The two homes, and their different atmospheres and associations, are juxtaposed in the story. Lou associates El Paso with “Jesus and Mary and the Bible and sin” (Berlin 2016, 69). As we will find out, her relationship with her family is not great. Her parents disapproved of her marriage, and the divorce is “the last straw” (Berlin 2016, 69). None of them will be at the family reunion, her father furious about the divorce and her mother in hospital after a suicide attempt. Lou seems cut off and distant from her immediate family. When they return home to the family to celebrate Christmas, the home is described as a strange and impersonal place: “The dining room table resembled the ads for smorgasbords on cruise ships” (Berlin 2016, 85). The people there are remote family members who “barely took their eyes from their plates or the game” as Lou enters (Berlin 2016, 85). Even so, she evidently feels a strong kinship with her family as she repeats how “us Moynihans” are.

Meanwhile, the trip to Mexico is more of a happy reunion. In the cab, Berlin writes: “I buzzed the window down and hung my head out, glad to be home” (Berlin 2016, 75). Aged 19, Lou is still a teenager. Yet returning home does not mean being cared for by her parents, and the older family members seem to be occupied with their own traumas and conflicts. Instead, it is in Mexico that Lou feels like a child: “The din and the smells

of downtown Juárez were the same as when I was a little girl. I felt little and like I wanted to just wander around, but I waved for a cab” (Berlin 2016, 83). The hotel in Mexico is presented as more home-like than the ranch in Texas. As Bella Lynn says: “Hotels are so homey, I always hate to leave ...” (Berlin 2016, 84).

Lou’s relationship to the two places is not black and white. As is typical for Berlin, her protagonist’s feelings about her homes and her family are ambiguous. The Spanish language serves as a good example of this. Lou speaks Spanish but does not immediately disclose this to other Spanish speakers. It is presented as more intimate than English: “She spoke a little English but I didn’t speak any Spanish to her, or to any of them; it would have seemed too familiar a thing to do” (Berlin 2016, 77). Lou’s bilingualism makes her a translator and mediator between the Mexican health-care professionals and the American patients, which is just one of the ambiguous or in-between positions Lou takes in the story. Her movement between the US and Mexico, English and Spanish, patient and caregiver, mother and child is repeated throughout the story. It is when she arrives at the clinic, that things come to a head, and Lou has to make a choice.

I argue that this ambiguous relationship to the notions of home and family is replicated in Lou’s almost-abortion. The maternal body serves as a home for the fetus, which can be seen either as an intruder or a welcome guest. Pregnancy and childbirth come with a crossing of bodily borders, as does abortion. As Adrienne Rich and others have argued, the institution of motherhood is revealed in maternal healthcare, in which women are subjected to patriarchal practices and attitudes (Rich 1976). The procedure of abortion is described as something that is done *to* the passive women: “the old woman started packing each woman’s uterus with a ten-foot length of IV tubing, shoving it in, like stuffing a turkey” (Berlin 2016, 79). The description of the treatment of Sally is a particularly strong illustration of the invasiveness of the medical procedure, which, while undertaken in her own interest, possibly results in her death. It is important to note that the depiction of the abortion clinic and its staff is not about them being cruel. It is the situation itself, the unwanted pregnancies and the illegal abortions, which create the cruelty and the suffering.

Despite this violation of integrity, Lou’s final decision is to keep the baby and make a home for it. Unlike Sally, who is a child, Lou has agency. She is free to make her own decision and has the power to protect herself from the intrusive doctor. In relation to the topics of homecoming and dysfunctional families, herself creating a family for her children seems, to her, like a way to break the cycle.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has explored how abortion and motherhood feature in Lucia Berlin's short story "Tiger Bites," in which the feelings of loneliness, shame, desperation, and sadness are central. Even as the women are leaving the clinic, the oppressive atmosphere remains: "But the silence in the car was impenetrable, heavy with shame, with pain. Only the fear was gone" (Berlin 2016, 83). Abortion is not presented as a simple or obvious solution; the main character Lou decides not to do the procedure and comes home pregnant to have "a real family" (Berlin 2016, 78). One might interpret Lou's choice to continue her pregnancy as Berlin saying that abortion is only for the truly desperate. If possible—the devil's advocate interpretation might go—a woman will always choose to have a baby. The representation of abortion is not emancipatory or freeing; indeed, Lou's road to (imagined) independence goes through motherhood and creating a family of her own.

At the same time, the women in the story that do have abortions are depicted with empathy and solidarity. The complexity of the issue is reflected in the feelings surrounding the ideas of home and family, as motherhood is simultaneously the source of grief and loneliness, and the way out of those very feelings. Coming home to your family does not necessarily mean to feel cared for or safe, and the act of having an abortion means crossing borders and going to foreign places. However, the foreign place might be more familiar than the family home. Mexico represents Lou's childhood, while Texas, and the US, is characterized by the divided family: the alcoholic mother, the absent father and the runaway husband. In a fractured home, it is impossible to heal trauma.

The alcoholic, absent and cruel mothers of Sally, Lou and Bella Lynn merge into one dysfunctional mother figure, and their daughters are united in their handling of their mothers. The act of mothering consequently becomes fluid. Because of her pregnancy, Sally is a potential mother, while also a child. Lou herself is a young mother, who steps into a caring role when Sally needs to be calmed and helped through the abortion. There are no simple answers or clean-cut borders here; Lou's fluctuating position is key to understanding the ideas of both motherhood and homes.

To conclude, "Tiger Bites" is a story that portrays motherhood, as well as abortion, as a deeply complex subject connected to ideas of community and belonging. The breakthrough of Berlin's writing decades later goes to show that the issues and feelings depicted in the short story have been

present for generations of women. Reading “Tiger Bites” in light of the recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* makes it clear that storytelling is never linear, and that literary interpretation is closely linked to the society we live in. The unreliable nature of abortion laws, and indeed all rights of women and marginalized people, creates intergenerational trauma, which in Berlin’s story is reflected in the dysfunctional mother-daughter relationships. This trauma, however, is not fatal. The isolation of the one hand clapping can be broken by caring for another. However, this is only possible when motherhood truly is a choice. As Berlin’s portrayal of the abortion clinic illustrates, not having agency in deciding over your own body is the most isolating experience of all.

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