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Abstract

Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* and Adele Wiseman's *Crackpot* both employ powerful matriarchal figures in secondary but important roles. This study will examine these literary matriarchal figures in respect to their relationship to power. The theories of Michel Foucault and Julia Kristeva both take into account the relationships of subjects as well as the subjects themselves. In trying to locate subjects, both theorists look towards anomalies or points of "difference" in relationships to reveal where power resides. The matriarchs dominate within their immediate families yet, in the context of larger social milieus, they struggle for power. They generate and derive power through their being (re)created retrospectively in the stories of other characters. Foucault and Kristeva perceive gender as socially constructed. Sexuality is important in defining the matriarchs in *Running in the Family* and *Crackpot*. Foucault's study of sexuality and repression in relation to the confession provides a theory of power larger in scope than traditional notions which define power as a transgression of boundaries. Kristeva speaks of "women" and power in terms of what she calls "the abject". "The abject" lurks on the borders of the body, language, society and challenges those borders. Filth and defilement on the border of identity threatens the unity of the ego, but "the abject" – decaying flesh, menstrual blood, excrement – is nevertheless a part of that identity. Kristeva posits that women are "abject". Sexuality in these novels becomes what Foucault refers to as a technology of power. The matriarchs, Lalla and Rahel, use their sexuality in different ways, but both use it to obtain power. My study will trace some of the technologies of power employed by the matriarchs in these two texts in order to further reveal them as social constructs. (Abstract shortened by UMI.)