

A Different Kind of Incest

Kathryn Harrison's Analysis of Kinship in *The Kiss*

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Kathryn Harrison's memoir, *The Kiss* (1997), suggests that different kinds of "incest" exist because different types of kinship exist. Her purpose in differentiating kinds of incest is to encourage a complex healing for herself, for the English language, and for women who must survive sexual lives not yet articulated nor well-understood by society.

The Kiss poses at least two problems of language and storytelling signification;

- 1) the possibility that the meaning of "incest" must be broadened in order for certain stories or occurrences to be healed, or
- 2) the possibility that the relationship described in Harrison's memoir is not the violence of "incest" as typically signified, but is rather something else: something sexual, something difficult, something chosen, something emotionally violent, and something that occurred with someone kin to her, but something not yet signified in language.

Thus, Kathryn Harrison's purpose is to tell her story of "incest" in order to broaden our understandings of this thing we call incest.

Understanding *The Kiss* depends on the ability of readers to forfeit the monolithic paralysis and fixed assumptions that cloud the mind when words such as "incest," or acts similar to "incest" are spoken. On the surface, the story of *The Kiss* reveals that incest between father and daughter took place; at a deeper level, events we do not always associate with "incest" also occur in this text: for instance, the "incest" begins when the daughter is twenty years of age, and the daughter participates in its initiation. Kathryn Harrison declares that this type of act exists, and that this story actually happened to her. Because of the constraining, engendered socio-political and legal contexts surrounding "incest," readers are unable to understand Harrison's act as anything but the type of incest we know; however, Harrison's act simultaneously expands the culpability of the "victim" in this memoir.

Wai Chee Dimock, in her award-winning essay, "A Theory of Resonance" asks us to consider that words are not necessarily unchange-

able in their meanings. She suggests that "meanings are produced over and over again, attaching themselves to, overlapping with, and sometimes coming into conflict with previous ones" (1062). Dimock is quite aware that this suggestion has the potential to imbue readers with fears of "unruliness" and "chaos," but she asserts a case for considering such change as an important element of readers continuing to stretch their abilities to make meaning. She refers to the attributes that constitute these changes as resonance and noise:

Noise includes all those circumstances that complicate readers' relations to text: circumstances that, filling their heads and ringing in their ears, make them uninnocent readers, who encroach on the text with assumptions, expectations, convictions. Noise includes all those circumstances that so quicken the pulse, so sensitize the interpretive faculties, as to call forth unexpected nuances from words composed long ago. (1063)

We suggest that to read Harrison's *The Kiss* requires that readers understand their investment in one monolithic signification of incest as any and all sexual behavior between (most predominantly) father and daughter. Harrison's text resonates with a determination to redefine readers' convictions about this word and to reconstruct longstanding feminist investment in positions of victimization, innocence, irresponsibility, and powerlessness. Harrison creates a noise that both reverberates off of "incest" and disturbs our abilities to protect the word's sacred power and suggests a need for another word to signify Harrison's experience. She also proposes that although a birthfather is a type of kin, when he has been absent from the child's life for decades, he loses some of the bond and association that ties him to his daughter in typical ways.

Our argument challenges the definitions and language most frequently associated with incest. In doing so, we do not intend to minimize the well-documented realities and negative impact of unwanted sexual encounters that occur between children and their adult caretakers and family

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members. This type of incest is violent and violating.

We argue that something else also exists, which the word “incest” attempts to address, but also veils. Because the situation that Harrison describes seems to signify “incest” to many readers (it does not to us), many readers cannot access the type of experience that Harrison discloses. Lack of language thwarts their understanding. We suspect that to understand the memoir would be to permit Harrison to heal, and readers are ambivalent about their desire for Kathryn Harrison to heal from her experiences. To understand the memoir would mean an admission that not all fathers are kin.

Kathryn Harrison’s text, *The Kiss*, reveals that her relationship with her father is different from what United States mainstream, reading culture recognizes as incest. By venturing into such an argument, we do understand that as feminists, we participate in what Robyn Wiegman refers to as a “feminist politics of ‘disloyalty’” (2). We are being disloyal to the methodologies that suggest “incest” as a singularly untouchable and sacred domain in which women are non-complicit. Instead we propose that at least one woman participated in a sexual relationship with her father (an admittedly fraught, guilt-ridden, complicated, and emotionally fierce) by choice, and she does not claim to have been victimized. We also suggest that should we want to preserve “incest” only for the devastating and victimizing situations, that the time has come to recognize the need for other words to signify the sexual experiences of adult women who copulate with, make love to, fornicate with, seduce, and obsessively pursue their “fathers” in order to quell the loss that occurred when these women became separated from their fathers as children.

Harrison’s memoir tells us that at six months of age, the author’s parents divorce. Growing up, Harrison then sees her father only twice, once when she is five and once when she is ten. At twenty, she and her father meet again. This time, within months, the two establish a sexual relationship. By the time Harrison and her father begin their relationship, Harrison is no longer a girl. She is a young woman, a woman who chooses to have a sexual relationship with her father because she thinks it might help her

capture the unrequited girl-father love, the love that young girls and fathers develop and share. She ponders how a woman who is no longer a girl becomes fathered by a man who never really enacted fathering. She questions the parameters of his kinship to her as well as the boundaries of their vague relationship to one another. Harrison reminds us of their lost love, and therefore implies what they intend to capture as adults, “We lost each other. We lost my childhood and his fatherhood and twenty years of love, and these losses are not recoverable. We are fleeing from this truth, but we can’t flee indefinitely” (*The Kiss* 106-7).

In *The Politics of Survivorship: Incest, Women’s Literature, and Feminist Theory*, author Rosaria Champagne argues that there is a distinct difference psychoanalytically between a child’s “desire” for the father and a child’s “wants,” “demands,” or ability to “give consent” to sexual relations. A seductive daughter might desire her father, but she does not “want it”. And here is the feminist punch: because the unconscious cannot say no, incest, *especially* when desired by the child, cannot be confused with consent. The desiring daughter is not the consenting daughter. “Children have the right to sexual fantasies – and to nonsexual boundaries with the imagined objects of desire” (Champagne 145). For us, Champagne’s argument is impeccably drawn and distinctly clarifies the impossibility of a consenting child, even of one who desires and fantasizes about a parent. However, Kathryn Harrison is not a child. She most likely still “desires” the father with a comparable desire for the sexual safety legally granted a child. However, she has since entered a rational, societal, legal position signified as adulthood, which situates her as one able to give sexual consent. The incredible gift of Harrison’s text is that she refuses to see herself as a child. She does not define her kinship to her father as one of child to parent. Instead, she stays grounded in her knowledge of herself as an adult woman in a sexual relationship with the man who gave birth to her. She does see herself as misguided, and she does see her father as “more” to blame for what has occurred, but she is also very aware that the sexual relationship would not have occurred had she not desired it and consented for it to happen.

A truth of Kathryn Harrison’s life is her passion

and addiction for her father. Her memoir, *The Kiss*, retells this experience:

My days are filled with my obsession: whether to see him, when to see him, when not to see him. Like a more prosaic addiction – to alcohol, to heroin – mine for my father has consumed the rest of my life. I take no pleasure in its satisfaction, and yet I cannot see beyond it, *him*, to anything else, even myself. (*The Kiss* 157)

Harrison uses the language of her memoir to accept and reveal her obsession. In doing so, her language refigures the culturally constructed and commodified innocent white female. She makes it known that her twenty-year old female “self” is sexually driven toward her father, but for her, this is not merely the sex associated with lust and physical relief; she also calls this act “love”: “Looking at him looking at me, I cannot help but fall painfully, precipitously in love” (*The Kiss* 63). Her love for this man has not been accepted by her readers. Many, instead, have been horrified. Part of the collective horror has everything to do with the fact that a beautiful adult white woman speaks retrospectively about issues that good white girls and especially married women do not typically discuss with their readers or their husbands.

Critics take issue with the fact that Harrison explores these exact sexual truths twice: in her novel *Thicker Than Water* and then six years later in her memoir (*The Kiss* 1997). But before she packaged her experience in the language of novel and memoir, she also verbalized her experience. Her husband, Colin Harrison, tells us that within days of their meeting, Kathryn articulated her sexual truth. He explains, “She was telling me [of her relationship with her father] now, she said, because she thought I must know – if we were to stay together” (*The Kiss* 328). The unspeakable history Kathryn told Colin brought both of them into an awareness of the role language would play in their lives. The truth and her telling of it suddenly became irreversible acts, recorded acts which signified their commitment to honest and healing renderings. If she was to become kin to him through marriage, she wanted truth to exist between them.

While the story Harrison tells in her novel is well received, the memoir version is described as

a text that seeks “shock value” (Marlowe M2). We believe that the problem with this reaction is that many readers experience fiction not only as if it were not true, but also as if it did not have an ounce of truth in it. Thus when Harrison’s memoir appears, readers become shocked because they did not receive the original fiction as if it were at least based on a true premise. Champagne argues that “‘fictions’ are not lies,” but rather they are “narrative recastings” of stories that have gone unrecognized (3). Harrison realized that her fictionalized version of the story fell on deaf ears, and that the only way to get the story heard was to tell it in a form that signified “truth”: the memoir. In exactly this way, Harrison’s text becomes a risky feminist speech act. Readers and critics say that the content of the memoir is shocking; we believe that Harrison’s honesty is what shocks. What we find courageous in this speech act is Harrison’s fortitude, in particular her determination to challenge the limited language our culture uses to describe female sexuality.

Harrison’s text represents what feminist theorist Carla Kaplan labels “women’s language,” for it provides “our [women’s] unspoken meanings” (344). Said another way, the experience Harrison chooses to tell in two genres, fiction and memoir, subverts our narrow cultural definition of “incest”. Dimock’s and Kaplan’s respective works reveal their commitment to create a language for the unspeakable. In challenging our limited cultural definition through a feminist lens, Harrison expands our understanding of what Dale M. Bauer means by “feminist dialogic” (1). Taken together, Harrison’s texts show us the limitations of a linguistic dialogic that includes only culture and history. The truth is that language does not yet exist to depict accurately women’s varying stories. But with Harrison’s reliance on culture, history, and gender, an unspoken truth about female sexuality is articulated. The result is a true story by, for, and about a woman. And as feminist Wendy Waring argues in her edited collection titled by those same three prepositions, a book “for” women necessarily “includes the private confidence of the storyteller in the ear that will listen” (15).

Carolivia Herron also writes a novel about a young woman who had a passionate obsession

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with her father. In *Thereafter Johnnie*, Herron, like Harrison, reveals an unspeakable truth, and yet because Herron also initiates the story in fictive form, the “lyric qualities,” and “tragic vision” of the book are praised on its 1991 dust-jacket. Only Gloria Naylor fully understands and addresses the impact of this text’s story: “Herron has managed [...] to bring the reader face to face with whisperings of our darkest thoughts and sexual desires” (dustjacket). In this novel, Herron makes it clear that the daughter, Pat, is the pursuer of her father. Pat says to her father, “I had to work so hard to get you to make love to me and I wanted so much to have a baby and so I got pregnant” (31). Herron’s character even understands that sometimes her father did not want her: “I wanted that kiss. You never liked to want to kiss me. You were ashamed when I pleased you. You did not want that kiss” (33). Pat explains her obsession to herself as somewhat inevitable: “You are the father who gave me being. Whom should I desire but you? Whom should I possess?” (34). Herron has Pat’s sister also tell how Pat pursued her father: “She caught him everywhere in the house, smiling, kissing at him, playing with him as he turned and jerked away to his study, ashamed. We all heard. How he ran from her, and she kept after” (189). Later in the novel, as all the family members struggle to understand the relationship between Pat and her father, Pat tells her sister, “I’m not afraid of sin and cowardice, Eva, I just want to sleep with my father, that’s all I want to do, and I want one person to understand it. Will you take the time?” (195). The character in Carolivia Herron’s novel ultimately finds no one to understand and commits suicide. Suicide is something we, the characters in the novel, and the readers, do understand. Passion and sexual desire for one’s father is not.

Critical responses to Harrison’s memoir suggest that to read of her experiences in memoir form, to read of her attempt to establish a “loving” relationship with her father, is to read confessional smut. In *The Washington Post*, Jonathan Yardley calls the book “slimy,” “repellent,” and “revolting” (Petersen 3). James Wolcott’s review in the *New Republic* attacks Harrison for wanting to make readers uncomfortable; and Liz Smith’s review is a monosyllabic declaration of “Yuck”

(Petersen 3). These reviews express repulsion for the memoir, repulsion that safeguards them from wanting to ask questions of the text and to ask critical questions about Harrison’s honesty. For many critics, it appears difficult to read Harrison’s truth, “I’m [...] captivated by him. I’ve never really known who my father was, and revelation is inherently seductive” (*The Kiss* 57).

A second set of reviews markets the memoir as bewildering and disappointing rather than disgusting. *The New York Times*’s Christopher Lehmann-Haupt asks, “Why do human beings commit incest?” – a question he never explores. Kimberly B. Marlowe, in the *Seattle Times*, paraphrases many of the book’s “disappointed-and smut-reviews” by explaining,

Several reviews of *The Kiss* have questioned why Harrison felt the need to depart from her award-winning fiction (*Thicker Than Water*, *Exposure*, and *Poison*) and tell this story as a memoir. Some have flatly accused her of doing it for shock value and potential bestseller bucks, while others have lumped her in with the wave of tell-all books focusing on abusive parents. (M2)

These negative reviews encourage the memoir’s commodification as a socially unacceptable object, which tantalizes the potential consumer. The dust jacket of the memoir adds further to the commodification conundrum when it frames Luc Santé’s comments which attempt to capture the memoir by describing it as a “true story,” a “tale,” and a “Gothic” (*The Kiss*). Apparently no one wants to say simply that Harrison is telling an untold truth. Santé quickly follows the suggestion of truth with mitigating terminology such as “tale” and “Gothic”. Bookstores do not sell it as truth; they shelf it with fiction. And many critics cannot handle it as truth; they describe it in folkloric terms.

A pervasive fear apparently exists regarding girls’ and young women’s sexuality. The horror might also be a response to what the word “incest” signifies culturally. Harrison’s text responds to the horrors by doing more than solely naming a culturally repulsive social act. Harrison’s memoir suggests that “incest” also serves as a barricade to complex knowledge of girls’ and young women’s sexual development. Most people want

to believe that Harrison (re)wrote a fictional tale told in *Thicker Than Water* in memoir form solely to exploit the market. To believe otherwise is to imagine that Kathryn Harrison did engage in sexual activity with her father. Furthermore, to believe is also to question why and how this occurred.

In *The Kiss* Harrison tells us that as a girl and as a young adult, she desired her absent father's touch, affection, flattery, and presence. In addition, Harrison bemoans a lack of physical intimacy with her mother in *Thicker than Water*. The young adult protagonist, Isabel, says about her mother:

It wasn't long before she [her mother] had learned to use morphine to avoid conflict, to quell pain that was not physical, to warm herself with its lovely, gentle fire against every cold fear, every bleak thought. And I encouraged her in this, I enjoyed giving her those shots, loved their cheap comfort. And I wanted the excuse to look at her naked chest, the necessity of touching it. This was the closest I ever remember being to my mother's breast, her body. (*The Kiss* 26)

In both the novel and the memoir, Harrison provides specific imagery, language, and scenarios to figure the complex desires she experiences for her parents. Typically our language signifies and commodifies these desires, especially behaviors that enact these desires, using only one word: "incest". Kathryn Harrison's memoir *The Kiss* is not about incest, though. It is a book about creating language for difficult honesties that explore female desire, understanding of kinship, and lovability. While Harrison, at times, appears to question her lovability, in the telling of her experience, she captures her own lovability:

Whatever I do – peel an orange, tie my shoe, pour water from a pitcher into the dry soil of a houseplant – enralls my father. I get up to brush my teeth, and he follows me into the bathroom. He leans against the doorjamb to watch as I squeeze the paste from the tube. His scrutiny both excites and exhausts me. How can it be that anyone finds me so interesting? (*The Kiss* 56-57)

While many of the critics did not appear to

understand *The Kiss*, some did. As Karla Petersen explains,

Contrary to the critical hissing, what makes *The Kiss* so horrifying is neither the revelation of incest, nor Harrison's decision to air her family's dirty laundry in your neighborhood bookstore. What gives Harrison's book its unsettling power is the author's ability to make sense of what most of us would rather keep senseless. (3)

There is sense in Harrison's memoir evidenced by her awareness and acceptance of her own involvement in the relationship with her father Kimberly B. Marlowe calls the book

more a Greek tragedy than a "Daddy Dearest". It is not just a book about the most forbidden of sexual relationships, it is a traveler's guide to a writer's years in Hell, a place she will never stop visiting. (M2)

Susan Cheever insists that "the shocking part of *The Kiss* – the incest, love affair – isn't the book's force". She explains that the book's force is its peacefully resolved ending. Although she comments on the memoir's "real shock," she does not evaluate it as a weakness of the book. Cheever's identification of the daughter-father sexual relationship as "the incest, love affair" is central to understanding the value in this book. By using the phrase "the incest, love affair" to identify "the action" for which the memoir is titled, Cheever suggests that Harrison's book urges readers to question the social constructions of incest (11) and to hear her when she admits, "Whatever passions we feel, we call love" (*The Kiss* 95).

In questioning social constructions of incest, we find that incest, and the various sexual acts that fall under this rubric, have occurred infrequently in society. However, incest often has been discussed as a significant universal taboo (Fox 6-8; Kubo 105). Robin Fox argues that in actuality, until the advent of the state, incest was treated as the rare event it is. State interference in the sexual lives of people historically transforms the treatment of offenses once deemed minor, such as incest, into "capital crime[s]" (8). Again, it is important to differentiate between the powerless children forced into incestuous acts by parents, and the situation, also ineptly called "incest"

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that occurs between Kathryn Harrison and her father. She identifies herself as someone who is sinning, not as some one who is sinned against (*The Kiss* 171). Colin Harrison also verifies that his wife sees herself as complicit in this act (376). She is not a helpless victim. She is a decision-maker. We are talking about adult interactions and adult cognizance about these interactions.

Ronald M. Holmes reminds us that although historically “incest has been viewed negatively [...] At certain times in certain societies [...] incest has been not only accepted but encouraged” (40). Thus, prohibition exists and incest also exists. It seems that only criminal status and public attention change. Although incest has throughout time been a questionable activity and deemed immoral, it has not always been criminal or monstrous. Legal prohibitions against incest evolved out of concerns with the survival of society (Godelier 71). What seems to have been of primary importance in the past is the relationship between incest and reproduction. Champagne tells us that incest became illegal in the U.S. in the late 1860s (14). Since that time, laws in the various states have undergone quite a few changes. In many states in the United States, the emphasis on the incest statutes is placed on sexual intercourse, penile penetration, and marriage. Many states also clarify ages of children with whom a parent cannot legally have sex as under eighteen (Champagne 18). And interestingly, the law stipulates that the child cannot be under the care of the adult nor deemed to have given consent if under eighteen. Some states limit this statute to children under fifteen (Champagne 15). Age and consent clearly determine the legal issues surrounding incest.

In Colorado, the statute reads: “Aggravated Incest occurs when ‘Any person who knowingly has sexual intercourse with his child (including stepchildren and adopted children) unless legally married to the stepchild or child by adoption’” (Herman 225). In Colorado, marriage mitigates the criminality of incest. The punishments vary from state to state, but include prison terms between one and twelve years. In Indiana, incest occurs “When a person over 18 who engages in sexual intercourse or deviate sexual conduct with another person, who knows the other person is parent, step-parent, child, step-child

[...]” (Herman 230-31). This statute is unique among others because it deems criminal those adult people who participate in incestuous relationships. Many states, however, have the statutes worded so that they only deem the parent criminal, not the child. In West Virginia, the incest statute designates the perpetrator as “A male person who shall have sexual intercourse with his mother, sister, daughter” (Herman 257). The various definitions evade particulars and yet elevate the need to position blame based on regional understandings of appropriate sexual partners, age, and kinship boundaries. Incest has been multiply defined and signified by religion, state, region, the age of the participants, and the marital status of the people involved.

Sociologist Christopher Bagley surmises that there is no “unitary theory of incest taboo” and that no theory appears “capable of accounting for all aspects of incest prohibition” (506). Bagley’s research suggests,

There does not appear to be any natural revulsion to incest in the child; indeed, the opposite-sexed parent seems to be a covert but significant figure in his sexual life. In the usual course of development, this sexual relationship becomes strongly tabooed as the child’s age increases, and a process of “repression” ensues by which the child’s relationship with the opposite-sexed parent becomes explicitly non-sexual. (514)

Using Bagley’s theory, what appears to have happened to Kathryn Harrison is that her father was not around long enough to strengthen this taboo which then increased the potential for her to act on her sexual attraction to her father. Harrison writes, “I’m [...] captivated by him. I’ve never really known who my father was, and revelation is inherently seductive. There is, too, the fascination of our likeness, that we resemble each other in ways that transcend physical similarities” (*The Kiss* 57). No taboo whether legal or moral seemed strong enough to discourage her sexual interest in her father.

And yet, collectively the critics ask, “Did she need to publish this book? Couldn’t she have simply shared her memoir with her immediate family? Why make it public?” No social codes seem strong enough to discourage her interest

in expressing the unspeakable. She consciously breaks taboos and consciously seeks accurate language to express the unspeakable. While many critics argue that *Thicker Than Water* tells readers enough about Harrison's daughter-father relationship, her novel is not enough for her. In her memoir, *The Kiss*, Kathryn Harrison courageously asks us to listen more carefully and to understand more fully the complexities of girl and, ultimately, adult-woman-sexuality, a sexuality for which there is yet no accurately signifying language. The majority of sexual signification for women involves a language of violence and loss: "rape," "incest," "breaking the hymen," and "her virginity was taken": very little affirmative or accurate language exists. Thus, when we read of a female sexual act that is difficult to comprehend, we make the act accessible by associating with the violent signifiers that already exist to describe female sexuality.

In Harrison's case, her own words acknowledge her cognizance of the relationship's complexity and her determination to bring sense and healing to the relationship. Harrison declares, "Everything about my father bespeaks appetites satisfied, hurts soothed. In contrast to my own flesh, always silenced, its hunger and pain ignored, his – so white, so indolent – both fascinates and repels me" (*The Kiss* 96).

Harrison's "story" when commodified in fictional form remains acceptable and speakable because it is virtually invisible as truth. The vehement critical responses to Harrison's memoir suggest that readers want such tales to be told in fiction because we want to "enjoy" the text voyeuristically without having to experience its veracity. Daughter-father passions, it appears, must be contained in fiction in order to keep people safe from the truths that surround them. When the same story is told in memoir form, though, when memoir exhibits a passionate truth, the form itself becomes vilified as excessive and exploitive.

In fact critics argue that Harrison sells herself short as a writer and takes advantage of her readers by "telling her story at least twice". What's especially interesting about such criticism is the way it disassociates Harrison the writer from her life. The implication is that part of the public's disgust for her memoir is the fact that Harrison

just may have used the vogue genre of memoir to gain control of a specific life experience. As well, in the last two years, memoir has been the money-making genre (Kenny E1). The genre argument seems to operate as a scapegoat for reader's disgust at the truth.

In a message sent through her publisher, Harrison explains, "*The Kiss* was a book I couldn't avoid, rather than one I set out to write. There was an internal imperative to deal with the subject now" (Marlowe M2). And as her husband explains in his article, *Sins of the Father*,

The book, I feared, would expose Kathryn to all manner of criticism, name-calling, cheap psychologizing, yellow journalism, ridicule, even hate. Yet I could only wonder what might happen to my wife if she did not write her book. There it was – the continuing ride into darkening adulthood. (376)

Harrison wrote and published *The Kiss* to honor truth and the integrity of her own life. She tells us, "I am frightened by the kiss. I know it is wrong, and its wrongness is what lets me know, too, that it is a secret" (*The Kiss* 69).

Harrison's memoir begins with George Eliot's words, "The happiest women, like the happiest nations, have no history". These words confirm that Harrison recognizes the risk she takes in telling her truth. The epigraph also reveals her belief in the feminist value of writing truth: the act of writing the memoir affirms both her history and her life. The words of her memoir then represent writing as a witness to truth and an acknowledgement of words as vision (Brant 289).

Making her memoir public then is Harrison's risky feminist speech act. Harrison becomes a responsible woman by articulating her relationship with her father, and the critics hate her for it. As Naomi Wolf claims, "In spite of the rhetoric of freedom that surrounds us, women's reclamation of the first person sexual is filled with the risk of personal disaster" (xxi). By publishing her memoir, Harrison, an upper-middle class white woman, resists the more "appropriate" genre for such a disgusting and unbelievable story, crime fiction (Farrell 13). In publishing it, she also resists succumbing to silence. In fact, the most profound aspect of *The Kiss* is that it ardently

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packages the not-silent, sexual woman. Harrison takes a risk both in the truth she tells and the form by which she tells it, a risk of which she is fully aware. The memoir genre allows Harrison to tell what women know but are not supposed to know and sexuality and about kinship, and it also permits her to defy the age-old suppressive adage called “keeping it to yourself”. By packaging this story as memoir, Harrison wraps-up a part of her history and gifts readers with our first installment of a new language for daughter-father passion (Wolf xix). She writes, “The loss of my father will haunt me as it did in the days long past, when I saw a man with no face walk the halls in our house. Somewhere in the world is a father I can’t know” (*The Kiss* 202). Her father is and is not her kin.

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