



Source: Ewen MacAskill, Simon Tisdall and Richard Norton-Taylor, 'Britain blames Tehran for Iraq troop deaths', *The Guardian*; Reuters; *Telegraph* in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 07/10/05.

Tags: [child/parent](#), [corporeality](#)

Writer/s: [Margaret Morgan](#)

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I measure time in toilet rolls. When I look down I am shocked to see that my child's nails are long—again. I notice the passing weeks by the sun's passage along the ridge before me. I am in that grey zone that is the speeding up of the time machine of Jules Verne, night and day blurred together, a grey zone five of indeterminacy. I pick lint from the dryer and think of Mary Kelly. I pull wads of cotton and hair from the drain. I don't think of anyone. I suckle. The milk is always making its presence felt, like a separate being. Yet I've found succour at feeding time, am nourished by her insistence.

So this morning I wake up and, coming into consciousness, dimly recognizing that old wooziness, feeling those sticky, drying juices beneath me, I roll over like the lumpen animal I have become: and sure enough, there, on the sheet beneath my sleep, is the small tell-tale spot: well, what do you know, said I to myself, look who's come to visit, my period, my bloody period. I feel the old familiar tug, for the first time in thirty-two months.—Not that I'm accounting, but, hey, I meant to say 'counting' and instead said 'ac-counting' which tells you something of the state of my being. So, maybe I was keeping track. But in any case, as I was saying, there's an old friend at my door. We haven't been close in recent times, I've shunned her in fact, she's been a matter of mourning for me, her reds have made me blue. But not this morning, no sir-ee. This morning I welcome her. 'Spread yourself out, make yourself comfortable, all is forgiven!' say I to my old friend. I revel in the drag of a contracting uterus, the snake inside that is shedding its skin. I delight in the pull of the ineluctable, the beginning of a good four day bleed. The last time I felt such pangs—it was years ago now—it was full of ennui and the ring of death, no baby, bo-a-baby, baby-baby, a gentle despair that slid into consciousness as the blood seeped and oozed and drained down the toilet bowl each day after day, each month after month.

But now, not now, that blood, as if on a virgin's nuptials, is a source of delight and pride: it is my subjectivity—a self born anew, a self returned to me, a self after and beyond the breast. Ah yes, I remember me well. Here I am, still here. I ache. I bleed. I bleed therefore I am.

I watch the flat of the television beyond the bulge of my personhood. I joggle my head from side to side, albeit in a futile game of cat and mouse with the too bright AM light of California bouncing off the screen. I am annoyed, but quietly delighting in the privilege of the annoyed. I refuse to budge. I revel in my corporeality. Still not attending to the stain that is at that very moment silently spreading, making its way into the soft, downy and expensive lower

layers of the newly purchased mattress, I think to myself: Let it bleed! I am painting the town red. At the Nature Channel before me, I gloat, seeing the not-self that my flow has, by the sheer fact of its existence, refused: on the television screen, an impassive mound of mother cat lying there with kittens attached, all squabbling and jostling among themselves—nothing to do with her—on all eight nipples. My nipple. No, mine. Mine! Mine! Mine! The kittens rule, and she is all squirting fluids and jiggling swollen pinkness. All nipple. All breast. Beast. I was myself that cat, a dripping padded thing, wads to contain the excess, my always large nipples enlarged some more and the non-existent breast transformed into C cups and then, obscene Ds. Which is not to suggest, of course, that this breast business was without its supreme pleasures. The dissolution of self or its extension into the suckling partial self, which, though legally a separate entity, hangs to you for dear life, waking, sleeping, shitting, crying to make the milk come, in synchronicity with you, its mother. And you with it. So, in all that time, of more than two mountainous mammalian years, whether because peri-menopausal or because my body had so whole-heartedly given itself over to the manufacture of nourishment for the infant, I never bled. Instead I flushed mildly, swelled, aged, and remained constantly, slightly, sweaty, and always, always, milky, translucent like the glass of an office door. I am the new mother of ripe middle age lactating with the symptoms of menopause.

But now here, still in bed, a bloody mess, coterminous with the decathecating, the final boredom with nursing, no, breast-feeding (why the word nurse? I don't like it—it suggests illness, another pathologizing of motherhood), here, now, with that dragging, tugging, bleeding sensation—when am I me without my abjection?—I revel in the return to personhood. I am uterus, not nipple. Bleeding or no, this is me, mine. And this, on the very same day that my daughter, with as much aplomb as pride, iterates her own access to subjectivity that is the abjection of her very own shit into the Potty, into which thereafter she stared, long and hard, with her old man's crumpled frown. We went then together, ceremoniously, to the toilet to empty the shit—her shit—into the bowl and then rinsed and rinsed and washed and washed and then ate cookies to celebrate. And this on the very day she went for the second time to nursery school without *mama*. So that while I bled, she seeped away too: a red-letter day for subjectivities accessed and returning. We—she and I—are still in synchronicity.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Margaret Morgan.*