

*Sour Heart* wants us to think about shit. And vaginal fluids, and boogers, and blood. But mostly shit. Whether it be the excrement that won't flush in a Bushwick bathroom or the refuse floating in the Hudson River, Zhang makes shit inextricable from the immigrant's experience, rejecting the ease of a palatable success story. Zhang demands our uncomfortability in her portrayal of the immigrant's abjection; in *Sour Heart*, everyone, whether or not they eventually succeed, is "just a piece of shit covered in vomit sitting in a pool of shit that everyone vomits on" (37). The very nature of a non-American "alien soul" denotes someone as "a lowly immigrant with a shit-stained anus for an anus," an "abysmal creature" (Zhang, 182). The immigrant, subjected to conditions no one should be forced to endure, is irreparably changed and marked as non-human, regardless of any resolution.

Another "violat[ion]" of the "bodily limits upon which classic subjectivity depends" comes from Silverman's concept of the maternal voice fantasy (80). In *Sour Heart*, Zhang is preoccupied with the idea that the family you come from will, in adulthood, never again be the family to which you belong. To combat this deeply terrifying idea, the book's child narrators attach themselves to any maternal figure, be it older sister, mother, or grandmother. The children of *Sour Heart* reveal themselves to be, once again, in possession of a questionable subjectivity through their desire to become one with their parental figures, to sleep in the same bed until "bound[ed] by their flesh" (Zhang, 18). The maternal voice embodies both the original comfort of the womb and the terror of confinement. In "Why Were They Throwing Bricks?," Allen hides under his grandmother's "long nightgown," symbolically returning to her womb (Zhang, 244). As his grandmother narrates the story of his birth, her powerful voice also creates a new origin story, framing Allen's creation as emerging from her. While Allen can only receive comfort from attaching his being to his grandmother's, his older sister recognizes the result will be an impotent sixteen-year-old boy that "still [cowers] underneath [his] grandmother's dress" (Zhang, 246). The mother's voice as Silverman's nightmare violation also appears in the story "Our Mothers Before Them;" it remains a constant unwelcome presence that keeps her child "pathetically lovestruck for [her] mother," in a constant state of submission to her emotional manipulation (Zhang, 97).

Zhang, however, ultimately leaves us with the potential of the maternal voice. Despite knowing that her attachment to her parents both can't and "[won't] last forever," *Sour Heart* ends with the original child narrator,

Christina, letting herself be comforted to sleep by her parents' murmurs, "clearing away the frantic voices of who I thought I was supposed to be... until I remembered who I was again and no longer felt lonely" (Zhang, 301).