This chapter investigates the archetype of the female bandit, a powerful vigilante figure who does not seek vengeance for crimes left unpunished by the criminal justice system but instead struggles for a more even distribution of wealth and/or power among the general populace. In this sense, her altruistic motives surpass the boundaries of self. Such vigilantism frequently overturns the existing androcentric power structure, to victimize those individuals who typically do the victimizing. Unlike their male counterparts, the female bandits showcased in this chapter have the additional motive of vanquishing their own demons via their radical acts—they rid themselves of social mandates that are so ingrained in their psyches that it prevents them from living to their full potential. The destruction of these demons is often replete with violent wrenchings of the soul as well as the social order, steps that are necessary to correct outdated ideologies.

An important characteristic of bandit women is their desire to replace their own sacrificial behaviors with behaviors that instead lead them to fulfill their potential and motivate other women to do the same. By proving themselves central to the transformation of other women, female bandits act in a political capacity to inspire change. Female bandits commit criminal acts but privately rationalize their lawbreaking, seeing their criminal behavior as a type of social defense or as part of a natural law that supersedes the fallible laws of man.

My analysis of the female bandit exposes the extent to which the themes of *Sister Gin* (1975) by June Arnold and *Fried Green Tomatoes* (1988) by Fannie Flagg overlap, demonstrating that despite the radical differences in style, the underlying messages of the two texts correspond. June Arnold’s earlier novel informs *Fried Green Tomatoes* in multiple ways. For example, both texts are written by lesbian authors from the South who write about lesbian relationships despite a patriarchal culture that values and normalizes heterosexuality; both texts...
counter ageism by denoting the elderly in a positive way; both texts draw attention to the pervasiveness of racism; both texts include main characters experiencing menopause and use the condition of menopause to provide their heroines with an opportunity for personal renewal; and both texts include vigilante characters whose anger at the biased justice system of the United States spurs them to take the law into their own hands. The texts thus present in narrative form what both authors seek to achieve in storytelling—that is, a new kind of female solidarity based on the sharing and influence of political belief rather than on some sort of primary group identification.

The themes shared by these texts thus exceed the norms of representation in fiction by constructing and contributing to a mode of expression that translates beyond the text itself, in a continuum that I have termed “mothering morality.” The term encapsulates how female-constructed femininity is articulated both within and beyond the fictional text by these authors and authors like them, and how such articulations influence new generations of writers. Moreover, the passing along of newfound gynocentric strength and potency in a “lesbian continuum” (Rich) mirrors the way that the characters of their stories promote empowerment both in their own generation of women and in future generations.

Finally, I revisit (see Chapter Two) a discussion of William Faulkner’s *The Unvanquished* (1938), which includes a female bandit, Granny Rosa Millard, because this character provides an interesting counterpoint to the two female-authored bandits in her very lack of altruism and desire for personal development.

A brief history of the bandit in American fiction will establish some guidelines for this discussion. In the United States, the bandit became notorious in the late nineteenth century when a new era of violent crime began. Banditry experienced an upsurge after the Civil War, when train robberies by the Reno brothers of Indiana and bank robberies by the James-Younger gang of Missouri became frequent occurrences (Richard Maxwell Brown 16). Brown cites the James Brothers, Henry Berry Lowry, Pretty Boy Floyd, and John Dillinger as premier examples of American bandits and explains that from the period following the Civil War to about the mid-1930s (with the demise of Dillinger), Americans were largely ambiguous about whether banditry should be condemned or admired (16). Crimes of banditry and the men committing such crimes were mythologized in fiction, transforming the men into heroic incarnations that glorified