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UNCOVERING A "HERSTORY" OF POWER: MEDITERRANEAN  
GODDESS MYTH, IMAGE AND SYMBOL IN CONTEMPORARY  
CANADIAN WOMEN'S PLAYWRITING

*i found god in myself  
& i loved her / i loved her fiercely  
ntozake shange*

*Introduction*

With the evolution of modern feminism over the past three decades, women playwrights have begun to explicate notions of female self-identity within their work. Many of their plays articulate the common need to reconnect with ancient, spiritual and powerful images of the archetypal female, whose vitality has largely been buried and left to the "underworld" of the female psyche. Owing, in part, to patriarchy (as defined within the constraints of Judeo-Christian dogma) and cultural misogyny (as conventionally portrayed through media, especially advertising), many female and male playwrights have not been accorded a legitimate outlet for demonstrating the breadth of their individual ingenuity and creativity. As Kay Turner, author of "Contemporary Feminist Rituals" points out, history has demonstrated that only certain men (commonly white and heterosexual) define, possess and confer power or authority, and power is the necessary ingredient for the creation of culture. Women (and those men who do not fall into this select category) have, therefore, traditionally been consigned to live on the fringes of culture, locked in domestic zones which are rarely defined as part of the cultural territory (220).

Though we currently live in a time when both men and women are reexamining prosaic notions of what is "masculine" and "feminine", and are incessantly postulating on the validity and neutrality of gender roles, society has yet to offer plausible solutions for the formation of true egalitarianism. In our rapidly changing social climate where new media are replaced virtually as they appear, an ancient art form like theatre offers society viable alternatives for the future, which upon closer investigation are deeply rooted in our ancient past. In other words, in exploring the myriad of contemporary Canadian plays by men

and women which both overtly and covertly exhibit explicit spiritual, female archetypal imagery, one is forced to question the very foundations of a five-thousand-year-old system wherein religious taxonomies, focused exclusively around male images of divinity, have established the commonly held notion that female power can never be fully legitimate or wholly beneficent (Christ 73).

This analysis will explore the augmentation and development of the relationship between female spirituality and Canadian women's playwrighting by examining frequently employed images of the archetypal feminine, by drawing examples from the selected works of Audrey Butler, Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell, Banuta Rubess collectively with Nightwood Theatre, Sally Clark, Connie Gault, and Judith Thompson. It will demonstrate how these images appear in various forms (either overtly or covertly), due to women's inherent spiritual need to reclaim aspects of the feminine self that have been lost and forgotten in their struggle to free themselves from constricting, and often times, male-prescribed and defined roles (Lowinsky xi). It will further investigate the need for women to find their spiritual roots in the personal, cultural and archetypal past, present and future, by exploring the use of the triptych of virgin/mother/crone in Canadian women's playwrighting. In doing so, it will inquire into the quintessential feminine journey, a conspicuous aspect of many of the plays discussed below. It will address the uses and importance of Moon imagery and will conclude with a discussion on the theory of a "feminine catharsis". While this kind of imagery is hardly restricted to works by women (plays by George F. Walker, Bryden MacDonald and Tomson Highway illustrate this point well), the relationship between male playwrights and female spirituality is beyond the scope of this limited investigation and will therefore be reserved for further examination.

### *Interpreting the Spiritual Anatomy: Exegeses and Definitions*

One of the ways in which women have been able to reconnect to female-centred power and solidarity is by accessing archetypal images of the feminine. These universal effigies, often manifested in the works discussed below by virgin, mother or crone "type" characters, express important and sentient aspects of women's collective psyches. Perhaps Jung best describes these theories:

In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal

nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents...The concept of the collective unconscious indicates the existence of definite forms in the psyche which seem to be in the present always and everywhere. Mythological research calls them "motifs"; in the psychology of primitives they correspond to Levy-Bruhl's concept of "representations collectives," and in the field of comparative religion they have been defined by Hubert and Mauss as "categories of the imagination". Adolf Bastian long ago called them "elementary" or "primordial thoughts". From these references it should be clear enough that my idea of the archetype—literally a pre-existent form—does not stand alone but is something that is recognized and named in other fields of knowledge (Campbell, *Jung*, 60).

The term archetypal feminine, then, refers to the specifically female motifs that exist within the collective unconscious and are often illustrated in mythological tales. Psychotherapist Nor Hall describes these often mythological characters and tales (the word myth literally meaning to repeat) not as fictitious stories about imagined goddesses, but as complex and essential psychic facts, arising out of the sleep cycle of a culture, the way a dream comes up in the sleep of an individual (Hall 69). Greek goddesses like Artemis, the huntress, and Aphrodite, the goddess of love, are primary examples of the archetypal feminine, (which, however, by no means originated with ancient Greece). They are simply manifestations of the feminine within the collective unconsciousness of every woman, and the feminine countenance within every man.

Many archaeological and religious theologians (Walker, Stone, Eisler, Spretnak, Hall, Harding) maintain that the archetypal images (feminine and otherwise) that exist within the collective unconscious are based in the social organization and belief systems of early centres of civilization, predating Judeo-Christian mythology and liturgy. These seemingly New Age notions (or more accurately "Old Age", Rudakoff 115), have been verified by the archaeological records of countless early female figurines that have been unearthed and studied all over Asia Minor and Europe (Christ 6). Originating with the inception of the Venus figurines from the Palaeolithic era, dating back over twenty thousand years, these goddess images formed the foundations of the earliest matriarchal theologies, negating the commonly held notion that the ancients primarily worshipped male deities (Eisler 6).

Overwhelming evidence exists that these early civilizations (geographically based in Palestine, Jericho and Anatolia) were remarkably peaceful and were marked by extraordinarily equitable soci-

eties wherein women and the feminine occupied important social positions, and both female and male deities were worshipped (Eisler 4). During this early evolution of Western civilization, the highest power in the cosmos was feminine. The great Goddess was known by many names (Astarte, Isis, Ishtar to name a few), and was seen as the Great Mother who reigned as the supreme divinity. Walker has suggested that this was primarily due to the fact that motherhood was the only recognized bond (or relationship) and the connection between sexuality and childbearing was unknown to primitive men (Walker 1983, 680). Beyond being worshipped for fertility, the Great Mother was revered as the wise creator and the sole source of universal order, and in this matriarchal structure women's roles differed markedly from those in patriarchal cultures (Stone 266).

For many of the women playwrights whose works are examined herein, one of the ways to explore these feminine archetypes is through their craft. By employing theatrical techniques which infuse what we now recognize as Mediterranean goddess imagery into their work, many women playwrights are now engaged in the creation of matriarchal-focused theatre which employs aspects of feminine myth, image and symbol within the text and structure of their plays. This form of woman-centred theatre promotes and sanctions a serious turning away from the old to the new (or more accurately, the patriarchy to the ancient), and provides an "emotional, descriptive, intensified and sanctifying version of both emergent ideological systems and female archetypes. It offers an imagistic revitalization for women by allowing them to participate in the concrete, bodily expressive form of creation focused on ancient images of the feminine" (Turner 220).

This analysis will explore the most common manifestation of the archetypal feminine conspicuously used both overtly and covertly in many of the works discussed below, the triptych of Virgin/Mother/Crone, which alludes to what the Christian lexicon might refer to as a trinity - a wholeness with three distinct and separate components. Best illustrated by the image of the Moon (a lunar goddess) whose cycle encompasses three distinct phases, the triptych is composed of: the innocent young girl; the mature mother; and the older, wiser crone. Hall describes the interconnectedness of these three archetypes:

The moon expresses this eternally conceiving and bearing inheritance in the succession of phases: dark to new crescent to full to old crescent and down into dark again. The White Goddess or the Muse who inspires mortals to ecstatic speech, song, and dance is the moon in her fullness. Her full stage is symbolic of coming to creative fruition - when the fruit of the moon tree is ripe. In the waning stage the fruit is eaten away or withers. The dying crescent is absorbed into the blackness of the no-moon,



under (or inner) worldly womb phase. This is the time of conception and increase. Looking at the moon in its visible phases —rising in the east, full overhead, diminishing in the west— consider again Jung's moon reflective statement about feminine immortality: "Every mother contains her daughter in herself and every daughter her mother. Every woman extends backwards into her mother and forward into her daughter." (Hall 94-95).

Jungian analyst Naomi Ruth Lowinsky describes this triptych as a "Motherline", a life source that lives in every woman's body. She contextualizes it as a story of the generations from a woman's point of view which encompasses a woman's female lineage reaching backward from her mother and her mother's mother, and forward into her daughters and granddaughters (2). What makes the Motherline so multifaceted is that women have both a personal and archetypal Motherline, the latter inherently connecting them through the collective unconscious. The journey towards the understanding of one's personal and archetypal Motherline is most interesting in that one can gain a greater understanding of this lineage by travelling simultaneously forwards and backwards. In other words, the journey is not limited to the future, nor is it dependent on the past. Rather the two exist within a framework of mutual importance and connectedness. This concept will become clearer as we encounter examples within the context of the plays.

***(Re)engendering Spirituality:  
the Conscious and Subconscious Use of the Archetypal Feminine***

Though the past thirty years have seen a resurgence of Goddess culture and Pagan ideology, we have yet to see analytic work on these belief systems when manifested on the stage. There is an abundance of Canadian playwriting by both women and men exhibiting aspects of female spirituality. The problem is simply that it is rarely perceived, much less analyzed, within the context of archetypal feminine imagery and is therefore subsequently left in the recesses of the psyche.

In her study "Under the Goddess's Cloak: reCalling the Wild, engendering the Power," dramaturge, educator and dramatic critic Judith Rudakoff notes that matriarchal imagery and symbolism have not gone astray in the twentieth century. Rather, she claims, they have been hidden, ignored or unconsciously assimilated (115). She comments that:

What most people fail to take into account is that as women artists, critics and dramaturges, we have been schooled from an early age in a tradition that is almost wholly and actively patriarchal in its mythology (Rudakoff 115).

The role of the female artist in male-defined culture necessarily stipulates that the feminine view will, more often than not, be "other," and that female power can never be fully legitimized as there is a "pervasive philosophical bias against women as creators" (Citron 265). As Christ notes in relation to women under patriarchy, "This message need never be explicitly stated (as, for example, it is in the story of Eve) for its effect to be felt" (73). Hall in a not dissimilar vein points out that women are brought to the task of self-reflection by archetypal disorientation resulting from centuries of adapting to a predominantly patriarchal world (34).

For these reasons it is imperative for women to seek out examples of their own spiritual likeness in order to fulfil deep-rooted psychic needs. The theatre acts as a primary cite for initiating this search, as it, like religion, often provides symbols and rituals that, through a process of catharsis, enable people to cope with difficult situations and facilitate in the problems associated with life's important transitions (Christ 72).

To find examples of the archetypal feminine within Canadian women's playwriting we must follow separate but interconnected paths: the overt and the covert. The overt route, comprised of works like Linda Griffiths and Maria Campbell's *Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*; Sally Clark's *Jehanne of the Witches*; Nightwood Theatre and Banuta Rubess' *Smoke Damage*; and Audrey Butler's *Medusa Rising*, is lined with scores of symbols reflecting the female aspect of divinity, feminine archetypes and matriarchal lineage. The more "accidental" (Rudakoff 116) or "subconscious"<sup>1</sup> body of plays such as Connie Gault's *Sky*, and Judith Thompson's *White Biting Dog*, is more subliminally infused with iconography reminiscent of powerful female archetypes (specifically Artemis and the virgin/mother/crone triptych). Both categories are defined through their use of the archetypal journey and work to explore and recontextualize many female archetypes by recovering original meanings behind commonly used symbology (which has been) trapped in a modern and limited social context.

One of the strongest elements common to each play is the "archetypal journey." These journeys, reminiscent of Psyche's search for meaning and completion in the Greek myth of Psyche and Eros<sup>2</sup>, all con-

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<sup>1</sup>In using the term "subconscious" I am not suggesting that these playwrights use this imagery in an unconscious manner. Rather, that they have employed a series of symbols and archetypes that speak to us *through* the unconscious. Moreover, they choose to manifest these symbols in a covert way.

<sup>2</sup>Here I speak of the myth of Psyche, whose journey leads her from a virginal state of innocence to the full maturity of womanhood. In this myth, Psyche, a mortal, the wife of Eros (son of Venus), is urged by her jealous sisters to look upon the body of her husband,

sist of a central character beginning in a virginal mode (innocent and unknowing) and travelling, often through her own past, to obtain a powerful knowledge of her personal and archetypal Motherline.

In *Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*, Jessica is helped through her spiritual journey by Vitaline, a crone. It is she who helps Jessica find her way by exerting her role as a Native elder, as well as acting as a therapist of sorts, affirming the importance of female power. Psychotherapist holds its original meaning in the phrase "in Psyche's cult"; those who practice the profession are seen as attendants to Psyche, those who help in the search for lost parts of the self or those who help to stretch a restricted imagination (Hall 23). In Vitaline's words:

You've got to stop, alright. Stop all that crazy talk before the spirits give you a good whack. I'm your teacher, I'm very smart, I've taught all kinds of people, one white guy even. I helped you find your power and you're saying I'm just some old woman raving away in the bush? Running around with eagle feathers sticking out of my head? That's what I am?...What's the matter with you? Yes, you had to go to your dark side. You want to feel and understand your power? (Griffiths, Campbell 120).

Like Psyche, Jessica comes face to face with her Native half, and must lose herself in order to find herself again. In this sense, she begins her journey through her own soul and the collective soul of her Motherline. She is what psychologist Marion Woodman calls the "pregnant virgin," referring to her as "that part of us who is outcast, the part who comes to consciousness through going into darkness" (10). Meeting other feminine guides and spirits along the way, Jessica travels down through her dark side (reminiscent of Psyche's trip to the Underworld) where she is given the gift of personal power and self-understanding. Vitaline remarks:

Like stars they come.....  
their wings silver,

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though she has been forbidden to look upon him in the light. Her sisters, by suggesting to Psyche that her lover is not in fact a youthful god but a brutal, monstrous snake, fill her with doubt. That night, in an effort to seek out her husband's secret identity, she holds a lantern over his sleeping form. But when a fateful drop of oil falls on the backside of the sleeping god, he banishes Psyche, in a fit of rage, to a lifetime of endless torment. After much wandering she falls into the hands of Venus, her bitterest enemy, who orders her to perform a set of seemingly impossible and endless tasks, the last of which is to go down into the Underworld and retrieve the beauty of Persephone, Queen of the Dead. Overcoming many obstacles, Psyche accomplishes the tasks and makes the journey from earth to the heavens where she is reunited with Eros and made immortal. They then give birth to a child whom they name Bliss.

For an excellent analysis of Psyche's archetypal journey see Hall's chapter "Psyche's Search" in *The Moon And The Virgin* (20-35). For the mythological background on Psyche, see *Crowell's Handbook of Classical Mythology* (Tripp 503-506).

their bodies shine.  
 Listen, you can hear them...  
 gossiping like women, sharing power, sisters and brothers of the earth.  
 Pat the earth, stroke her,  
 this woman is our Mother,  
 we are her daughters and sons...  
 There is an old man coming, old man  
 to be your helper and show you the way.....  
 My grandmother passed him on to me,  
 I pass him on to you...

(Griffiths and Campbell 126).

In *Smoke Damage*, past and present are interwoven to create a tapestry that explores the medieval witch burnings as five characters search for an understanding of personal and archetypal feminine power. The character Tart has an insatiable urge to discover why her Aunt had been burned during the witch hunts of the seventeenth century:

WHY? Why was she burned? That's all I want to know. Aunt Nora knows her name, that's it. But if I knew why, I could do something. I've got to do something (Rubess 15).

Her journey also begins in a virginal mode, sparked by the need to learn more about her family's history:

I was really numbed out, I mean *numb*. Until this summer, when Aunt Nora told me about the family tree (Rubess 13).

When confronted with her personal family history, Tart chooses to travel to Europe on a three-week tour, attending various sites of the witch hunts. Tart's journey is of dual importance. First, it is representative of the need to seek out one's own Motherline. This often unrecognized yearning to uncover our buried stories of the life cycles that link generations of women can be brought on by the smallest inner "nudge" or intuition that reminds us that our fibres are extended far in front of us and reach far behind us. Secondly, on a more universal scale, it illustrates how the search for a specifically female history (and lineage) is suffocated by a society that places little value on the pursuit of feminine self-understanding.

Co-playwright Banuta Rubess responds to some of these issues in the context of revisioning history and creating new (or rather excavating old) spaces for women's lives and stories:

I have always been interested in "revisioning" history, in showing history from a new perspective in order to uncover truth, and form is the

means. I should add that I also feel the product should be entertaining. I was strongly impressed by Brecht's insistence that we must have fun (*spass*) in the theatre. After all, if I can't present the politics in a theatrically exciting manner I might as well run for office or participate in a political campaign... So "revisioning" history to me means disclosing information—don't forget my Latvian roots, which to me has meant an absence of information—and it means telling the story from a new perspective, often the perspective of women, or a woman. Kids in schools today are still taught that "women never did anything" and that's just not true (Rubess as quoted in Rudakoff and Much 67).

This linkage to women's historical and collective past helps create an important, specifically female context within the structure of the text that provides audiences with powerful images of the archetypal Motherline that are not always presented in contemporary culture. This is not to imply, however, that structure is implicitly male, rather that under patriarchy, women's activities are rarely studied and analyzed within their own historical context. Moreover, their work has been traditionally ecumenically examined in relation to the "more important" contributions of their male counterparts, relegating the significance of their responsibilities as secondary or "other."

Like *Smoke Damage*, *Medusa Rising* also creates an important female context within the structure of the piece that helps illustrate the need for women to reconnect with the power of the archetypal feminine as a form of personal healing and inner discovery. The character Tanya is perhaps most representative of this intrinsic need. Like Jessica and Tart, Tanya begins her journey unconscious of the fact that she is in need of this reconnection with her spiritual past. She says:

This is the craziest thing I've done in a while —  
driving all the way here because of a wet dream—  
I don't even know these women- (Butler 10).

Tanya's travels from Vancouver to Hanlon's Point to attend a birthday party for a woman she does not know can be seen as an allegory for her need to re-connect with other women and celebrate female spirituality. Her isolation from these women and personal, spiritual cognizance of the Motherline can be interpreted in the context of Psyche's search for wholeness and bliss. Beginning as a maiden, Psyche's period of isolation "is the first stage of her initiation into the greater feminine mysteries of erotic (*eros*) and spiritual love. A cover of darkness, separation, and confusion (the "welter" of seeds) are necessary prerequisites for the eventual rebirth of a lost and wandering soul" (Hall 22). Just as Psyche must wander in fear before she can be reunited

with Eros and eventually give birth to Bliss, Tanya must travel with uncertainty and experience this separation and darkness before she can realize the joy and celebration of the ritual circle at the end of the play.

The theme of the wandering soul making an arduous journey of realization and spiritual rebirth is perhaps most clearly revealed in Sally Clark's retelling of the story of Joan of Arc, *Jehanne of the Witches*, in which the central figure Jehanne must die as a virgin before she can be reborn as a woman. The motif of death before rebirth is reminiscent of the Greek myth of Demeter and Kore/Persephone wherein the child, Kore, is abducted from her mother, Demeter, and dies, but is reborn as Persephone, Queen of the Underworld, and a woman in her own right.<sup>3</sup> Isabelle, Jehanne's mother, explains the cyclical nature of women's power:

ISABELLE: You're a vessel for the powers...You're turning into a woman. It's happening to you and you can't change it.

JEHANNE: Why should I lose my power just because I'm becoming a woman?

ISABELLE: You don't lose power. It changes. It needs to recover itself. It is in the nature of power to have cycles. You can't use power without replenishing yourself. Otherwise, it will turn against you. This particular cycle is ending (Clark 120).

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<sup>3</sup>In the Demeter/Kore/Persephone myth Kore, the daughter of Demeter, the mother of the earth, was playing in a field among the narcissus flowers when Hades, the god of the Underworld, snatched up the maiden and carried her down into the bowels of the earth where he is said to have raped her, making the maiden his wife. Enraged by her daughter's seduction, Demeter wandered over the earth in the form of an old woman beyond childbearing, refusing to allow the earth to take seed, forcing the plants and crops to die useless upon the ground. For an entire year she brought famine upon the earth, but acted as a nurse to people in many cities. When Zeus realized that humanity would starve to death, thus effectively ending their sacrifices to the gods, he sent Hermes down to the Underworld to retrieve the daughter. Upon her return, a joyful reunion followed, but the mother's first question to the daughter was, "Did you taste any food in the Underworld?" Demeter was shocked to hear the girl admit that she had eaten seven pomegranate seeds, for anyone who tasted the food of Hades was required to spend at least a third part of every year in the Underworld. Now Queen of the Underworld, Persephone (she had acquired her own name upon eating the seven seeds) would only be with her mother for two thirds of the year, and rule in the Underworld for the remainder. Demeter, in her grief over losing her daughter for those months, refused to allow the grain to grow during that part of the year.

For an excellent analysis of the meaning of the seduction of Kore see Hall, chapter 4 ("Mothers and Daughters").

For mythological information see Tripp 194-198.

Jungian psychologist M. E. Harding claims that these cycles exist not only within a woman's full life span (and the anima, or the unconscious feminine aspect of a man's life) resulting in her three incarnations as Virgin, Mother and Crone, but also within her monthly cycle, reminding women of their spiritual interconnectedness, and the instinctive forces within them (74):

For to women, life itself is cyclic. The life force ebbs and flows in her actual experience, not only in nightly and daily rhythm as it does for a man but also in moon cycles, quarter phase, half phase, full moon, decline, and so round to dark moon. These two changes together produce a rhythm which is like the moon's changes and also like the tides whose larger monthly cycle works itself out concurrently with the diurnal changes, sometimes increasing the swing of the tides and at others working against the tidal movement, the whole producing a complex rhythm hard to understand. In the course of one complete cycle, which most strangely corresponds to the moon's revolution, the woman's energy waxes, shines full and wanes again. These energy changes affect her, not only in her physical and sexual life but in her psychic life as well. Life in her ebbs and flows, so that she is dependent on her inner rhythm (Harding 68).

Harding contends that modern women have lost touch with this aspect of their psychic selves, which often manifests itself in menstrual disabilities, and that they must concentrate on the power of their cycles by taking the time for inner reflection and introversion (75). Woodman refers to this as the "gestation" or "Chrysalis" period (27).

This gestation period is clearly delineated for Jehanne when she leaves her mother's home, a place of security, and follows a dark and threatening path. Jehanne's fateful mission is given to her in secrecy by three voices<sup>4</sup>, the Archangel Michael, Saint Catherine and Saint Mar-

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<sup>4</sup>Though the triad of voices, reminiscent of the Virgin/Mother/Crone triptych, holds meaning in the number itself, the saints themselves carry particular significance within the myths of the goddess Aphrodite. Saint Catherine holds her roots in a Greek convent of priestesses who called themselves "kathari", the "pure ones" and honoured Kali (otherwise known as Aphrodite) the triple goddess of Virgin/Mother/Crone. St. Catherine was known for her beauty, wisdom and virginity (another triad), and was beheaded for refusing the hand of the emperor in marriage. It is said that when she died, milk flowed from her veins instead of blood (Walker 1983, 149-150). Saint Margaret was another "virgin martyr" as well as a canonized form of Aphrodite. She too was subject to astonishing tortures to overcome her dedication to virginity. In one legend she fled from her suitor by disguising herself as a monk and becoming a holy hermit. Apparently very difficult to kill, different versions of her saga claim that she was burned, drowned and beheaded (Walker 1983, 582-583). Saint Michael was a Judeo-Christian archangel who inherited the myths and attributes of Hermes (Walker 1983, 653), the Greek god of magic, letters, medicine, and occult wisdom. Hermes was a hermaphrodite, and resided united in one body with Aphrodite (Walker 1983, 395).



garet (all played by women), who charge her with the responsibility of saving France by travelling to Vaucouleurs to restore the throne to the Dauphin Charles so that the country may be united under his rule. In addition to this daunting task, she is instructed to retain her virginity, for which sacrifice she will be given the power to accomplish her task. She is directed to do this by Michael, who informs her:

Virginity gives you clarity. If you lose it, you won't be able to see or hear me. It takes many years to reach that state of clarity (Clark 37).

A closer analysis reveals Michael to be an example of Jung's concept of animus, the masculine part of a woman's nature (Harding 68). Harding refers to this as the "Ghostly" or "Spiritual Lover," the effects produced by forces in a woman's unconscious which have been stirred into awareness through her contact with a real or perceived male image. This male facet of the self instructs her to commence the psychic journey into the unknown.

Of the three saints, Jehanne is first able to see and hear Michael, her masculine counterpart, who urges her to sacrifice her sexuality for the good of the country. This demand is akin to the goddess Aphrodite who required her disciples to sacrifice their sexuality upon initiation to her cult (Aphrodite shared her body with her male counterpart Hermes, the first hermaphrodite, Walker 1983, 395). Once the even greater sacrifice of "psychic desirousness" was made, she granted them wholeness ("resulting from serving their own inner truth, instead of seeking to be made whole through another" (Harding 196-197).

Aphrodite was much more than the Greek goddess of love. A Virgin/Mother/Crone trinity, she ruled the world by the natural law of the maternal clan, governing birth, life, love, death, time and fate and was responsible for offering humans an understanding of sensual and sexual mysticism (Walker 1983, 44-45). At the onset of the Christian era, Aphrodite's temple (on Cyprus) was converted into a sanctuary for the worshipping of the Virgin Mary (Walker 1983, 44).

Jehanne literally becomes an incarnation of the goddess, as she is "seduced" (when seduced, one is led aside (Hall 76) by the male aspect of her own self, and led into the secluded and introverted state of contemplation, where she struggles within herself to reemerge as a woman.

This gestation theme parallels both Psyche and Kore/Persephone, who experience this process of change much like the metamorphosis of caterpillar to chrysalis to butterfly (another triptych). Woodman contends that when this process of transfiguration begins often women will reject it, much like Kore's initial rejection of Hades, and Psyche's re-

fusal to answer her sister's queries. It often begins by manifesting itself in our dreams or through visions, like Tanya and Jessica, or voices like Jehanne. The induction into this "Chrysalis phase" (Woodman 27) signifies our fear of death and the unknown and we relinquish ourselves to the calling only through an unconscious belief in spiritual rebirth. As Woodman explains:

The ego now has to be strong enough to remain concentrated in stillness, so that it can mediate what is happening both positively and negatively. It must hold a detached position, relying now on its differentiated femininity in order to submit, now on its discriminating masculinity in order to question and cut away. Something immense begins to happen in the very foundation of the personality, while consciousness experiences the conflict as crucifixion. Ego desires are no longer relevant. The old questions no longer have any meaning, and there are no answers...The ego on some level knows what is happening, and knows it has to happen. It knows that its personal desires have to be sacrificed to the transpersonal. It knows it is confronting death (28).

When the ego, or more specifically the characters in these plays, are in this chrysalis phase that we see a clear path towards reclaiming the archetypal feminine in women's playwriting. Ironically, it is often with those works in which the use of female primordial images is seemingly covert or subconscious that characters experience this process most acutely.

In Connie Gault's *Sky, Blanche*, an unwed pregnant teenager comes to live with Jasper, a slow but sincere young man, outside a small prairie village in the summer of 1920. Angry and deeply ashamed, she is unable to tell her new husband that her pregnancy is the result of a violation committed by her own father. Instead she proclaims the unborn child to be the son of God. At first it would seem as though Blanche's story bears a closer resemblance to Christian liturgy than to the images of archetypal feminine discussed earlier. However, further examination reveals a deep-rooted connection to the Kore/Persephone and Demeter mythology and the triptych of the Virgin/Mother/Crone.

Unwed and pregnant, Blanche (Kore) is torn from virginal innocence by her father's rape (Hades), and during her gestation resists entering the realm of Persephone and womanhood. Like Kore she refuses to journey into the underworld to reemerge a woman, and becomes a literal and figurative embodiment of the pregnant virgin, incubating and dwelling in anxiety. As Rudakoff notes:

Blanche will not allow herself to be possessed, either by the child feeding off her body, or the husband who chastely vows to preserve and protect her questionable innocence. Blanche refuses entry into the Underworld,

no matter how it tears at her skirt. Though she carries—in her unborn child—tangible, visible, living evidence of her taste of pomegranate, her denial of the origin of its conception holds her back from leaving her state of protected innocence. Her refusal to leave Kore the Virgin and embrace Persephone the Crone is finally shattered when she realizes that her baby is dead in the womb. Only then does she reach out to her husband, cradling his head at her bosom, welcoming him home. And throughout the action of this play, a silent unseen Crone, —Blanche as an old woman, alone—watches the cycle play itself out again and again (121).

Blanche's body is a metaphor for women's relationships with the archetypal Great Mother, with whom life begins. For most women, the relationship with the mother is the first defining relationship in our lives. Though Blanche attempts to deny the conception aligning herself with the Virgin (Mary), the archetypal Great Mother (Persephone) reveals herself in a dream in which Blanche is an angel whose wings are so white and heavy that she is unable to pass through an arch and go beyond.

BLANCHE: Let me alone. (*Pause.*) I had a bad dream. I dreamed I had wings. Angel's wings. White and heavy.

JASPER: Do you think wings *would* be heavy?

BLANCHE: I came out here in my dream with these *heavy* white wings hanging on my shoulders, dragging my shoulders down and back so it was hard to walk. They were real big wings.

JASPER: I seen angels in Mother's prayer book. They've got big wings. I just didn't know they'd be so heavy.

BLANCHE: And I came over to this arch and looked out.

JASPER: What did you see?

BLANCHE: Nothing. But I had this feeling I had to leave.

JASPER: What?

BLANCHE: I just had this feeling that I was supposed to walk through here and...and I don't know what after that. Just keep walking, I guess.

JASPER: Where?

BLANCHE: I don't know. Don't matter anyhow, because I couldn't get through. The wings were in the way. I got stuck. I got stuck right here in the middle of the arch and I couldn't get out and I couldn't get back either (Gault 60-61).

Not unlike the beginning of other archetypal journeys discussed above, Blanche dreams that she must move beyond the gestational period, and exit the chrysalis in order to fully perceive the transformation into womanhood. Her heavy, white angel's wings bring to mind Christian imagery connoting heavenly or divine "children" (God's children), whose wings are a symbol of their affiliation with godliness. However, ancient associations of female sexuality with angels originated with the fact that angels or "cherubim" (from the Hebrew "kerubh") were priestesses who wore large, artificial wings as an expression of their own connection to the Great Mother Goddess (Walker 1988,232). Yet Blanche's wings are cumbersome and prevent her from passing through the arch. The arch (in the shape of the sacred Greek alphabet letter the omega) is a symbol of the Goddess, Mother of birth and death. Walker notes that the omega "continued to be hung "for luck" over doorways throughout the early Christian era, protecting the *threshold* as it did in pagan times" (emphasis hers, 1988, 9). Unable to understand the symbolic meaning of the wings on a conscious level, Blanche lacks the power to remove the anguish of her lost virginity and pass through the threshold into the world of womanhood. It is only through the death of her unborn child that the burden is lifted and the metamorphosis complete.

In Judith Thompson's *White Biting Dog*, Pony Daid must also embrace death in order to experience rebirth as a Persephone figure. Pony, after making love with Cape, is unable to live in the innocent world of Kore, and kills herself (retreats to the Underworld where Persephone is queen) in order to resurface as her own woman. Like Blanche and Tanya, she is forewarned of this (archetypal) need to move beyond the threshold in the dream she relates to Cape.

PONY: (eyes closed) Well, I go home, right? And there's these guys, these tough guys drinking Lemon-Lime on the porch, and one of 'em's holding a carp, a great big brown carp, and I look down the mouth, and there are my folks! My parents, movin'...their lips for help, all squished in a carp fish. And the guys are laughin' (Thompson 76).

In her dream, Pony returns home to find two large, burly men outside her home who have captured her parents inside a large carp. While Christian symbology maintains that the fish symbol was based on *ichthys*, (Greek for fish), an acronym for Jesus Christ, the son of God, the fish and its keeper are actually pagan symbology. Ichthys was the son of an ancient Sea-goddess, known by many names one of which is Aphrodite (triple goddess of the Virgin/Mother/Crone). In several versions of the myth, Ichthys guards the Great Goddess, whose symbol

was a fish, iconographic of the female genitals (the reason why fish have traditionally been viewed as aphrodisiacs (Walker 1988, 374).

Pony dreams that of the two men drinking lemon-lime (binary symbols for birth and death) on her porch, one of them (Ichthys) is holding the carp containing her parents. The porch is symbolic of Pony's inability to re-enter her parent's home. No longer an innocent child, as she has tasted the pomegranate of seduction, she is unable to return to her childhood home, a place of virginal innocence. As she looks into the mouth (symbolic of genitals) of the fish she sees her parents trapped and in need of help, suggesting that she must rescue them from the mouth of the fish. Like Kore, Pony must separate herself from her parents before she is able to pass through the underworld and reemerge a woman. Rudakoff notes:

In the fullness of her imposed Persephone aspect, Pony becomes the woman who has experienced union with a man she loves, and is changed forever. Pony's inability —or unwillingness— to reconcile and assimilate these abrupt and unalterable changes in her life makes it impossible for her to continue to live in the phenomenal world. She has been given first-hand knowledge, but lacks the wisdom to know how to use it (119).

Once Pony consciously embodies Persephone and embraces death, she is able to associate her parents as a woman, just as Persephone was able to rejoin Demeter after her six month gestation. Pony explains the importance of the chrysalis period (in her final monologue) to her father at the end of the play:

—like this is gonna totally weird you out, but — I had to appear to you like this 'cause — in a couple of hours you're gonna hear that — don't freak out — that I passed myself on and — like — I didn't want you to get too down about it so I thought I'd come and tell you myself that — it's not at all a bad thing. It's quite nice if you just give in to it. You know the feeling when you're falling asleep and ya jump awake 'cause you dreamt you slipped on a stair? Well it's like if you stayed in the slip — if you dove right down into it and held your breath till you came out the other end. I'm in the holding your breath part right now, so I'm not sure what's on the other end, but I feel like I'm so big I'd barely fit into Kirk Community Centre (Thompson 106).

Although reluctantly at first, Pony, like Jehanne, embodies the Great Mother archetype in embracing her death (the death of Kore) and celebrating her rebirth (the emergence of Persephone). In one form or another, all characters discussed here are analogous to Persephone, who has lost the power of innocence, but acquired one greater, the empowerment of self. Edith Hamilton comments on the goddess' revolutionized power:

But all the while Persephone knew how brief that beauty was; fruits, flowers, leaves, all the fair growth of the earth, must end with the coming of the cold and pass like herself into the power of death. After the lord of the dark world below carried her away she was never again the gay young creature who had played in the flowery meadow without a thought of care or trouble. She did indeed rise from the dead every spring, but she brought with her the memory of where she had come from; with all her bright beauty there was something strange and awesome about her (54).

The search for cognisance of the archetypal feminine is often a long and difficult process. As with Blanche and Pony, women often reject their inner desires because of their fear to surrender to the feminine unconscious. Woodman notes that femininity, biologically and psychically, is by nature receptive, and further suggests that until women learn to overcome their fears and understand the nature of active receptivity and its indispensability to creativity work and relationships, they belittle their own womanhood (130). Perhaps Pony expresses this fear best:

No. No I'm not okay and I don't think I'm okay in the least I think I blew a fuse, you know? I blew a fuse on account of I'm scared! I'm scared 'cause the old me is getting killed off by the new me, that hatched after we— (Thompson 78).

Reluctance aside, once the initial fire has been kindled it is almost impossible to extinguish the archetypal change. Whether women choose to embrace it or fear it is inconsequential as the inception begins independent of our own volition.

The search for feminine soul requires us to seek a source that runs deeper than our personal Motherline stories, deeper even than our ancestral, cultural roots — that takes us down to our primordial origins in the Great Mother. This is at once the easiest and the hardest part of the journey. For the Great Mother is all about us, always with us; her nature is expressed in our female bodies, the food-yielding earth, and our myth-making cultures. We live in her embrace and she lives through us. She bears us, feeds us, and buries us. Our Motherline stories are manifestations of her life force. Yet we have lost our orientation to her. She cycles through our bodies, bleeding and passionate, fecund and rageful. We are born of her, we become her, we give birth to her so that she may carry on the life cycle. Yet, consciously, we do not know her in ourselves. She confronts us with the beginning and the ending of our lives; yet we deny her (Lowinsky 179).

While the Great Mother may exist in a profusion of incarnations in our daily lives, Lowinsky's analysis begs the question: Why do we fear

and deny her? One explanation certainly has its roots in the fact that we live in a society which has been largely indoctrinated by an uncontested canon of male ideology and patriarchal dogma which places little value on the pursuit of feminine self-understanding:

We have lost our containers; chaos threatens. Without rituals to make a firm demarcation between the profane and the sacred, between what is us and what is not us, we tend to identify with archetypal patterns of being—hero, Father, Mother, etc. We forget that we are individual human beings; we allow ourselves to be inflated by the power of the unconscious and usurp it for our own. And we do this not knowing what we do and that we do it. Liberated from the “superstitious” belief in gods and demons, we claim for ourselves the power once attributed to them. We do not realize we have usurped or stolen it. How then do we explain our anxiety and dissatisfaction? Power makes us fearful; lack of it make us anxious. few are satisfied with what they have. Despite our so-called liberation from gods and demons, few can live without them. Their absence makes nothing better. It may even make things worse (Woodman 19-20).

This being the case, it stands to reason that once women are introduced to the archetypal feminine either consciously or subconsciously, they are better able to confront cultural misogyny through self-empowerment. Moreover, the incorporation of feminine archetypal imagery into theatrical works may be interpreted as a powerful, positive force for the transference of feminine energy, reflective of the age-old maxim: Knowledge is power.

This type of empowerment is best illustrated in *Medusa Rising*, both in the title itself and in the healing circle formed at the end of the play. The importance of Medusa’s name<sup>5</sup> in the play’s title is best explained by Rachel:

Medusa, destroyer aspect of the triple goddess of Libya  
 Medusa: moonblood of us all/symbol of divine wisdom  
 creator and destroyer of life:  
 our first mother betrayed, furious and angry (Butler 4).

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<sup>5</sup>Though Greek mythology made Medusa the terrible Gorgon whose look turned men to stone, she was actually the serpent-goddess of the Libyan Amazons, who represented female wisdom. A triple goddess, like Aphrodite, she was better known as the Destroyer and Creator. Her triptych was made up of the past/present/future, and she was seen as the mother of all gods. Medusa had magic blood that could create and destroy life, thus she represented women’s periodicity. Connected with the moon, it was said that she was, “All that has been, that is, and that will be.” This description of her was so famous that the Christians later copied it on behalf of Jehovah (Walker 1983, 629).



A further example of empowerment is found in the healing circle. Seven friends arrange to celebrate a birthday with a healing ritual in which each woman shares her own story of resistance. By accessing painful moments in their past, they reconnect with lost images of their Motherlines and create new, positive icons of woman-centred power and knowledge. In their ritual they use a sacred melon as a "talking stick" or "conch" to guide the discussion. The significance of the melon, beyond the fact that it is representative of the moon, lies both with its shape and its essence. Along with its obvious physical connection to women's bodies (illustrative of a woman's breasts, belly, buttocks and roundness), the melon is representative of the Cosmic Egg, the archetypal image of the Great Mother. Walker notes that, "It used to be a common idea that the primeval universe —of the Great Mother who created it— took the form of an egg" (1988, 5).

By its very nature the iconography of the melon evokes the archetype of the Great Mother. It further symbolizes the souls of all women, who share the same archetypal beginning. Round fruit symbolism (melons, apples, oranges and peaches) is common to myth and female archetypes and is generally representative of women's genitalia and fecundity (Walker 1988, 477-490). Its shape, colour, and seeded-centre are womb-like representations of women's physical ability to bear children. In this context the fruit also denotes the power and transference of energy among the characters. Just as Kore eats of the pomegranate before becoming Persephone and taking on her new identity, the women of *Medusa Rising* exercise their empowerment by sharing and passing the melon and by calling out to the moon.

To the ancient Greeks the term "*menos*" meant both "moon" and "power." Even if the moon's presence is not as omnipotent as it is in *Medusa Rising*, the moon archetype in its triple aspect (crescent to full to crescent) plays an important role in each of the three plays. Known as the archetypal symbol of the Great Mother, women have sensed their connectedness with the moon since the earliest of the Goddess religions, probably due to the fact that women's menstrual cycle roughly corresponds to the lunar cycle (Hall 4). But beyond the physical connection, the Moon has historically been known as "the eternal Great Mother." More than aligning with women's periodicity, the Moon has always revealed aspects of the feminine experience. Hall examines this phenomenon:

Imagine the new silvery moon crescent as the virgin or the nymph, the full moon as mother pregnant with life, and the old moon as the old crone or withered woman descending into the darkness of death only to rise again. These phases variously became associated with three weird sisters, three fates, or three goddesses who, when seen together, represented

the life span of women from beginning to end. Because of the spiritual promise embodied in the moon's cycle, native women in Africa pray to her, asking, "May our lives be renewed as yours is" (Hall 3).

In *Jessica* the vitality of the moon is felt in the spirit of the Great Mother, healer of all wounds. In *Smoke Damage* she is represented in the voices of the women who died, the souls of the dead. Just as all souls are born of the Moon, they return to her upon their death. In *Jehanne* she is incarnated in her triple aspect as the three saints. In *White Biting Dog* she is realized in Pony's death and rebirth. And in *Sky* she metaphorically appears in Blanche's womb as the mother of birth and death, representing both the potential for life and the site for passing through the threshold only to begin the cycle again.

The revaluation of these ancient images in the body of work by women playwrights discussed here can act as an initiation for both men and women, as it actuates the archetypal feminine within the collective unconscious. By synthesizing this kind of imagery within theatre, a unique art form is created, one that offers the possibility of a "feminine catharsis." Moreover, the feminine catharsis (which is accessible to both sexes) may be invoked whether conscious or accidental. Batya Podos, author of "Feeding the Feminist Psyche Through Ritual Theatre" describes this catharsis:

It works within a framework of symbolic vocabulary that will speak to the subconscious understanding that lies within each one of us. It is through the reintegration of female imagery and symbology into consciousness that catharsis is accomplished... Certain symbols, words, and actions will trigger certain emotional responses, appeal to our mythic senses and unify us in our perceptions and understandings. The goal is to...exhume the ancient memories from the subconscious where they have lain dormant and unrealized. The goal is to remind the audience of what they used to know about their relationship to the world but have forgotten — to remind them of who they used to be. This is the self-knowledge that opens the door of transformation...It is feminine in context in that the transformation through self-revelation and personal experience is based on these ancient images of the female. However, its recognition is by no way limited to women only. It is a shared experience, one that extends itself to the larger shared community of the audience (306-308).

### *Conclusion*

Once both women and men understand the nature of our ancient past, we may want to return to that state of empowerment. Cognizance of the ancient ways can aid in a cultural transformation that will return us to a state of partnership. As Podos points out, theatre which invokes these

powerful images can help us re-attain this archetypal knowledge. For, as the Greeks well understood, plays are created and designed in order to create "moral lessons and provide "catharsis" - a purge or purification of the emotions that would bring on spiritual renewal" (Podos 306). It is through the alliance of the archetypal feminine and theatre that this "feminine catharsis" may be achieved. By reexamining and revitalizing these ancient, matrifocal and Goddess-worshipping cultures, and by creating a female context that provides images and symbols of women's power, our perception of history (as it has been taught under patriarchy) may be challenged and altered to include "her" story (Podos 307):

Once the central myth-making forum of society, theatre arose to identify and map out a culture. And while the theatre at present is debased in our film and video oriented world, it is still the most sentient, living and communal art form. It behooves us to re-create a theatre which by dramatizing the key mythic questions of our own crucial epoch will once again function in an active and meaningful way. Despite the overwhelming obstacles set forth by our patriarchal society, despite the risks inherent in the communal art that is theatre, women playwrights have demonstrated their capacity to pose and examine the imperative questions which are at present essential to our survival. By daring to challenge the "universal" by shaping the world into new unities, women playwrights are redefining culture, and in doing so they are broadening our sense of the range of human possibility (Koenig 19).

By evoking the myths, images and symbols of the ancients, women can utilize not just the theatre, but other art forms that adopt this kind of imagery to help return us to a society that is collectively responsible — not just to one half of its population, but to its diverse cultures, to its children, its parents, its sick and disabled and to the planet, our Mother Earth.

Women must allow themselves time for reflection, gestation and silence. For it is in these times that the voices are the strongest. We must learn to listen to the voices, as much as we need to pass on their wisdom, for they have much to share with us.

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