SWALLOWED BY THE WHITE GODDESS: Exploring Patriarchal Conditioning and the Feminine Myth in Some Cross-Worlds Fantasies for Children

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines patriarchal conditioning and the construction of the feminine myth in some "cross-worlds" fantasies--a subgenre of children's fantasy in which children from the twentieth century are pulled into an alternate world, which usually resembles ancient Britain or Ireland. In these novels, there is a recurring image of a goddess-figure, who appears either as an elusive, ethereal presence or, more often, as a destructive and terrifying force. This goddess-figure tends to correspond most closely with the White Goddess described by Robert Graves. In many cross-worlds fantasies, this very patriarchal construction of the Goddess is superimposed upon the female protagonist, marginalizing and dehumanizing her.

This thesis explores the effect of such patriarchal and mythological conditioning on the presentation of the feminine in cross-worlds fantasies through close readings of four novels. Chapter One considers the definition and fragmentation of the feminine in Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*. Chapter Two examines the image of the Terrible Goddess and the Devouring Mother in *The Marrow of the World* by Ruth Nichols, and *Fire and Hemlock* by Diana Wynne Jones. Chapter Three considers Margaret Mahy's *The Changeover* as a feminist reconfiguration of the

feminine myth.

Progressing through these novels, from the intensely patriarchal image of the White Goddess in *The Owl Service*, to the celebration of feminine strength and sensibilities in *The Changeover*, we can see a gradual shift in the attitude toward, and the presentation of, the feminine, a shift which would seem to reflect the changing consciousness of our culture. In *The Owl Service*--the earliest novel and the only one of the four written by a man--we find a very oppressive image of the White Goddess: supernatural, subhuman, mindless, voiceless and destructive. *The Marrow of the World* presents us with a goddess-figure who is similarly destructive and frightening, but one who is also self-conscious and intelligent. Nevertheless, she remains essentially a stock character, subhuman, with little personality or depth. Although *Fire and Hemlock* is less patriarchal than the previous two novels, the goddess-figure is still presented as a singularly negative presence. Cold, calculating, beautiful, and fatally seductive, she is the Devouring Mother aspect of the White Goddess. Mahy's *The Changeover*, written in a distinctly feminist vein, does not feature the White Goddess as a separate character or villain, but as the latent dark side of every person, male and female. The supernatural feminine, as it appears in this book, corresponds more closely to the benevolent Mother Goddess and Creatress described by "New Age" thinkers. Unlike the female protagonists of the other novels, Laura does not lose her

autonomy, or her sense of self, to the White Goddess. Mahy's novel demonstrates that, although the myth of the White Goddess is not without imaginative or literary value, it is important to become conscious of our own mythological conditioning. We can then transcend myth, reinterpreting, reimagining, and even rewriting it so that it becomes more meaningful and satisfying to everyone, regardless of sex.

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During the past year, after many, many hours spent in the library, in front of the computer screen, and haunting the halls outside various university offices, it gradually dawned on me that an M A. thesis is something rather more than just a long seminar paper It is an event--a BIG event-- and, like all big events, it does not come together without the assistance and effort of a number of people I would therefore like to extend my sincere thanks to the following people: to Colleen Donnelly, English Graduate Secretary, for her endless patience and heroic efforts; to Dr Kim Blank, for his understanding and assistance, to Dr. Margot Wilson-Moore, for her time, effort, and encouragement, to Dr Misao Dean, for her time, effort, and good-humoured patience, even in the face of my anxious pestering; and to Dr Margot Louis, for her encouragement, interest, and detailed criticisms and suggestions Most of all, I would like to thank Professor Judith Terry, who first introduced me to the critical study of children's literature, for her careful editing and criticism of many rough drafts, and for her enthusiasm and unfailing support during the writing and preparation of this thesis

To my FATHER, who introduced me to the
wonderful world of fantasy by reading
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and to my MOTHER, who instilled in me the love
of writing, and then showed me how to do it well

INTRODUCTION

> One of the things that the study of literature should do is to help the student become aware of his own mythological conditioning, especially on the more passive and critically unexamined levels. He is, of course, unlikely to do this as long as the teachers are unconscious victims of the same conditioning.
>
> Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture*

In Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*, three children become caught up in the playing out of ancient Welsh legend--and find themselves the target of a goddess's fury. In Ruth Nichols' *The Marrow of the World*, Philip and his adopted cousin Linda are pulled into another world in which Linda discovers her disturbing relationship with the witch, Ygerna. Polly, the protagonist of Diana Wynne Jones' *Fire and Hemlock*, must match wits and magic with Laurel, an ancient goddess who continues to manipulate people and events in the modern world. Polly must rescue her friend Thomas Lynn from the diabolical Laurel, who perpetuates her own life, and that of her consort, by taking the lives of young men. Laura, of Margaret Mahy's *The*

Changeover, leaves everyday normalcy behind when she enters the realm of the supernatural and becomes a witch in order to save her baby brother from an evil and consuming spirit.

Each of these novels is an example of a popular sub-genre of children's fantasy fiction. This "cross-worlds" fantasy, as I shall call it, blends the twentieth century world of the protagonist with another supernatural world, which tends to be based on the myths and legends of ancient Britain and Ireland.[1] In almost all of these fantasies, a goddess-figure appears, either as an elusive, ethereal presence or, more often, as a terrifying, destructive force. What can we learn from the depictions of these goddesses, and indeed from the fact that they are present at all, about our social consciousness and engrained biases that shape our perceptions of the feminine? Why do goddess-figures (and very specific goddess-figures at that) appear so persistently in cross-worlds fantasy?

Another pattern is also very common in those novels involving a female protagonist, or secondary character, the heroine almost always becomes associated and aligned with the goddess-figure to the point of merging with the Supernatural Feminine, and becoming another facet of the goddess. This intriguing phenomenon raises another barrage of questions.

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[1] Pat O'Shea's *The Hounds of the Morrigan*, Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and *The Moon of Gomrath*, Nancy Bond's *A String in the Harp* and Susan Cooper's *The Dark is Rising* sequence are just a few more examples of the many popular novels in this genre.

What repercussions does this have on the child reader, particularly on the female child reader? Are any patriarchal biases being reinforced? If so, what are they? Does association with the supernatural and goddess-figures empower or marginalize the female characters of these novels? How does the presence of two, apparently contradictory, realities (the supernatural world versus the "real" world) affect the psyches of the female characters? How are they portrayed as dealing with their split realities, and how, if at all, does this reflect the actual situation of girls and women in Western society? This paper will attempt to address some of these questions through the analysis of four cross-worlds fantasies. Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*, Ruth Nichols' *The Marrow of the World*, Diana Wynne Jones' *Fire and Hemlock* and Margaret Mahy's *The Changeover*.

Although this paper does not purport to be an exhaustive study on the effect of patriarchal discourse and myth on children's fantasy from pre-feminist days to today, the movement from the very patriarchal mind-set of *The Owl Service* to the very feminist orientation of *The Changeover* does seem to reflect changing cultural ideals, and Western society's gradual development of a new feminist consciousness. This paper will look closely at these four novels with the intent of raising some questions and, hopefully, a new awareness, about the effect of myth and patriarchal conditioning on the presentation of the feminine in children's cross-worlds

fantasy.

In Defense of Children's Literature and Feminist Criticism

> I have often wondered why literary theorists haven't yet realized that the best demonstration of all they say when they talk about phenomenology or structuralism or deconstruction or any other critical approach can be most easily demonstrated in children's literature. The converse of which is to wonder why those of us who attend to children's literature are, or have been, so slow in drawing the two together ourselves.
>
> Aidan Chambers, *Booktalk*.

Perhaps one of the reasons why children's literature and literary theory have been slow in coming together is because both are regarded with something akin to suspicion by the conventional academic world. Children's literature--casually referred to as "kid-lit" by students--is typically viewed as the easy elective, a "sub-literature" incapable of withstanding any serious academic analysis (Slemon and Wallace 7). Critical theory, on the other hand, is often accused of fostering intellectual snobbery, of being overly academic and pedantic to the point of alienating the reader entirely from the text. They do indeed, at first glance, appear to be an odd couple.

Recent study and intellectual exploration, however, has

revealed children's literature to be anything but simple. Instead, it provides us with a window through which we can catch a singularly insightful glimpse of ourselves, our culture, the child as concept and construct, and even the workings of our unconscious, from a new and unique perspective. Critical theory provides us with a tool to open that window, and allows us to enter the text more fully.

Although the word "criticism" carries with it some rather negative connotations, it in fact involves the *positive* exercise of commenting on a text, and discovering new ways of reading and understanding it (Hunt 4). With regards to children's literature, it has been suggested that literary theory allows people to "unpack an overly formalized approach to the study of books for children" (Slemon and Wallace 8). Critical theory is about reading practices: how they work, how they differ, and how they affect the reader's relationship with the text.

Unfortunately, there are still those who rigorously resist the application of critical theory to children's literature, either because they feel it is simply a waste of time, or because they fear that the "innocence" of children's literature will somehow become tainted. Feminist theory is an approach that seems to be particularly unwelcome to those who resist critical analysis of children's literature. To take a slightly less-than-literary example, no one wants to hear that Walt Disney's "The Little Mermaid" is a gargantuan,

anti-feminist *faux pas*. The movie remains enormously popular and the attitude is: the children love it and isn't that all that really matters? Those who dare to criticize are dismissed with a roll of the eyes and an incredulous shake of the head: "O God--she's on another *feminist* kick!"

Others are openly hostile towards any attempt to inject a feminist perspective into children's literature, as is Kevin McCabe in his article, "Neopaganism, feminism, and children's literature". McCabe expresses "alarm at the spread of...matriarchal feminism in contemporary children's literature" and is "disturbed" by these "rather dubious theories" (40). He goes on to link feminism with neopaganism, homosexuality, the occult and even Satanism, his tone ominous and moralistic, as if feminism in children's literature must inevitably beckon innocent youngsters down these apparently equally dark and destructive avenues (43-4).

Such a view is both narrow and unfortunate, for it greatly restricts one's exploration of a text. Feminist theory expands upon a text, making it fuller and richer by opening up new avenues for interpretation and criticism. Elaine Showalter in her article, "Feminist criticism in the wilderness," defines feminist theory simply as a "mode of interpretation" (245). She goes on to quote theorist Annette Kolodny who writes:

> All the feminist is asserting, then, is her own equivalent right to liberate new (and perhaps different) significances from these same texts; and at the same time, her right to choose which

> features of a text she takes as relevant, because she is, after all, asking new and different questions of it (246)

Feminist theory and children's literature are, in fact, even more compatible than one might initially expect, for both concern the perspective of an "Other." Woman is defined by our society as "other than man", the child stands as "other" to the adult. We could even extend this idea further to say that children's literature is seen as "other" in relation to the traditional literary canon, while feminist theory is "other" in the field of conventional literary criticism.

This notion of the "Other" also plays a particularly important role in fantasy fiction for children, where there is almost always a conflict between the real world and an "other" world. The question of identity and self becomes tantamount as the child must decide to which world she or he belongs. Cross-worlds fantasies become a highly appropriate medium for exploring the concept of "otherness" and its effect on the human psyche: the two worlds become a metaphor for the protagonist's divided self as she is pulled between the conflicting self-images and expectations imposed upon her by patriarchal society.

Myth and Fantasy: reflections of the "current moral order"

In the cross-worlds fantasies we shall be discussing, myth plays a central role. Consequently, it is worthwhile to

consider briefly some of the implications and functions of myth in literature. Joseph Campbell believed that one of the functions of myth was "the sociological function of educating the person into his society" (Sullivan 126). Stephen Donaldson extends this thought to include modern fantasy novels which he feels "clarify for the reader the ideals on which society believes itself to be based" (126). He goes on to note that, in this way, fantasies "support the current moral order" (Donaldson quoted in Sullivan 126). If this is so, then perhaps it is not surprising that most of these cross-world fantasies for children, upon scrutiny, reveal themselves to be written in a distinctly patriarchal vein. Re-shaped and moulded through centuries of retellings and transcriptions, the myths we draw on for our fantasies have been inscribed, and in some cases *re*inscribed, with the precepts and biases of Western culture, and the values and societal maxims they illustrate are patriarchal.

Further to this, literary critic Maggie Humm feels that the written word is always political to the extent that it cannot help but reflect our perceptions of society, particularly where issues of gender are concerned:

> Literature and criticism are ideological, she argues, "since writing manipulates gender for symbolic purposes" and style is an articulation of ideology. (quoted in Guerin 184)

In her essay, "Why are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" Ursula Le Guin writes, "The use of imaginative fiction is to deepen your understanding of your world, and your fellow men, and your own

feelings, and your destiny" (Le Guin 43). Towards the end of her essay, Le Guin makes the shrewd observation that "fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that." (44). In short, fantasy acts as a mirror, providing us with a reflection, albeit an embellished one, of our own culture and values. The sentiments expressed by Campbell, Donaldson, Humm and Le Guin suggest that fantasy holds a particular sway over its readers, and that both fantasy, and our response to it, have much to say about our perceived roles and identities.

The Goddess and the Feminine Myth

As mentioned earlier, one pattern which emerges with regard to female characterization is the appearance of a goddess-figure and the female protagonist's subsequent identification with her. The idea of a Great Mother Goddess has gained a certain popularity in recent years. The modern movement of Goddess-worship coincided roughly with the rise of feminism, and it seems plausible that it is, in part, a reaction against main-stream, male-dominated religion (Larrington 411). Speculating about the appeal Arthurian/Celtic fantasy has for women, Nickianne Moody, a critic of fantasy and science fiction, writes:

> With the growth of feminist thought, particularly in the United States, has come the rejection of patriarchal iconography and this has

> included aspects of Christianity. This in turn has led to the rediscovery of earlier pagan systems of worship or awareness, characterised as New Age. The Irish concept of the other world was a land of women. .The principle deity that concerned itself with society was the mother goddess in her three aspects. There is historical evidence to suggest that in the brief period between Roman and Christian rule in Britain a matrilineal society existed, if not a matriarchal one. (193)

Adherents of today's "New Age" schools of thought tend to view the Goddess as a nurturing, all-embracing being, "the wise Creatress of the Universe and all life and civilization" (Stone xxv). There is a focus on our interdependence and interconnectedness with the earth, and with each other (*Goddess Remembered*, videocassette). In this way, the idea of a Great Goddess is extremely appealing to many as an emblem of the resurgence and celebration of feminine power, and a new feminine spirituality.

However, this is not the predominant image of the Goddess/Primordial Feminine that inhabits the sociological and imaginative mythology of Western society. As Northrop Frye writes:

> The imagination, as it reflects on this world, sees it as a world of violence and cunning. .The typical agent of cunning is a woman, whose main instrument of will is her bed ..Ares and Eros are functionaries of Venus, whose alternative form is Diana of the triple will, the white goddess who always kills, and whose rebirth is only for herself. (183)

Over many centuries, patriarchal myth and superstition cultivated a view of the Divine Feminine very different from the benevolent Creatress of the Universe. Some writers, like

Merlin Stone and Mary Condren, claim that there occurred a "patriarchal re-imaging of the Goddess as a wanton depraved figure" (Stone, back cover). They suggest that, long ago, as patriarchy struggled to assert its dominance, it undermined the existing matrilineal society by discrediting its reigning deity, the Goddess, and characterizing her as a villain, the goddess of death and destruction (Condren 43). In place of the benevolent Earth Mother, there appeared another version of the Primordial Feminine: silent, terrible, lustful, unpredictable, deceitful and fatally beautiful. This image of the Goddess appears throughout the traditional literary canon and was reinforced in such works as Frazer's *The Golden Bough*[2] and, later, Robert Graves' tremendously influential (though intensely patriarchal) work, *The White Goddess*.

In her book *The Serpent and the Goddess*, Mary Condren documents the erosion of the Great Mother in Celtic myth and legend as invading patriarchal warrior cultures began to displace the matriarchal agricultural societies of ancient Ireland. She cites for example the instigation of the festival of *Samhain* by the new warrior culture:

> Significantly, one of the features of the gathering would be the burning of the *torc-tened* (fire-boar) or *torc-cailie* (forest-boar). The boar was one of the most sacred symbols of the Goddess, and a recent explanation of why the fire was lit at *Samhain* is "to burn the witches" (29)

Condren also makes the point that patriarchy frequently

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[2] Published in twelve volumes between the years 1890 and 1915.

demoted and depopularized the Goddess by turning her into a conniving and destructive war-goddess even though more ancient tales can be found describing her as non-violent, and extremely just (31). The theories of scholars like Stone and Condren are useful in that they suggest some hypotheses as to how some of the current myths and attitudes toward the Primordial Feminine/Goddess developed. Condren, for example, postulates on the shift from a nature- and body-oriented feminine consciousness to the logic-dominated male consciousness.

> Macha's transition from Mother Goddess to war goddess reflects the new concerns of patriarchal consciousness. We saw how the Triple Goddess often appears in the abstract form of a Triple Spiral. The triple male gods, in contrast, are usually depicted as three-faced heads. The head, rather than the body was now the location of creativity.. The cult of the warrior and the hero would replace that of female creativity, with widescale repercussions for the future of humanity. (35-6)

Keeping in mind Stone's and Condren's views that patriarchy played a significant role in reshaping and redefining the character of the Goddess, I submit the following proposition: that within the context of fantasy literature, the White Goddess, described by Graves as beautiful yet also as "that ancient power of fright and lust--the female spider or queen-bee whose embrace is death" (24), is a patriarchal construction. When this particular construction of the Goddess appears in children's fantasy, superimposed upon the heroines of the novels, it becomes oppressive, obscuring the female

characters' humanity and reducing them to two-dimensional stereotypes of the supernatural feminine. This occurs, for example, in Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*. Interestingly, in the three novels by women authors--*The Marrow of the World, Fire and Hemlock*, and the *Changeover*--the goddess-figures tend to be more complicated and diverse. Within the goddess-figures created by Jones and Mahy in particular, it is possible to discern tensions between the negative power of the White Goddess and the positive power of the "New Age" Goddess. However, the White Goddess, coupled with another, closely related patriarchal construction--the *feminine myth*--still tends to dominate the structure and symbology of popular fantasy, and of children's cross-worlds fantasy in particular.

In her book, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir shows how patriarchy has created an elaborate mythology around woman. In her chapter entitled "Myth and Reality," de Beauvoir argues that woman is frequently viewed as an inexplicable essence shrouded in myth and mystery. She writes:

> Of all these myths, none is more firmly anchored in masculine hearts than that of the feminine "mystery." It has numerous advantages. And first of all, it permits an easy explanation of all that appears inexplicable; the man who "does not understand" a woman is happy to substitute an objective resistance for a subjective deficiency of mind; instead of admitting his ignorance, he perceives the presence of a "mystery" outside of himself, an alibi, indeed, that flatters laziness and vanity at once. (262-3)

This is a commonly held attitude. How often on prime-time

television, for example, do we hear male characters exclaim, "Women! I'll *never* understand them!" It is the belief (not to mention a favourite joke) of popular culture that there is an element of the inexplicable about all women. As in the plots of our cross-world fantasies, in which the unknowable, inexplicable White Goddess is superimposed on the female characters, women in everyday society are also obscured by the unwanted mantle of the feminine myth.

One of the challenges of feminist criticism has been to recognize such patriarchally-planted myths in our subconscious, to understand how they affect our perceptions of the world, and to make a conscious effort to separate myth from reality. This is not an easy task for, as critic Pam Morris points out, the majority of us have absorbed the ideology of patriarchy and have assumed its way of seeing, to the point where "woman's subordination is naturalized, [and] made to seem just the way things are" (5). Children's literature, with its tendency towards caution and conventionalism, as well as its need for acceptance and approval, from parents as well as in the critical arena, too frequently remains within the familiar confines of patriarchy, wrapping itself in the colourful but potentially strangling scarves of myth and the feminine mystery.

CHAPTER I

A Self of One's Own: Definition and Fragmentation in *The Owl Service*

> Kept on the fringe of the world, woman cannot be objectively defined through this world, and her mystery contains nothing but emptiness.
>
> Simone de Beauvoir,
> *The Second Sex*

Few books illustrate de Beauvoir's point so clearly as Alan Garner's *The Owl Service*. Borrowing from *The Mabinogi*, Garner builds the framework of the novel around the ancient Welsh tale of Blodeuwedd, a woman who is created out of flowers by a wizard for his son, and later turned into an owl as punishment for betraying that marriage. It is a story of woman defined and redefined, against her will, by the male forces around her. In Garner's modern reenactment of this mythic tragedy, the female characters are similarly denied an essential self, and mysteriously change forms, redefined by their male counterparts until they are resolved, ultimately, into emptiness.

The process begins with all of the female characters in

The Owl Service being defined as mysteries: the mythic, powerful and terrifying presence of Blodeuwedd, the obsessed and possessed Alison, the cranky and inexplicably terrified Nancy with her shadowy past, and the invisible but influential Margaret. During the course of the novel, these women become overlaid with the supernatural--unlike the males (with the possible exception of Huw) who simply find themselves neighbours, and challengers, of an invasive, unwanted feminine power. Femininity becomes synonymous with supernatural; Blodeuwedd, Alison, Nancy and Margaret are pushed to "the fringe of the world," and left to teeter between being human and being *Woman*. *The Owl Service* incorporates a curious blend of feminine power and female helplessness. For Garner, however, woman ultimately degenerates into a fragmented, voiceless self, a diffused, unthinking, and formless--if supernatural--power.

Interestingly, as this paper will later show, this vision of the feminine in *The Owl Service* is very similar to Jacques Lacan's understanding of the "human subject" as described by editors Rose and Mitchell:

> [Lacan's human subject] is not an entity with an identity, but a being created in the fissure of a radical split. The identity that seems to be that of the subject is in fact a mirage arising when the subject forms an image of itself by identifying with others' perception of it ..Lacan's human subject is not a 'divided self' ..that in a different society could be made whole, but a self which is only actually and necessarily created within a split--a being that can only conceptualise itself when it is mirrored back to itself from the position of another's desire. The unconscious where

> unconscious where the subject is not itself, where the 'I' of a dream can be someone else and the object and subject shift and change places, bears perpetual witness to this primordial splitting. (5)

Without the imposition of definition and identity from an external source, the self simply disintegrates. For Garner, however, it is specifically the feminine self which requires a definition from man in order to achieve an identity, and a container for its powers. Blodeuwedd is "a being created in the fissure of a radical split." Her self has been splintered between flowers, wife, lover, and owls, leaving a vacuum that creates a maelstrom of uncontrolled, irrational power. A similar fate threatens Alison, whose identity is also dependent on those around her. Like Lacan's subject, she has no concept of herself apart from the images mirrored back to her from Gwyn, Roger and Margaret. And, because these perceptions are each different, Alison's self also begins to split, making her all the more vulnerable to the annihilating power of Blodeuwedd. Before exploring this idea of the split feminine in greater depth however, it is first necessary to look at Garner's construction of Blodeuwedd as the Goddess and Primordial Feminine, and to see how this construction grows to encompass all of the female characters in the novel.

Feminine power is both symbolized by, and incarnate in the figure of Blodeuwedd. Her inchoate and terrifying presence acts as the fulcrum of the children's actions and

emotions, tipping them from camaraderie to conflict, from excitement to terror. From the beginning, Blodeuwedd is much more than an unhappy ghost of a long-ago legend: she is the Goddess from "old time." Slighted, she is a terrible, unadulterated avenging fury and, unless placated, will destroy all. Garner gleaned much from Robert Graves' *The White Goddess*, which he has called "That most infuriating gold mine of imagery...which I understood with great clarity on the fifth reading" (Garner "Coming to Terms" 29). For example, the imagery surrounding Blodeuwedd's physical description is rich and detailed, and coincides closely with descriptions of the Goddess provided in Graves. At the beginning of Chapter Six, the portrait of Blodeuwedd is revealed behind the pebble-dash wall:

> She was tall. Her long hair fell to her waist, framing in gold her pale and lovely face. Her eyes were blue. She wore a loose gown of white cambric, embroidered with living green stems of broom and meadowsweet, and a wreath of green oak leaves in her hair. (33)

She is, as Alison is prompt to exclaim, beautiful, her identifying features being long blond hair and a pale face. The description is unmistakeably reminiscent of Graves' White Goddess, who is

> a lovely, slender woman with a hooked nose, deathly pale face, lips red as rowan-berries, startling blue eyes and long fair hair. (24)

Graves also quotes this description of the Goddess found in Apuleius's *Golden Ass*:

> First, she had a great abundance of hair, flowing and curling, dispersed and scattered about her divine neck; on the crown of her head she bare many garlands interlaced with flowers . . and round about the whole length of the border of that goodly robe was a crown or garland wreathing unbroken, made with all flowers and fruits . (72)

Graves then goes on to list the many animal forms she was wont to take, including, of course, the owl. Beauty, juxtaposed with a power that is potentially destructive and deadly, becomes an identifying feature of the White Goddess, and is found also in the characters of Ygerna and Laurel, the goddess-figures in *The Marrow of the World* and *Fire and Hemlock* respectively.[3] The physical description of the Goddess/Blodeuwedd becomes especially significant when we realize that it also matches the description of Alison.

Further comparison of Graves' construction of the White Goddess with Blodeuwedd makes it clear that they are essentially the same. Graves considers that all of the many and varied goddesses described in myth are simply different aspects of one great, primordial, all-encompassing Goddess. Blodeuwedd is described as "the Flower-Goddess" (Graves 92); she is also identified as the Love-and-Death Goddess (403). The connection between this aspect of the Goddess and the events in *The Owl Service* is obvious. Ever since Huw's "old time" love has turned to death through jealousy and hate: it

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[3] In Nancy Bond's *A String in the Harp*, Peter is also presented with this juxtaposition of beauty and danger when he encounters the goddess Caridwen: "She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, beautiful in a way that frightened him even as he was drawn to her" (45).

happened to Gronw, it happened to Cousin Bertram, and it threatens to happen to Alison. The catalyst is Blodeuwedd--appropriately the Goddess of Love-and-Death. Further, Graves notes that this aspect of the Goddess is typically associated with goats (403). In Chapter Two of *The Owl Service*, Roger lies down in the grass and pulls meadowsweet over his face (meadowsweet being the flower from which Blodeuwedd was made), but starts to his feet when he hears the ghost-spear pierce the rock beside him:

> There was no one in sight: his heart raced, and he was cold in the heat of the sun. He looked at his hands. The meadowsweet had cut him, lining his palm with red beads. The flowers stank of goat. (12)

Blodeuwedd as the Goddess of Love-and-Death has left her mark: pain and the pungent smell of goat. Garner depicts the Goddess in her destructive, dangerous aspect, thus the meadowsweet cuts Roger (though it is as a result of his own action--here, as throughout the novel, Garner plays on the analogy between Roger and Gronw) and the odour of the flowers is offensive.

Yet another point links the mythic image of the White Goddess, and Blodeuwedd of *The Owl Service*: in addition to identifying her as Muse and the "Mother of All Living," Graves defines the White Goddess as "the ancient power of fright and lust" (24). It is this phrase which describes most closely the figure of Blodeuwedd in Garner's novel. Fear is the dominating mood of this book, and it grows, pressing the characters down in a kind of claustrophobic panic. Lust is

what triggered the ancient murder, and it is lust that perpetuates and repeats the mythic tragedy in modern times. Blodeuwedd is not a person, she does not have a self; she is "an ancient power," she is unchannelled, uncontrolled, irrational emotion, and she is deadly. Understanding the nature of Blodeuwedd in *The Owl Service*, and her relationship to the White Goddess is vital to a feminist critique of the novel, for Blodeuwedd gradually assimilates the other female characters. Within *The Owl Service*, Blodeuwedd *is* the Feminine.

In keeping with the stereotype that women are a channel or, in this case, a "live wire" to the supernatural, Alison is the first to become intuitively aware of Blodeuwedd's presence as she traces the owl from the plate:

> "I saw it as soon as I'd washed the plate," said Alison. "It was obvious."
> "It was?" said Roger. "I'd never have thought it. I like him."
> "Her," said Alison.
> "You can tell? OK. Her. I like her." He tapped the owl's head with the pencil, making the body rock on its perch. "Hello there!"
> "Don't do that," said Alison.
> "What?"
> "Don't touch her."
> "Are you all right?"
> "Give me the pencil. I must make some more," said Alison. (15-16)

Alison's assertion of the owl's gender is chilling in its clipped, unexplained certainty, as is her ominous warning to Roger. "Don't touch her." An alliance has been created between the Goddess-Blodeuwedd and Alison, identifying our young, twentieth-century heroine with the supernatural and

with the ancient, patriarchal archetype of the primordial feminine. What is important to note, however, is that this alliance, this compulsion of Alison's to both identify and defend "*her*," is neither rational nor conscious.[4] This becomes the pattern of female action throughout the book. In addition to this, the more the Goddess image becomes superimposed upon Alison, the more her humanity and self fade, threatening to vanish like the pattern from the plates.

Since Garner (and myth) places considerable importance on the physical beauty of the Goddess, it is significant that Alison is the only other character who receives any sort of physical description in *The Owl Service*. She is the stereotypical beauty of western culture: blond, blue-eyed, and pale. This, of course, is deliberate, making the assimilation of Alison into Blodeuwedd both easier and obvious. Because she is so strongly identified with Blodeuwedd, Alison becomes distanced more quickly from the normal, natural twentieth-century world than do Gwyn and Roger. Indeed, Gwyn and Roger are never entirely out of touch with the natural, "real" world, nor do they ever lose their humanity. Alison does both.

Apart from her compulsion to trace the plates, the first example of Alison as a supernatural force occurs in Chapter

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[4]A parallel may be drawn between Alison's situation and Susan's in Garner's *The Moon of Gomrath*--Susan's behaviour in chapter nine is equally compulsive when she builds the fire that wakes the old magic.

Four, when her frustration with Nancy sends a plate flying through the air of the next room. When Gwyn defends Alison from the enraged Nancy by taking the blame himself, Alison returns an oddly passive and innocuous response:

> "Thanks, Gwyn," said Alison. Gwyn looked at her. "I couldn't help it," she said. (26)

Alison accepts as a matter of fact that she suddenly possesses the peculiar skill of a poltergeist, as does Gwyn. There is no surprise, just an unquestioning acceptance of this new quirk in her nature. The implication seems to be that it is natural for a woman to be supernatural. "I couldn't help it" says Alison. Here again we have what becomes a recurring and dominating theme: the feminine unleashed, a dangerous power beyond the control of rational thought. Further to this, however, is the mindlessness associated with the feminine. *Why* could she not help it? Why do Gwyn and Roger let this bizarre incident pass without question? What is significant here is not only that Alison does not understand the forces at work within her, but that she makes absolutely no attempt to understand them. This is in contrast to the reactions of the male protagonists. Gwyn puzzles over the story in *The Mabinogi* and over the history of the valley, trying to connect the two, Roger uses his knowledge of photography to try to identify a mysterious figure in one of his pictures. In other cross-world fantasies as well, such as in Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* and William Mayne's *Earthfasts*, the main male characters turn to scientific experimentation and

deduction to try to explain supernatural happenings. That such a process does not seem to occur to Alison reinforces her connection with the mindless mysteriousness of the White Goddess.

Alison's most frightening withdrawal from humanity into the visage of the Goddess occurs at the end of Chapter Seven and the beginning of Eight. Having made plans that Alison should hide the plates from Nancy, Gwyn and Roger return to the house to find Alison reading in the yard:

> "Hi, Ali." said Roger. "Did you manage to stash the plates OK?"
>
> Alison's eyes were hidden behind the black discs of her sunglasses.
>
> "What plates?" she said. (41)

And so concludes Chapter Seven. The reader is jerked from casual normalcy into the by-now-unpredictable and menacing presence of the feminine. The "black discs" of Alison's sunglasses create a particularly unsettling image. Disturbingly reminiscent of an owl's eyes, they negate her humanity by masking any expression or emotion in her eyes; indeed the blank darkness of the lenses would seem to reflect the replacement of Alison's individuality by the dark, unformulated force of the Goddess.[5]

In the ensuing confrontation--Alison coldly insisting she knows nothing about any such plates, and the boys urging her

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[5] Susan in *The Moon of Gomrath* also becomes at one point inhuman and amorphous--in chapter five her hand feels like a hoof and then "a formless shadow" seems to rise from the place where she had been.

to quit playing games--Gwyn loses his temper and kicks the book from Alison's hand. It is at this point that the Goddess-Blodeuwedd is nakedly displayed in the figure of Alison.

> No one moved. There was silence. Then, "You shouldn't have done that," Alison said.
>
> "You shouldn't have done that." Her knuckles were white on the edge of the deck chair. Her neck thrust forward. "You shouldn't have done that."
>
> Gwyn could see himself reflected in her sunglasses, and at the corner of the lens something fluttered like a wounded bird. He turned his head. It was the book. It came for him through the air. Its pages rattled, and disintegrated, but still came for him, like a tail after the red binding. Gwyn dropped the flour bags and protected his face as the book swarmed at him.
>
> "No!" he shouted. (42)

Alison is completely dehumanized. Garner, always a master of atmosphere, creates a feeling of spine-chilling menace with Alison's clenched and venomous refrain: "You shouldn't have done that." It is an innocuous phrase, similar to Alison's earlier remark, "I couldn't help it." Again, there is no hint of *why* Gwyn shouldn't do that. Instead, female hysteria climaxes in an eruption of uncontrolled, destructive power. She is the Goddess.

Fragmentation is an image that recurs again and again throughout the novel: shattered plates, crumbling walls, torn books, broken families. In addition to portraying the feminine as irrational, supernatural, and other-than-human, *The Owl Service* depicts the feminine as fragmented. Again and again the female characters are redefined until there is a schizophrenic splitting of the self that ultimately silences

and annihilates. Blodeuwedd was flowers until Gwydion confiscated her essential nature, redefining her as wife for a man she had never met. When she rejected this definition of herself to become the lover of Gronw, her identity was again wrenched away from her as punishment, and she was reshaped into not an owl, but owl*s*--plural. Huw tells Gwyn: "But they made her owls and she went hunting" (74). It is a curious phrase and an even more curious image: one being, splintered and separated from herself. The image is reinforced by all the owls Alison is compelled to trace, and by the sound of not one, but a great many owls rustling and fluttering in the attic, the hen hut, the shed.

Alison drifts between her own identity and the innumerable, furious fragments of Blodeuwedd. Garner creates a striking image of this in Chapter Fifteen when Alison sees a vision of Blodeuwedd in the water, yet mistakes it for her own reflection:

> she saw herself mirrored among the haloes that the sun made on the water. The brightness destroyed the image of the house so that all she saw was her face.
>
> I'm up here and down there, thought Alison. Which is me? (83)

The answer, of course, is both. The significance of the image, however, becomes especially poignant when Gwyn comes along and, by dipping his hand in the water, destroys the image which breaks apart and ripples across the tank--in fragments.

In the next chapter when Gwyn explains to Alison that the

laws of physics prevent the possibility that she had seen her own reflection from the window, and that it must have been Blodeuwedd (a comic blend of scientific and superstitious thinking!), Alison replies. "but I could tell it was me--my colour of hair, and face, and--well it just was" (96). Although Gwyn scoffs at this a second time, there remains the knowledge that most people instinctively recognize their own reflection. Alison did indeed see herself in the face of Blodeuwedd; "I'm up here and down there, thought Alison," experiencing a Garnerian splitting of self.

Alison is further torn between the differing definitions and expectations imposed on her by Gwyn and her own mother, the mysterious Margaret. The fact that Margaret has remained an invisible, silent but very influential force aligns her very closely with Blodeuwedd. Like the Goddess, she has no dialogue and never makes a personal appearance. Nevertheless, the other characters' constant deferrals and submissiveness to her suggest a powerful, even frightening personage (not unlike Laurel in *Fire and Hemlock*). Her invisibility, coupled with her knowledge of virtually all the children's actions, creates a feeling of omniscience, and Alison's efforts not to displease Margaret border on panic:

> "Gwyn, please don't fool about. Oh, you know we musn't see each other."
>
> "Why not? You in quarantine for smallpox, are you?"
>
> "You know Mummy says I musn't talk to you."
>
> Gwyn gazed at the crags, and slowly followed them to the next hillside, and down to the valley, to the mountain on the other side of the valley,

> and straight up to the sky.
> "I can't see her," he said.
> "Gwyn," said Alison, "I'm going home."
> "Right," said Gwyn, "I'll come with you."
> "No!"
> "Why not?"
> "Don't! Please! What do you want?" (90)

Yet Margaret does see them despite Gwyn's clownish, exaggerated search for her. The implication is that Margaret is indeed omniscient, and she too begins to merge with the image of the Goddess.

After several chapters of avoiding Gwyn in an effort to stay her mother's wrath, Alison is cornered by him.

> "Tomorrow, Alison. Please. Can't you see? You must."
> "Stop it," said Alison. "Stop it, stop it! Stop tearing me between you. You and Mummy! You go on till I don't know who I am, what I'm doing. Of course I can see! Now. But then she starts, and what she says is right, then." (118)

Alison's distress and confusion as she searches for an identity typify what most adolescents, male and female, experience as they hang in limbo between their childish and adult selves. It makes sense that cultural conditioning and influences would have an added power over the vulnerable adolescent psyche, a power that is paralleled in this case by the White Goddess (who is, significantly, a patriarchal, cultural construction). Margaret, like Blodeuwedd, or perhaps *as* Blodeuwedd, threatens to pull apart Alison's identity and assimilate her. Alison knows her identity is not her own but is not strong enough to define herself, as is illustrated by her response to Gwyn's questioning:

> "What are you wanting to do when you leave school, Alison?"
> "Mummy wants me to go abroad for a year."
> "But what do you want to do?"
> "I've not thought I expect I'll go abroad "
> "Then what? Sit at home and arrange flowers for Mummy?"
> "Probably " (91)

Gwyn's dig about arranging *flowers* for Mummy reminds us that, of course, Blodeuwedd is also the Goddess of Flowers, drawing another subtle parallel between Margaret and the Goddess. Both are invisible yet powerful, feared by Alison, and vying for control of her identity. Alison, as formless and fragmented as Blodeuwedd, has no real thought as to who she is or what she will do, instead, she accepts definition from outside herself. Alison-the-twentieth-century-child does not have the strength of Alison-Blodeuwedd-Goddess. She responds with meek, listless passivity. Anger, power and strength are only hers during those temporary periods when she becomes a channel for the supernatural. To be human and female is to be powerless, to be powerful and female is to be inhuman.

> "I only want you to be yourself," said Gwyn.
> "And what's that?" said Alison. "What you make me? I'm one person with Mummy, and another with you. I can't argue: you twist everything I say round to what you want. Is that fair?" (118)

Alison's query--is she what Gwyn makes her--again draws the parallel between Alison and Blodeuwedd, and Gwyn and Gwydion. Alison *is* made: she must be either patriarchy's definition of an upper-middle-class society girl, or Gwyn's definition of a heroine and potential lover..or collapse into the abyss of formless, furious power that is Blodeuwedd. Her other

complaint to Gwyn, "you twist everything I say round to what you want," in addition to reiterating the mindlessness of the feminine through the image of a girl apparently unable to either think, speak or argue for herself, leads us to another important theme in Garner's *Owl Service*: the muting, silencing and eventual exiling of the feminine.

Blodeuwedd has no voice, and the only sounds she can make are muffled and indistinct· the scratching of claws deep in the attic, a rustling in the back of the stables, and in the hen hut: " a fluttering in the darkness, like wings, but dry and hard as a rattlesnake" (67). She is a presence and a power, but a power that remains barely contained, and unable to articulate itself.

Gwyn's mother, Nancy, the previous generation's vessel for, and incarnation of Blodeuwedd, is also locked into definitions that constrict any expression of self. Defined by her class status, her race, her lack of education, and the image Gwyn ruthlessly cultivates of her as a "miserable cow" (111), neither we as readers, nor the other characters in the novel, are permitted to take anything Nancy says seriously or with any kind of sympathy. Although her own story is only hinted at, it is obviously a tragic one, yet Nancy is so ensconced in bitterness and fear that her grammatically incorrect and awkward speeches come out as little more than

garbled, ill-tempered griping[6]:

> "Nobody seen what I done with that key. Nobody. You is it? Soft soaping me, and then running to them with your tales?"
> "No, Mam! What key?"
> "After all I done for you. Running to them with your tales. Think you're one of them now, don't you? Know it all, don't you? Right my lad. Right. You know where you're starting next month. That's you finished, boy!" (110)

Nancy frequently becomes virtually inarticulate with rage, as when she becomes the target of Alison's plate-throwing poltergeist:

> "Oh!" she shouted. "Oh! Throwing plates now are you? That's it! That's it! That's it, Miss! That's it!" (26)

Nancy, like Margaret, is a reification of the Terrible Mother aspect of the Goddess, her voicelessness parallels that of Blodeuwedd, as does her power to inflict terrible pain, as Gwyn's tears after Nancy has "finished" him suggest.

Nancy's personal confrontation with Blodeuwedd towards the end of the novel takes place in a clenched, terrified and furious silence. Finally unable to deny the presence of the myth any longer, she enters the stables where all of Alison's paper owls have congregated before the stuffed bird:

> The doorway was blocked by a figure draped in oilskins. Roger jumped back. It was Nancy. She stood there, a groundsheet slung over her, holding a poker in her hand, and her eyes were as grey as the dust.
> "What do you want?" said Roger.
> She did not answer.

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[6] For an interesting analysis of speech and language in *The Owl Service*, see Michael Lockwood's article, "A sense of the spoken: Language in *The Owl Service*."

> "Haven't you any jobs?" said Roger.
> Nancy ran forward and swung the poker at the case. The glass exploded, and the eagle owl flew up as a cloud of sawdust and feathers, and Nancy lashed about her at the paper models which winged in the air around the leaping woman and the dead bird that filled the room and stuck to her wet clothing and even to her skin and to her hair . . .She said nothing. The sounds in the room were her breathing, the whip of the poker, her feet on wood and glass. (140)

This is perhaps one of the strongest, most poignant scenes in the book. Nancy silently, desperately, futilely striking at feathers and sawdust in an effort to break the relentless cycle and her own connection with it. However, by acknowledging the power's presence, she only reawakens the link between it and herself. From this point on, as Nancy seeks to escape the coming maelstrom, her speech becomes even more cursory and monosyllabic, often limited to single word answers and commands to Gwyn. When she can find no transportation out of the valley, she sets out on foot in the storm to walk the pass, leaving Gwyn shouting after her:

> "Mam!"
> She turned but did not stop. She walked backwards up the road, shouting, and the rain washed the air clean of her words and dissolved her haunted face, broke the dark line of her into webs that left no stain, and Gwyn watched for awhile the unmarked place where she had been, then climbed over the gate. (147)

It is a chilling image of annihilation. Her mouth is working, yet the words can no longer be heard. Nancy, portrayed by Garner as an annoying shrew of grating and discordant speech, is reclaimed by the supernatural and exiled from humanity. The last time we see her, she is driven into the mountains,

into the storm, into the night and out of the world. She is silenced, dissolved into emptiness.

Nancy's fate is shared by both Blodeuwedd and Alison. For Garner, it is part of the pattern, the inevitable resolution to uncontrolled feminine power. His Goddess is voiceless, and the threat she poses is like that of an animal, wild with fear and fury to the point where it lashes out blindly; an animal that must either be subdued and harnessed, or else destroyed. The local people brace themselves resignedly for her coming much as they would for an impending storm: "'We must bear it,' said Mrs. Richards. 'There's no escaping, is there? Aberystwyth isn't far enough.'" (41).

Huw's attitude towards Blodeuwedd is also one of mixed sympathy and fear--again, such as one would feel for an animal wild with pain and distress. As Huw observes, Blodeuwedd's distress "is making her cruel, as the rose is growing thorns" (55), and later: "She is terrible in her loneliness and pain" (137).

Alison recedes into Blodeuwedd until she too is voiceless and unconscious as the novel approaches its climax and its conclusion. Roger's murmured attentions to Alison, as he tries to defuse the wrath of Blodeuwedd, are exactly the sort one would give to a frightened animal:

> "She's not owls. She's flowers. Flowers. Flowers, Ali." He stroked her forehead..."Flowers, Ali. Quietly now. Flowers. Flowers. Flowers. Gentle Flowers...Flowers. Flowers. That's the way." The marks paled on her skin, and the tightness went from her face as she breathed to the measure of his

hand on her brow (155)

He soothes her with his voice, and strokes her until the fear and power dissipate. At the end of the novel, Alison, tamed into a new definition of herself, is left looking at her new master...in silence.

Garner's vision of the feminine in *The Owl Service* is clear and consistent. Without male logic and order to impose structure and definition, woman degenerates into unconscious, unthinking, voiceless emotion and primordial power. The only way to control this essentially terrifying and destructive force is to contain it within a man-made definition. Huw says, "She is coming, and will use what she finds, and you have only hate in you" (155). For Garner, the only form the feminine can have is that which she takes from man. Thus, she can have no responsibility for her actions, and no conscious will of her own. Ultimately, the only way to control her is to define her into silence and to leave her staring, speechless, from her place on the fringe of the world.

CHAPTER II

The Terrible Goddess and the Devouring Mother in *The Marrow of the World* and *Fire and Hemlock*

According to Joseph Campbell, in many (if not most) ancient mythologies and religions, the Prime Power and Source of Life was a Great Mother-Goddess who was one with the world-- her body *was* the universe (165). Such strong affiliations with creation, nature and birth link the Goddess just as closely with mortality and death: "The Earth Mother engulfs the bones of her children...Death is a woman" (de Beauvoir in Dinnerstein 124). As patriarchal cultures began to infiltrate these ancient societies, it is perhaps not surprising that they were intimidated by this powerful image of the feminine (Condren 37). As history and myth were reshaped and recorded from the masculine perspective (by an invading patriarchal warrior class, and later by Christian scribes and monks) these insecurities manifested themselves in the presentation of the feminine as destructive and dangerous (Condren xx, 35).

To the Celts, the Goddess incorporated not only the soft beauty of the Maiden and the voluptuous comfort of the Matron, but also the hideous Crone, the face of Death. A "corpse-devouring crow" was the favourite form of the Morrigan, the Irish goddess of war, while the White Goddess of Welsh mythology was known to take the form of a great sow who

eats her farrow--an image Garner alludes to in *The Owl Service* (128-129). Patrick Keane writes, "Whatever her manifestation --crow-headed, allied with spider, snake, hyena, or sow--the Devouring Female is a subdivision of the Terrible Mother, the destructive aspect of the Magna Mater. As Leanhaun Shee or White Goddess, she is the muse of the poets she inspires and inevitably destroys." (xii). Not surprisingly, then, images of the malevolent female have long been a fixture in stories for children--the wicked witch, the cruel step-mother, the evil queen--and it is both important and fascinating to study how the Terrible Mother aspect of the Goddess, as described by Graves, Keane, Neumann and others, continues to appear in relatively recent children's literature.

Alan Garner was writing during a period less accepting of woman as an equally capable and autonomous human individual then our society tends to be today. This does not mean that it is any less important to comment on his work from a feminist perspective, but it does help us to understand the prevalence of certain image-patterns such as those illustrated in the previous chapter. Even recognizing his patriarchal biases, however, it is still rather surprising to find no comfort at all in Garner's image of the maternal feminine. The mother-figures in the novel are malevolent and cold, apparently without a tender, nurturing side. Margaret never makes an appearance in Alison's sick-room; rather, it is Roger, Clive, and Gwyn who check on her and bring Alison her

meals. When the sick young girl tells Clive to "Tell Mummy not to worry" (25), there is the sense that such an admonition is hardly necessary. The scene closes with a vague feeling of pathos tinged with abandonment.

The archetype of the Terrible Mother is deeply rooted in our Western consciousness and so it is not at all surprising that she should surface in the fantasies of women authors as well. *The Marrow of the World* (1972) by Ruth Nichols and *Fire and Hemlock* (1985) by Diana Wynne Jones both contain strong, vivid depictions of the Goddess in her deadly and destructive aspect, and, as in Garner, the heroines of both novels become heirs to her terror and power. There are, however, significant differences between the three authors' rendering of the Goddess. Unlike Garner's voiceless, selfless, primitive power, the Goddess-figures in *Marrow of the World* and *Fire and Hemlock* are presented as very real, articulate, self-conscious personalities. Furthermore, in keeping with the myth of the triple-faceted Goddess, in the worlds of Jones and Nichols the feminine is alternately benevolent and malevolent, while Garner, on the other hand, focuses almost exclusively on the malevolent aspect. As we shall see, however, Graves' construction of the White Goddess as a *femme fatale* remains a dominant image in both Jones and Nichols.

The Marrow of the World

A more conventional and derivative fantasy than either

The Owl Service or *Fire and Hemlock*, Nichols' *The Marrow of the World* relies heavily on the stereotypical witch of popular culture. Although the story begins on a lake in Northern Ontario, the secondary world to which the children are transported is strongly reminiscent of the ancient Britain of the Goddess. There are a number of hints to alert the reader to this: the enormous stag the children see at the water's edge, a hunter named Herne, and two witches--the dead Morgan and her daughter, Ygerna. The name Morgan, of course, is famous throughout legend and history as the powerful enchantress, half-sister to King Arthur, a personage some also refer to as Ygerna (Thompson 48). *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* calls Morgan "a prototypical witch," and the "Celtic death-goddess" whose name "was applied to anything magical, miraculous, or misleading" (674). Morgan also figures as the Morrigan of Irish legend, the death-goddess who favoured the form of the crow or raven (Graves 143).

Morgan-Ygerna, both in myth and in this novel, presents us with yet another image of the Goddess as destructive and frightening. Linda, the heroine of *The Marrow of the World*, like Alison in *The Owl Service* and (as we shall see) Polly in *Fire and Hemlock*, gradually takes on this identity of the Celtic Goddess. Indeed, Linda's link with the supernatural, malevolent feminine is even more direct than that of Alison or Polly, for Morgan is, in fact, her "natural" mother--an irony, since Morgan is of course, *super*natural. Here again, the

mother figure is depicted as the converse of everything our conscious mind associates with motherhood. What characterizes both Morgan and Ygerna is an icy cruelty and the utter lack of compassion, affection, or familial ties. Linda is distressed by the memory of a woman (Morgan) who kept fireflies in a jar until they battered themselves to death against the glass. Linda describes Morgan to Philip as "very beautiful, but cold somehow, and hard" (68). Later in the novel, when Linda's self is being subjugated by that of Morgan-Ygerna, this coldness becomes manifest when Philip expresses his concern for Linda's human adoptive parents, worried that they must be terrified over their disappearance:

> But Linda merely shrugged. "I expect they'll be alright."
>
> She spoke with complete unconcern. For an instant Philip hated her. (67)

Woman as beautiful, yet sinister and cold, is a recurring theme in both *Fire and Hemlock* and *The Marrow of the World*, as is the image of woman as a deceiving and deadly seductress. Morgan, Herne tells Linda and Philip, "would wander abroad in the form of a young maiden, enticing men into her stronghold to keep them prisoner" (39). This was the fate of Herne's father who was kept as Morgan's prisoner and play-thing until his death. Ygerna is also deadly, described frequently in terms of serpent imagery. The extent of her merciless nature is revealed at the end of the novel when she coldly and calmly informs her young sister that she intends to slay her, for she requires not only the Marrow, but *blood* to restore her to her

former power and strength (156).

The way in which the malevolent, supernatural Feminine, in the characters of Morgan and Ygerna, is superimposed upon the heroine, Linda, is problematic both for the child reader and the feminist critic. From the beginning of the novel Linda is objectified and distanced. Except for a few brief glimpses, we never see the situation from her perspective, but rather through the eyes of her cousin Philip. It is fascinating that Nichols, although herself a woman, chooses to narrate the novel from the male point of view while objectifying the main female character--another testament, perhaps, to the power of patriarchal conditioning? Linda is such an unknown, and Philip regards her with such a mixture of uncertainty, bewilderment, suspicion and fear, that the narrator finds it necessary to reassure us that in fact Philip loves her deeply--an assertion that somehow rings a bit hollow (3, 13).

Linda becomes further objectified and distanced from the child-reader as it becomes less and less clear whether she is villain or protagonist. This ambiguity works well as a motivator for the plot--the reader is compelled to keep turning pages to find out just "whose side" Linda is on. However, this same ambiguity also clouds her humanity, and limits the depth of her character. The uneasiness about Linda's affiliations reaches a climax at the end of Chapter Eight when Philip suggests they enlist the help of the

wizard-king Kyril to destroy Ygerna:

> Only now did Philip glance at Linda.
>
> Gazing up at him was a face transformed: Linda's child-like features had hardened into a mask of willful cruelty and power. Philip swore softly and stepped back. He had never seen the witch in her so nakedly displayed.
>
> "We will follow the path marked out." Her tone made this an order he could not disobey; her voice might have been Ygerna's own. "This is not only my sister's choice but mine. Do you understand, Philip? *I* choose it." (118)

Linda is acting consciously and deliberately from within herself, rather than as one of Ygerna's enchanted servants. Her cruelty and power are "wilful" and she makes it emphatically clear that the decision to follow Ygerna's instructions is her own. The phrase "her voice might have been Ygerna's own" alerts us once again to the merging of heroine and Goddess. The contrast between Alison and Linda is also worth noting here, for, unlike Alison, who has no will of her own and is therefore denied any responsibility for her actions, Linda emphasizes her control of the situation: "I choose it." Linda's character demonstrates a strength completely absent in Garner's female characters. Fascinatingly, this very strength of character identifies Linda even more closely with the Malevolent Feminine. Unlike Alison, who is simply an empty shell for Blodeuwedd to possess, Linda already shares some of the traits of Ygerna and Morgan. The supernatural/Terrible Goddess aspect of Linda is not just imposed upon her as it is on Alison--it is, in part, *natural* to her.

Nevertheless, superimposition of Goddess upon heroine does continue to occur, resulting, again, in the dislocation of Linda's self and identity. In Chapter Ten, Linda draws on her supernatural powers to defend Herne and Philip from the ghost-girl:

> Suddenly Linda straightened, as if some alien power had filled her body. Her face altered, the mask of Ygerna superimposed upon her own. (145)

After the spectre is vanquished, the image of Ygerna remains a part of Linda:

> Then Linda turned, and Philip saw that the resemblance to Ygerna was now stamped indelibly upon her face . . . He did not know if any difference now remained between her and the witch her sister. (146)

Just as in *The Owl Service*, the female self and individuality are nullified by the imposition of the myth and the supernatural feminine. Linda struggles for identity, as Alison does when she is torn between Blodeuwedd, Gwyn and Margaret. At one point, Herne, in consternation and fear, demands of Linda:

> *"What are you?"*
> Softly and sadly, Linda answered: "I do not know." (105)

Again, Linda has been set apart as something beyond even her own understanding--unpredictable and potentially dangerous, with powers and affiliations beyond what is human. Like the multifaceted Goddess who may transform in an instant from the soft beauty of the Maiden to the deadly powerful Morrigan/Crone, Linda can never be "safe" nor completely

trustworthy. In short, not only do we have the classic description of a witch in the character of Linda, we have essentially what has already been defined as the feminine mystery. And, as is so often the case, the mysterious, because it is other than ourselves, soon becomes identified with *evil*.

The theme of good versus evil is so popular in children's fantasy that it is almost a standard of the genre. It is anticipated by the audience; it is familiar, uncomplicated, and its components readily recognizable: the *evil* villain and the *good* hero, with no equivocation as to the essential nature of the two. In *The Marrow of the World*, we are presented with a disturbing rendition of this theme. To represent these two opposing poles, Nichols has chosen the two sexes, pitted them against one another, and cloaked evil in the form of the feminine. The male characters are strong, stoic, noble and honest, from the brave and faithful Herne, to the wise, powerful and fatherly figure of the wizard-king, Kyril. Even the shrewd and ambitious dwarves are presented as unflinchingly honourable. By contrast, all the evil adversaries are female. Further, they are presented as invalids, physically frail and wasted, as in the figure of Ygerna:

> But her movements were feeble and her face haggard. Her hair, fine as brown silk, cascaded to the ground about her feet; but there was something in its color that reminded him of fading. Her bearing spoke of mortal sickness; yet Philip did not pity her. From that first moment he felt only dislike

and fear. (53)

Here we have the sense of physical corruption and disintegration that at the same time masks a latent and dangerous power, and of a beauty wasted and perverted. At another point in the novel, the narrator refers to Ygerna's "beautiful, crazed eyes" (53). This juxtaposition of feminine beauty and madness, corruption and evil is repeated in the encounter with the spectre near the end of the book:

> It had the stature of a young girl, but Philip no longer thought of *she*, only of *it*. The apparition's mouth was fixed in a frozen smile. Its eyes watched them slyly from the shadows of its hair.
>
> It came towards them, its little hands outstretched, pleading, beckoning. Its smile was ravenous. (143)

And again:

> a travesty of a child, decked all in garish colour: the skin too white, the lips too red, the hair too bright a gold. The creature's hands reached out; Philip saw that the nails were claws... in that small figure, incongruous with its marigold hair, its claws and frozen smile, he sensed a concentrated evil as far beyond his experience as it was beyond his strength to endure. (145)

In addition to having an affinity with Carmody Braque, the ravenous, parasitic spirit in Mahy's *The Changeover*, the description of the ghost child recalls almost exactly Garner's description of Blodeuwedd, even to the claws that make up the flowers in the mural of the Flower-Goddess (Garner 36-7). Here yet again is an image of the feminine perverted and dehumanized--an evil *It*. Once again Nichols is unwittingly falling back on yet another old saw from that now notorious patriarchal myth: specifically, that feminine power is all the

more potent and poisonous for its deceptiveness, and women are never what they seem.

Another point worth examining is Philip's attitude toward, and treatment of Linda. Throughout most of the novel his attitude is one of fear, which manifests itself not in an effort to understand, but rather to dominate and subdue. To this end, Philip resorts to a typically male method: force. From the beginning of the book, we are aware that there is a wildness about Linda that frightens Philip. In the first chapter, we are told that, in order to prevent Linda from exploring the strange city under the water, Philip "crushed his fingers around her wrist" until she was still (4). In Chapter Two, Philip is frightened, partially at waking up in a strange world, but even more at Linda's wild exhilaration. When she playfully pinches him, he strikes her across the face.

> In instant retaliation, he cuffed her hard across the cheek. Linda was silent, staring at him from the black shadows of her hair.
>
> "I'm sorry," said Philip roughly. He knew he had not struck her because of the pinch, but because her confidence and strange delight had frightened him. (24)

Philip strikes Linda *not* for pinching him, but because of her confidence and delight. Linda, instead of being angry, responds meekly, with an apology and a phrase that recalls Alison's penitent remark to Gwyn after the plate throwing incident: "'I can't help it sometimes, Philip.'" The text then reads, "All at once the wildness left her" (24). The

message being insinuated here, particularly since Philip is clearly the protagonist, is that Linda *ought* to be less wild, that wildness and confidence in a girl are things to be feared, subdued and controlled. The point is not a subtle one buried in the text--it is blatant. Philip is the focalizer with whom the young reader is expected to identify. This lends his actions a certain authority. By contrast, Linda at this point is still the unknown quotient, and relatively unsympathetic, and thus the reader is left with the implication that Philip's rough actions were justified.

Another disconcerting point about this novel (apart from the fact that Nichols seems unaware of the significance of the image-patterns she has created) is the fact that it is never debated that Kyril the wizard-king, is in the right, and Ygerna and Morgan are in the wrong. Of course, this *is* the standard good-versus-evil theme, and stock villains are to be expected. However, the question must be addressed because Nichols herself raises it. In Chapter Four we are given a brief glimpse of the situation from Ygerna's perspective. To her, the benevolent Kyril is a cruel predator who destroyed her witch-mother Morgan by burning her alive. Ygerna then relates Linda's own history:

> Ygerna nodded. "You were a fortnight old when our mother received news of Kyril's approaching army. To save you, she rocked you into an enchanted sleep; and you woke in a world beyond Kyril's reach, for he would have killed you."
>
> Linda shuddered. "Killed a child? Would he do that?"
>
> "Most certainly. Witches and witch-children -

he spares none." (54)

At this point Ygerna becomes something more than a stock villain. We are presented with a very different image of Kyril, one that is violent, cruel, merciless. And we have an image of Morgan, not as an evil and dangerous witch, but as a mother protecting her new-born infant and rocking her to sleep. Yet when we actually meet Kyril, he is presented as the epitome of the wise, noble and merciful king. Kyril waves aside Linda's questions about Ygerna's story, saying, "Then she lied, as she lied about so many things" (158). Linda accepts this without debate. Clearly it is not an issue even worth disputing, and Ygerna's allegations against Kyril are never intended to be taken seriously. Thus Nichols never feels she has to answer them with anything more than Kyril's cursory "Then she lied."

The novel is not entirely without positive references to the Goddess, however. Helve, the dwarf, salutes her in the caverns of the mountain as the "Mother of all wonders" who "breathes the breath of life" into all creatures (134). Philip also experiences a brief moment of revelation and reverence for the Primordial Feminine:

> Then, by degrees so slow the eye could hardly see them, another planet rose above the ancient plain. At the sight of it, Philip's thought cried out in recognition and worship far older than the body in which he dwelt. Venus, Isis, Ashtaroth, Inanna! (114)

These flashes of exultation and reverence for the Divine Feminine/Creatress of the Cosmos are brief, however, and

quickly recede into the wary suspicion that characterizes the characters' overall attitude toward the feminine.

Take, for example, Linda's powers. They are treated by the narrator, and by the other characters in the book, as if they were in themselves intrinsically evil, despite the fact that Linda uses them more than once to a good purpose. For example, in Chapter Ten, she uses them to protect Philip and Herne from the ghost-child; in Chapter Seven, she causes a spring to bubble up through the floor so that Herne can treat the wounded Philip. Even Ygerna acknowledges to Linda that her powers are her own and she can do with them what she will (156). Clearly then, Linda's supernatural powers are not intrinsically evil, and in fact can and do empower her in positive ways.

Nevertheless, Philip continues to regard Linda's powers with fear, much in the same way he views her wildness and independence. The reader is made very aware that, in Philip's mind at least, a powerless Linda is a better Linda. At the end of Chapter Five, after the encounter with the mermen, we are told that it is "with a pulse of gratitude" that Philip realizes that Linda's powers have, at least for the moment, left her:

> Linda looked at him; her face was bitter and exhausted. She appeared older, thought Philip - almost a woman, and with a pulse of gratitude, he realized that the strangeness and the power had left her. Once again she seemed fully human. (80)

It occurs to Philip that Linda, in this weakened and unhappy

state, looks like a woman, and seems "fully human." Thus when she is powerful and filled with that "strange delight," Linda is regarded with fear and suspicion as a witch, while weak and unhappy she is a "woman" and "fully human," and it is the latter state that is obviously infinitely preferable.

The phrase "fully human" must here be examined a little more closely, as it is a recurring issue in all of these cross-worlds fantasies. Within the context of these novels, we may take it to mean: one who is without supernatural powers, awareness or influence, and one who possesses both human compassion and emotion. Is being "fully human" presented as the ideal state? In *The Owl Service* and *The Marrow of the World*, the answer would have to be, yes. In these two books, supernatural affiliations and powers result in the female characters becoming *sub*-human, a state identified by their strangeness, their dangerous unpredictability, their inexplicable powers, their coldness or lack of compassion, and their retreat from logic into irrational forces like magic and untempered emotion. That these girls and women are subhuman is also reiterated by description of them using animal imagery: Alison and Blodeuwedd as owls (35, 41-2), Ygerna as a serpent (51), and Linda as a bird (4). Further, in addition to having an uncanny rapport with animals, Linda is also described as making a sound that is "half-human" (26).

In *Fire and Hemlock* and *The Changeover* the definition of "fully human" becomes a little more convoluted. It is also

less obviously the ideal. Polly in *Fire and Hemlock* taps into supernatural forces with near-disastrous results, but it is through her sensitivity to the supernatural (together with her capacity for logic and for love) that Polly is able to save the day in the end. Depicted in many ways as a "typical teen-ager" Polly seems to be "fully human" but possesses an extra dimension of imaginative/supernatural awareness. There remains some ambiguity however, as to whether or not her awareness of, and interaction with, the supernatural realm of Laurel is a good or bad thing. For Laura in *The Changeover*, the acquisition of supernatural powers briefly threatens to reduce her to the subhuman level of Carmody Braque, but once she gains control of her emotions and her reason, as well as her powers, Laura takes on a *super*human quality. She is in many ways an ordinary, "fully human" school-girl, but she possesses also an enhanced awareness and understanding of herself, and her world, which empowers her in a positive way. In *The Marrow of the World*, patriarchal discourse and construct prevent Linda from achieving this superhuman quality. She is permitted to be human only when she is powerless and docile.

Her newly realized powers at first appeal to Linda, though the other characters gradually convince her to hate them. In the cavern of the dwarves, when her guide isn't looking, Linda cannot resist swallowing a little of the Marrow of the World herself, acquiring some of the power intended for Ygerna. Ultimately, however, Linda, swayed by the attitudes

of the males around her, and out of love for them, renounces her strange powers and returns to earth with Philip. This is presented as the right and "happy" ending. Yet it is disturbing on a very deep level. Linda not only gives up power to make herself more compatible and acceptable in a male world; she is required to renounce who she is, to give up half of herself. The choice is put before Linda bluntly: keep your powers and never return home, or renounce them and go back to your family who will finally find you acceptable.

A comparison may be made here between Linda and Laura, the heroine of *The Changeover*. Like Linda, Laura must also choose to either accept or decline supernatural powers. Laura must come to grips with the fact that such powers will irrevocably alter her life, and her relationship with her family, in ways that may not always be positive. Laura's friend Sorry warns her that being a witch "separates you off" (106). Nevertheless, Laura accepts the challenge, and chooses to use the powers to make herself into a stronger, more powerful, more complete individual. For Linda, the choice is less kind. Choosing power would be punished by banishment from her earthly family and childhood home. Linda responds to this choice as we the readers, already conditioned by the patriarchal tone of the novel, expect and hope she will: she curbs and lessens herself in order to be more acceptable and lovable in a male-dominated culture. That this is presented as the right and proper "happy ending" is a testament to the

power of patriarchal conditioning. Thus there is a very interesting contrast between the way in which *The Marrow of the World* presents itself to its readers, and the feminist orientation of *The Changeover,* which succeeds in eliciting an entirely different set of expectations. *Fire and Hemlock*, however, falls somewhere in between these two extremes.

Fire and Hemlock

Harp and carp, Thomas, she said,
  Harp and carp along with me,
And if ye dare to kiss my lips,
  Sure of your bodie I will be.

"Thomas the Rhymer,"
The Oxford Book of Ballads

This verse, from one of two ancient ballads upon which the plot of *Fire and Hemlock* is structured, illustrates the dangerous and entrapping aspect of the White Goddess as she appears yet again in this third novel. Enriched by elaborate word-play and allusions to myths, fairy-tales and ballads, *Fire and Hemlock* is an original and complex fantasy. Polly, the main character, is caught between two conflicting sets of memories, and between the overlapping worlds of "Here and Now" (modern Western society) and "Nowhere" (the world of Laurel, the Terrible Goddess). Cultivating a friendship that eventually grows into love, between herself and musician Thomas Lynn (Laurel's ex-husband), Polly becomes involved in

a re-enactment of events described in two old ballads: "Thomas the Rhymer" and "Tam Lin." Both tales relate an unfortunate mortal man's entanglement with the White Goddess, or Queen of the Otherworld. Polly becomes the parallel of Janet in "Tam Lin" who must rescue her lover from the clutches of the terrible Queen.

Jones, with her talent for strong, colourful and eminently believable characterization, endows her female characters with a dimension of depth and personality lacking in Garner and Nichols. Her empathetic understanding and portrayal of the workings of the adolescent female mind, particularly within the structure of modern-day Western culture, provides us with a glimpse of the complicated interplay between deeply engrained patriarchal ideals and biases, and female values and desires. While Jones' novel does not make any specifically feminist comments on this state of affairs (and in fact it is difficult to determine to what extent the patriarchal patterns and myths therein are deliberate), the honesty and clarity of her depiction gives us a sharper look at how our understanding of the feminine is constructed and distorted by patriarchal myth and bias. The tone and atmosphere of *Fire and Hemlock* is much more modern than either *The Owl Service* or *The Marrow of the World*. In this respect, *Fire and Hemlock* more closely resembles Mahy's *The Changeover*, and the main characters of both these novels struggle to come to grips with the difficulties of modern

social values.

True to the pattern we have observed so far, Jones' image of the feminine is veiled in mystery which cloaks a deadly and destructive power; and once again, the source of the novel's conflict is a supernatural, supremely powerful, malevolent female. Like Garner, Jones has clearly gleaned much from sources like Graves' *The White Goddess*, and Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, to the latter of which the reader is specifically referred when Polly receives *The Golden Bough* as a gift from Thomas Lynn. The Goddess this time takes the form of the fatally beautiful Laurel Leroy, who remains aloof in the background as an ominous, over-seeing presence until almost the last chapter. There is no mistaking Laurel's identity and role, which are only underlined by the reference to Frazer (Jones 184). She is the immortal Mother Goddess who is perpetuated by the sacrifice of those she chooses as her temporary mates. Laurel, the reader eventually learns, obtains and "adopts" very young, beautiful boys (she has a penchant for blonds). When they mature, she takes them as lovers and then sacrifices them at the end of nine years to ensure her own immortality and renew the life of her consort (named in the novel, Morton Leroy). Sexuality is a very strong underlying current in this novel, specifically, feminine sexuality as entrapping--fatal seduction, with an implication of incest. Laurel raises Thomas Lynn and then marries him, she then begins the cycle again with young

Leslie, while keeping her step-son Seb in reserve. Morton Leroy hovers constantly in the foreground as villainous executor of Laurel's evil designs, waiting for her to dispense with each new mate and renew his own life and status as her consort.

To understand this aspect of the Goddess, it is helpful to return briefly to the myth as described and interpreted by Graves and Frazer. Frazer writes, "we may conclude that a great Mother Goddess, the personification of all the reproductive energies of nature, was worshipped...that associated with her was a lover, or rather series of lovers, divine yet mortal, with whom she mated year by year" (299). The "divine yet mortal" lover is an apt description of Thomas Lynn who, though a cellist living in an ordinary flat in the ordinary world, also, with Polly's help, discovers his supernatural powers as a "hero."

Graves also corroborates this aspect of the Goddess who, he writes,

> had a lover who was alternatively the beneficent Serpent of Wisdom, and the beneficent Star of Life, her son....The Son.. was reborn every year, grew up as the year advanced, destroyed the Serpent, and won the Goddess's love. Her love destroyed him, but from his ashes was born another Serpent. (387-9)

And later:

> She has a son who is also her lover and her victim, the Star-son, or Demon of the Waxing Year. He alternates in her favour with his tanist Python, the Serpent of Wisdom, the Demon of the Waning Year, his darker self. (393)

In *Fire and Hemlock*, Thomas Lynn has been both victim and lover,

son and husband to Laurel/White Goddess. And, like the Star-Son in Graves, he also has a tanist, a "darker self": Mr. Piper, who in some mysterious way shares the alternate identity of Tan Coul with Thomas Lynn.

> Polly stared. Mr. Piper was in some ways quite startlingly like Mr. Lynn. He was the same height, with the same sort of high shoulders and the same forward thrust of the head. His face was a very similar shape. But there, to Polly's relief, the likeness stopped. Mr. Piper's mouth was pinched with self-righteous bad temper. His face was lined with peevishness and his eyes were dark. The hair above it was gray, cropped as short as Nina's. (214)

In addition to clarifying the relationship between Jones' novel and British-Celtic mythology, the passages in Graves emphasize the cyclical nature of the Goddess and her relationships, as she mirrors the death and rejuvenation of the seasons. Her position is supreme and her repeated execution of her "son who is also her lover and her victim" is carried out as inexorably as the passing of the seasons: she is Nature, both nurturing and deadly. Jones cultivates this image in Laurel to create a character who is a terrifying juxtaposition of soft feminine beauty and cold, calculating Death.

Further digging reveals the significance of the name "Laurel." Graves tells us that it is an evergreen and "thus an emblem of immortality, it is also an intoxicant" (392). Laurel in *Fire and Hemlock* is immortal and her effect on those she seduces is indeed like that of an intoxicant. Leslie, who has been marked as Laurel's future victim,

> was lolling beside her on the seat. He did not seem to be able to take his eyes off Laurel. The look on his face was dreamy, besotted, adoring, but spiced with wickedness as if at least half his feelings were guilty ones. (324)

Words like "lolling," "dreamy" and "besotted" do suggest intoxication and reinforce the stereotype of feminine sexuality and beauty as entrapping and emasculating. Graves goes on to observe that the female celebrants of the Triple Goddess at Tempe chewed laurel leaves to incite "a poetic and erotic frenzy." Commenting that the Greek form of the word laurel is *daphne*, he posits that "*daphne* may be a shortened form of *daphoine*, 'the bloody one', also a title of the Goddess" (392).

Laurel *is* the Triple Goddess, being alternately a young, irresistibly attractive woman (as Polly is shocked to realize at Leslie's concert, Laurel "could have been the same age as Nina"(220)), a nurturing mother who adopts the young Thomas Lynn and sends him to the best music schools, and finally, as cold, implacable Death, demanding back the lives she nurtured, just as the earth reclaims the bones of all it sustains. However, unlike the earth, and unlike Garner's vision of the Primordial Feminine, Laurel is acutely conscious and calculating. This gives her malevolence a much sharper edge, and makes the title "The Bloody One" all the more appropriate.

As in the other novels, it is the main female protagonist who becomes associated with this disturbing and destructive goddess-figure. Like Alison and Linda, Polly does become,

briefly, a portal for the powers of the White Goddess, and, like them, the visage of the Goddess is stamped indelibly upon her own. Polly is no Alison, however, to be so easily and completely swallowed by the White Goddess. She possesses an extra depth of personality, and in developing her character, Jones depicts with sensitivity and insight first a girl, then a young woman, pulled between her own values and desires, and those of conventional society. As a child, Polly is not very concerned with societal norms and has not yet learned to defer to society's expectations of her. Her long, lovely hair is just a nuisance to her (7). She prefers toy cars to dolls (36) and plays football with the boys at school (85). The young Polly also tells her mother that she has no intention of ever marrying, and plans to go into training as a hero instead. As a child, Polly appoints herself Tom's assistant hero-in-training, envisioning an active life for herself, in which she takes charge of situations, and rectifies problems through her own initiative and skill: a hero's life. She does not wish to be mistaken for a *heroine* however--when Tom gallantly offers Polly his jacket, she tartly replies, "No, I'm an assistant, not a damsel in distress.. save it for them" (98). Fascinatingly, however, when Polly plays "Let's Pretend" for the first time with Thomas Lynn, creating Tan Coul and his assistant-hero, Hero, she has an afterthought:

> Thinking of Laurel, as she trotted beside Mr. Lynn down the windy road, caused Polly, for some reason to say, "When I come to work as your assistant in your ironmonger's shop, I'm going to

> pretend to be a boy. You pretend you don't know." (30)

Thus, Polly feels that in order to have a successful, active, adventurous life as a hero, she must hide her femininity. Although this is hardly a new concept, it remains an intriguing point, and a shrewd comment on the situation of the modern female psyche. We must also note that it is thoughts of Laurel which cause Polly to amend her fantasy vision of herself. On an apparently sub-conscious level, Polly knows she must hide herself from Laurel. Just as in the ballad of "Tam Lin," Polly, as a female with a vested interest in Tom, becomes a rival, and therefore the prey, of Laurel, Terrible Queen of the Otherworld. There is also a subtle admission of a connection between Polly and Laurel as representative of the Feminine, which Polly instinctively tries to sever by putting on a masculine persona. As we have seen in the other novels, according to patriarchy's feminine myth, girls and women are all creatures of the White Goddess, and may be possessed by her. By pretending to be a boy, Polly may be, on a subconscious level, attempting to deny her connection to the Goddess. However, becoming a boy is the one part of Polly's imagined adventures that remains strictly fantasy. Indeed, the older Polly becomes, the more overtly feminine she becomes, until the ties between herself and Laurel begin to tighten dangerously.

As she gets older, Polly begins to defer more and more to society's patriarchal expectations of her, with only the

occasional flash of defiance, as she realizes, and stands up briefly for her own desires and values. Growing up in a family torn apart by divorce, Polly adopts that traditional and expected role of the ever-polite, amicable, and agreeable feminine, as she tries desperately to maintain some semblance of calm and civility in her world. Yet this is obviously both difficult and destructive for her. When her mother throws out Polly's Christmas gift from her father, Granny advises Polly to "try and understand":

> Polly did try to understand. She was positively saintly, she thought, not mentioning all the other things Ivy had thrown away. (115).

Later, when David, Ivy's new "lodger," calls Polly a "sympathetic wench," she is somewhat flattered and so allows herself to become the go-between for David and his bookie. Even when Ivy completely ignores Polly's repeated invitations to her school pantomime, and then announces she is going away for a vacation with David (without even acknowledging that it is the same week as the play), Polly continues to be stoically agreeable.

> "That'll be fine, Mum," she said nobly. "Have a good time."
> "I knew you'd say that," Ivy said, which made Polly feel rather low. She would have liked Ivy to notice how noble she was being. (163)

Polly also goes along with what her peer group expects of her. Flattered by the popularity that goes along with catching an older boy's interest, Polly is also stoically passive with Seb, putting up with his unwanted attentions and adolescent

gropings out of her own "annoying soft-heartedness" (221).

The strain of suppressing her own desires while maintaining the expected feminine face of amiability begins to tell on Polly, however, and culminates finally in the painfully polite and utterly devastating facade at Joanna and her father's apartment in Bristol (183-194). Without anything being said apart from polite and formal pleasantries, Polly gradually becomes aware that Joanna neither expects nor wants Polly to live with them, and her father's silence and complete evasion of the topic confirm his deference to Joanna. Not wanting to disrupt the impeccably neat atmosphere of Joanna's apartment, and unwilling to upset Joanna or embarrass her father, Polly allows herself to be stranded, alone and penniless in Bristol rather than shatter the polite façade. The strain of the weekend takes its toll on Polly, leaving her physically ill (210) and emotionally bruised and subdued: "The time in Bristol seemed to have bitten deep and it took her a long time to get over it. She found it hard to concentrate on anything, even when she was back at school that autumn" (221).

Polly finds an outlet, however, in her friendship with Thomas Lynn. With him, Polly retains her confidence and assertiveness, and takes great pleasure in bossing him about, telling him off and generally acting in a haughty and demanding way. It is her relationship with Tom that motivates her, on those relatively few occasions, to admit to and stand up for her own true feelings and desires. When Morton Leroy

tries to intimidate her into forsaking Tom, Polly responds with sudden and surprising defiance:

> "No!" Polly almost shouted. The two parts of her came together into a pillar of white anger. "I told you no and I *mean* no!" (172)

The "two parts" of Polly--the cautionary, conciliatory, patriarchally conditioned part, and the part representing her own values and desires, described also as the "main part"--come together into a determined whole, decisive and confident, as Polly recognizes and stands by what she truly wants and believes. The image of the split self is a typically feminine image that also appears in each of the other novels. Patriarchal conditioning contributes to the division within the female protagonist, and she must undergo a difficult examination of self and soul in order to become whole again.

It is Tom's influence that again causes Polly to temporarily brush aside the persona of the amicable, passive feminine. Anger at Tom's criticism of her manuscript as "sentimental drivel" causes Polly to snap angrily at Seb when he approaches her after school:

> "Oh stop bothering me!" Polly snapped.
> "Polly! That's not like you!" Seb said in a huffy, pleading way.
> At this, Polly was angry enough--and hungry enough--to turn round and say, "Yes, it *is* like me! You just don't know what I'm like. I told you to stop bothering me. Go away and don't come back for a year. I'm too *young*!" (226)

Polly's retort that being angry *is* like her proves that "niceness" is a trait Polly feels compelled to cultivate.

Being nice and polite in a social setting has been drilled into Polly, lending a certain predictability to her behaviour. Predictability eventually breeds weakness, and Laurel uses this knowledge to break Polly's hold on Tom. Having invited her to a very formal social gathering, Laurel overwhelms Polly with civilities, and *embarrasses* her into saying she will forget Tom. Leaning toward her with an attitude of well-meaning concern, Laurel tells Polly,

> "Children always adore poor Tom. But I do think nowadays you might show him the kind of consideration he always shows you. You're embarrassing him, dear. You've got what's called a crush on him, haven't you?"
>
> Polly could not say anything. Shame rose up in her and scoured through her, bleaching everything. This was far worse than she had ever felt at Bristol. . . .
>
> "I - " Polly tried to say. Everyone in the room must know what a fool she'd been. She could see faces turning to her, dimly, smiling kindly and pityingly . . .
>
> The people who had been looking at her were all turning away, embarrassed to look.
>
> "Think," said Laurel, "if someone was hanging round *you*, pestering and sighing, for all the life you had - "
>
> "Oh all right! Don't go on!" Polly cried out. "I didn't mean - Of course I'll forget him! Just leave me alone!" (300-301)

Patriarchal conditioning vies with Polly's own desires, and in this instance wins. She allows herself to be cowed by what society has taught her is the "proper" way for her to behave. By the end of the novel, however, Polly's confidence in herself, and in her own values and desires wins out. As she goes to rescue Tom, she tells herself that this time, she will *not* be embarrassed out of claiming and acknowledging the

relationship she knows is right and real (317).

Despite the added depth and realism of Polly's character, Jones is still occasionally at risk of conforming to the feminine myth. As in the other novels, there is a superimposition of the Goddess-image on Polly. It is, at first, subtle and gradual, and, just as in the other novels, begins with physical appearance. Like Alison and Blodeuwedd, Linda and Ygerna, there is a striking resemblance between Polly and Laurel. That the worlds of Laurel and Polly are somehow linked in part by their physical appearance is hinted at very early in the novel when the young Polly and her friend Nina decide to dress up as high priestesses for Halloween. Donning old black dresses of Granny's, chubby, homely Nina ends up looking like "a large, fat nun" while "Polly's dress, apart from being too long, was quite a good fit" (8). There is the suggestion, then, that Polly's costume is successful, and that she could pass as a "high priestess." Nina, however, lacking Polly's beauty, only manages to look like a nun. Nina is "safe," securely grounded in the modern, hum-drum, Christian world, while Polly's costume foreshadows her connection with the dangerous, seductive, pagan world of Laurel.

References to physical beauty become frequent, and, as Polly becomes more involved with Laurel's world through her concern for Thomas Lynn, the similarity of their appearance becomes more marked. Both are physically beautiful, with

striking long blond hair. Polly, we are told, "was an extremely pretty little girl, and probably the prettiest thing about her was her mass of long, fine, fair hair" (7). Early on, Laurel's hair is described as "rather strange, light and floating, of a colour that could have been grey or no colour at all" (27) A few chapters later, Polly's freshly washed head is described as "a cloud of silver-fair, crackly hair, as clean as it was bright" (90). Mary Fields, Tom's ordinary sometimes-girlfriend, also has blond hair:

> She was a small, angle-faced lady with a brush of short, light hair. The same colour hair as Laurel's, Polly thought. Mr. Lynn seemed partial to that sort of hair. He rubbed his hand over Mary's hair as he introduced Polly. (97)

It is beauty that attracts a man, and a very specific sort of beauty at that. All three women have hair of the same colour. Mary's hair isn't quite as attractive as Polly and Laurel's luxurious locks, however, being a short and frizzy "bush." Is it coincidence, then, that Mary remains ordinary with no real influence over Tom? Both reader and Polly begin to suspect not, and when Polly's mother finally does suggest cutting Polly's once-hated tresses, she responds vehemently in the negative.

Although it would be far too simplistic and reductive to say that the main theme of the novel is that of catching and holding one's man, it is a motif which surfaces a number of times, not least in the ballad of "Tam Lin" in which the heroine must literally hang on to her lover to avoid losing

him forever to the Goddess. From the "Undying Laurel," to the delightfully obnoxious "Nympho Nina," to the bitter and neurotic Ivy, almost all the female characters in *Fire and Hemlock* at one point or another focus their energies upon attracting and keeping a member of the opposite sex. At age ten, Polly initially resists this trend, insisting she is not going to marry, but be a hero instead. She is not the least interested in looking attractively feminine and attempts to reject her beauty:

> Polly, at that time, was trying to eat a packet of biscuits every day in order to get fat like Nina. And she spent diligent hours squashing and pressing at her eyes in hopes of either making herself need glasses too, or at least giving her eyes the fat, pink, staring look that Nina's had when she took off her glasses. She cried when Mum refused to cut her hair short like Nina's. She hated her hair. The first morning they were at Granny's she took pleasure in forgetting to brush it. (7)

This all changes when the ten-year-old Polly meets Thomas Lynn, on whom she immediately develops a crush:

> "Snap!" said Polly, and laughed up at him. She knew, of course, by this time, that she was starting to flirt with Mr. Lynn. Mum would have given Polly one of her long, heavy stares if she had been there. But, as Polly told herself, she did have to distract Mr. Lynn from thinking too deeply about her connection with the funeral, and she did think Mr. Lynn was nice anyway. Polly never flirted with anyone unless she liked them. (17)

As the years pass and Polly gets older, she becomes more concerned with her personal appearance and increasingly envious of Laurel's beauty. In the second half of the novel, as the now-teenaged Polly gets ready for a lunch date with Mr. Lynn, she scrutinizes herself critically:

> Leslie had once said she looked almost Swedish with her hair. Did she? She was quite tall, but not willowy, not any longer. She had become rather plump lately. And even if she went without food from now to Saturday, there was not time for it to show. She would have to settle for being plump and pretty--she was pretty, she knew that. But she would have given her ears--and then hidden the blank spaces under lots of hair--to look as beautiful as Laurel. (239)

Significantly, "plump and quite pretty" is exactly how Polly describes Laurel upon first seeing her at the funeral (27), indicating that Polly is much more like Laurel than she realizes. In addition, it is in part her likeness to Laurel that attracts Thomas Lynn, who appears to be drawn to this blond ideal of feminine beauty. The physical feminine--sexuality and beauty--thus becomes tantamount in this novel. The power of the physical female body to seduce, entrap, and destroy takes on supernatural proportions that become manifest in the characters of both Polly and Laurel. Polly and Laurel now have a common goal. Mr. Lynn. And they use common methods in their attempt to establish their claim to him: beauty and seduction, and finally, magic and deceit.

Although Polly genuinely cares for Thomas Lynn, her jealousy of both Laurel and Mary Fields, coupled with her anger at Tom for repulsing her adolescent advances, prompts her to a controlling and vengeful act that not only almost destroys Tom, but shows incontrovertibly the link between herself and Laurel. Resorting to voodoo-like magic, Polly turns witch, ceremoniously arranging and burning articles linking her with Tom in order to transport herself

supernaturally into his presence and then force him to answer her questions. As she makes her preparations, we are told that "Remembering it four years later, Polly was amazed at the amount she had worked out and the things she knew, almost by instinct" (296). "By instinct" is the operative phrase, reinforcing not only the idea that Laurel is somehow a part of Polly, but that this sort of knowledge and control of supernatural forces is somehow natural, *instinctive*, to women.[7] What is particularly climactic about the witchery scene, however, is Polly's emotional response to her new position of magical dominance over Tom:

> "Polly!" he said, quiet and horrified. "What are you doing?"
>
> Now that it had worked, Polly's glee returned. She chuckled with it... Polly knew he was completely miserable, but she felt no sympathy at all, only a hard kind of triumph. (297-8)

This reaction, as much as the actual performing of the magic, places Polly solidly in the realm of the supernatural Other. Her hardness and lack of sympathy, her laughter in the face of Tom's horror, mirrors the unnatural coldness of Laurel. We have already seen this same quality in the characters of Linda and Ygerna. In *The Marrow of the World*, coldness is a defining characteristic of the mythical, malevolent feminine. For witches and other forms of the

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[7] The awakening of innate supernatural powers in the heroine also occurs in *The Moon of Gomrath* when Susan finds she is able to match the spells the Morrigan hurls at her: "Susan rose in her stirrups, and,without looking at the bracelet, the words poured from her lips, words she had never known or heard" (150).

supernatural feminine, this lack of emotion and compassion stands as evidence of their inhumanity. In this scene of *Fire and Hemlock*, Polly's humanity has been similarly negated. She herself wears momentarily the aspect of the Terrible Mother, showing coldness and cruelty to one she should have loved, and exulting in his fear of her. Kneeling amid the smoke of her enchantment, Polly has crossed over into the fringes of the world.

Just before the final, climactic scene in which Tom and Morton Leroy battle for their lives to the cool, detached amusement of Laurel, Tom and Polly openly admit the more-than-platonic nature of their relationship:

> He threaded both hands into Polly's damp hair and kissed her eyes and mouth. "I've always loved your hair," he said.
> "I know," Polly said. (323)

Again, there is the emphasis on the hair, and we get the foreboding feeling of a pattern about to repeat itself: isn't this how Tom and Laurel started out?

Fire and Hemlock is a rich and intriguing novel, no less so for the conflicting tensions, and sometimes apparently contradictory attitudes toward patriarchal society and feminine power. There are aspects of the novel which empower the feminine, and others which tend to marginalize it. The patriarchal myth still asserts itself, however. The male characters, including even the horrible Morton Leroy and the conniving Seb, are victims of the Terrible Goddess, their fates dictated by her whims and desires, and their wills

dissolved by her seductive beauty. The matriarchal power of Laurel is both destructive and terrifying and, at the same time, clearly *other*. The constant reiteration of the importance of the physical feminine results in a kind of biological essentialism that further marks the female characters as the Immanent Other, while their connection with the supernatural (presented as dangerous and deceitful) further undermines their humanity. Meanwhile, the old cliches are hammered home: a woman needs a man, and should use all her feminine wiles (ie. beauty and seduction, with a little deceit and magic thrown in) to hang on to him.

On the other hand, Diana Wynne Jones deals effectively with some difficult topics such as the ugliness of divorce and the emotional trauma surrounding it, the betrayal of a child's trust in her parents, and child sexuality. Also, the realism with which Jones portrays the complexities of Polly's relationship with Tom saves the novel from deflating entirely into the trite, two-dimensional theme of "catching and holding one's man." Instead, and true to human nature, Polly and Tom's relationship is a reciprocal one; each uses the other at some point, and both display selfishness as well as caring. It can even be said that Tom seduces Polly as actively as she seduces him, through his continued letters, presents of books, and obvious admiration.

Unfortunately, Jones does not entirely succeed in tying up all the loose ends of this sometimes cumbersome novel. The

ending is vague and confused, causing the momentum and dynamism to falter in the home stretch, and Polly threatens to (but doesn't quite) lapse into the sort of sentimental romantic heroine she despises. One could posit that this uncomfortable sense of something being left unresolved stems from Jones' failure, in this novel, to acknowledge and come to grips with the ways in which patriarchal construct and myth influence not just the characters in the story, but herself, as writer and author. As a result, Jones' incorporation of the feminine myth at times appears deliberate, and at others to be subconscious, leaving the reader with the feeling that there are still issues to be resolved and reconciled.

CHAPTER III

From "Bits" to Wholeness: Rebirth and Reconciliation in Mahy's *The Changeover*

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
>
> William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

One could almost go so far as to say that this maxim of Blake's could (and perhaps should) stand on its own as both summary and commentary for Mahy's *The Changeover*. This philosophical, imaginative, and utterly captivating novel is about the necessary existence of opposites, and our struggle as humans to reconcile them. Blake's words also sum up what I have been discussing on a larger scale: the attraction and repulsion that exist between the sexes; the reason that is traditionally associated with the male principle, and the mindless energy that is associated with the female principle; and finally, the combination of love and hate which is part of any human relationship but particularly those involving the opposite sexes.

Although Mahy never refers directly to the above quotation from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, she does allude to Blake (22) and it does not seem too far-fetched to think that she had this quotation somewhere in the back of her mind when

writing the novel. Blake's mystical-minded consciousness, and the romantic philosophy of the necessary tension generated by opposing forces, as in the ancient symbol of the yin-yang, permeate *The Changeover*. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate all become major themes of the novel. Even more importantly, these opposing forces come to delineate the on-going struggle between "masculine" and "feminine" principles. In *The Changeover*, Mahy shows us the difficulty and pain involved in reconciling feminine and masculine principles, both inside and outside of one's self. She makes the point that such a reconciliation is necessary to escape the feminine myth, to exist as *humans* and not as two-dimensional caricatures of society's preconceived notions of "man" and "woman." Laura, Mahy's fourteen-year-old protagonist, narrowly escapes sacrificing her humanity and becoming the Terrible Feminine glimpsed in the previous novels; she escapes by learning to confront and reconcile the opposing forces in her life. It is through her own recognition, and reconfiguration, of her self in terms of these contraries that Laura is able to remain a unique and *human* individual, and to transcend the power of the White Goddess.

Mahy constantly explores opposing forces in this novel, deliberately pitting time-worn patriarchal cliches and stereotypes (repulsive in their reductiveness, attractive in their familiarity) against a feminist consciousness. Baiting

patriarchal prejudice and superstition like a matador taunting a bull, Mahy chooses some of the most loaded symbols of the feminine myth--the mystically intuitive female, the witch, the madwoman, the cold and potentially dangerous triple Goddess--and reconfigures them into a new feminist symbology, creating a fantasy that celebrates not only feminine power but individuality and autonomy. This is a dicey exercise for any author. Can the supernatural be used in conjunction with the feminine without alienating or enslaving it to the feminine myth? Or will the White Goddess, that "ancient power of fright and lust" (Graves 24), always surface to provoke fear and antagonism between the sexes, and to drag female protagonists away to de Beauvoir's "fringes of the world"?

The Changeover tackles head-on those questions which have arisen most consistently in the course of this paper: the quandary of how to be both woman and human in a world of both natural and supernatural elements; the dilemma of whether or not to tap into a uniquely feminine power that patriarchy regards with fear, hostility, condemnation or outright denial, and lastly, the splitting of the female self between patriarchy's definition of Woman, the myth of the White Goddess, and the protagonist's own conflicting awareness of herself as a woman.

Unlike the preceding authors, Margaret Mahy is writing in a specifically feminist frame of mind. In many ways her novel, in its exploration of opposing forces, works as an

analogy for modern woman's struggle to define herself within the confines of Western civilization. Laura is faced with the dilemma of whether or not to tap into feminine powers considered taboo by conventional society. She must struggle to shape herself into a woman according to her own unique powers, desires and individuality, in the face of other powers (Western society, fear, hate, the feminine myth, etc.) which seek to make (or *un*make) her into something else--a White Goddess.

Attraction and Repulsion

Attraction and repulsion become an important motif running throughout the novel, and inevitably come to bear most strongly on the character of Laura. Laura is very attracted to Sorry Carlisle, but at the same time is nervous and wary of him:

> she could not tell, when he looked up, if he were hero or villain, for he was both threatening and savage, and yet consoling. Two distinct faces had tangled into one, both smiling with the same set of features as if he were offering to save her and ruin her simultaneously. (142)

And a little later.

> He was the boy who had touched her and warned her, and she had invited him in twice and thought that now he might decide to eat her. (142)

These passages, charged with witchery and sexuality, are wonderfully effective, capturing the sensual, transfixing tension of that which both attracts and repels.

The Gardendale Subdivision has a similar fascination for Laura. "At night its streets became dangerous, but she

frequently enjoyed this razor-edge of risk waiting outside their comfortable family door"(10). Laura gets a thrill from the atmosphere of the subdivision which is simultaneously homey and dangerous. At the end of the novel, she feels a little sorry for Julia's unborn child who will not experience "the adventurous life" of Gardendale. Yet Laura is also horrified and frightened at the brutality of the streets, and recalls the rape of a schoolmate as she makes her way nervously through the dark towards Sorry's house (57). The attraction and repulsion generated by Sorry and the subdivision are only signposts, however, alerting us to the greater and potentially perilous tensions within Laura herself.

Laura is faced with a choice that both attracts and repels her: whether or not to undergo the changeover to become a "woman of the moon." Stepping into the role of Maiden, she would complete the triangle of power already begun by Winter (Crone) and Miryam (Mother). To do so would give Laura the power to overcome the lemure who is destroying her little brother, however, to make the changeover could also alienate her from the life and people she has known. As Sorry tells her, "No--it's not terrible, but it separates you off...You mightn't want to be stranded over here with Miryam and Winter and me" (106). Like all women in Western culture, Laura is faced with the prospect of becoming *other*. To become a woman is to be "separated off," and, as Winter points out, this will

happen regardless of whether or not Laura chooses the changeover: "It changes you forever, but you are changing forever anyway" (128) The changeover which Laura must undergo is essentially an experience common to all young women and men. the coming to grips with a new aspect of one's self, and the realization of a new power that resides in a new and mysterious body. On the brink of womanhood, Laura can either change into the kind of woman conventional society expects of her, or she can make herself over according to her own unique powers and desires.

This is also true of Sorry who is caught between his and society's understanding of manhood, and the apparently contradictory, feminine concept of "witch"--also an integral part of his nature.

> "It's very much a feminine magic--or so we think," Miryam said. "And Sorensen sometimes resents it. He doesn't like being called a witch, although of course that is really what he is. Sometimes he feels that he is not completely a man or a witch but some hybrid, and he struggles too hard to be entirely one thing or the other. But he can't give up either nature. We do try to reconcile him, but so far, at least, have met with very mixed success." (70)

This passage contains one of the central themes of the novel: that unless one can reconcile the opposing forces (*particularly* masculine and feminine forces), within one's self, conflict and unhappiness are inevitable, as is an eventual loss of self and humanity. What is important to note is that the *two* apparently opposing natures, are *both* necessary to Sorry's wholeness Again, the symbol of the yin-yang would be

appropriate here. The struggle going on inside Sorry between masculine and feminine, and science and magic, brings us in turn to Blake's second set of necessary contraries: reason and energy.

Reason and Energy

Reason and Energy have a particular relevance in this discussion of feminism and fantasy, as they are often seen as representative of masculine and feminine principles respectively, and also of science and magic respectively. Typically, and especially in fantasy novels, Reason and Energy are set in a framework of challenge and, because of their gender assignments, one can see how certain stereotypes and the feminine myth may be perpetuated. In a sense, the terms Reason and Energy have become catch-alls and many of the forces, concepts and principles that society has decreed as being "opposite" have also come to be associated with either one or the other. For example, in our culture when we think of Reason, we think also of the masculine principle, of logos, science, industry, technology and civilization. Energy we associate with the feminine principle, with imagination, emotion, and with Nature (Palmer 25). While culture depicts men as being rational and discourages them from showing much open emotion (with the possible exception of anger), women are beset by the stereotype of the "flighty female", who makes impulsive decisions based on the "heart" rather than reason.

We have seen such a division in Garner's *The Owl Service*: the deliberate Gwyn and the sceptical, pragmatic Roger are off-set by Alison who can only cry, "I can't help it," or "I can't argue" and is subsequently possessed by the furious energy that is Blodeuwedd: the personification of Energy sans Reason.

Magic is what popular culture and superstition call the power of Energy when it does not conform to the laws of Reason. Connected with life at its most elemental level, it is, as Miryam puts it, "very much a feminine magic--or so we think." The last phrase--"or so we think"--is a shrewd and subtle comment on the part of Mahy. By allowing that Energy may not be an unequivocally feminine power, Mahy reminds us that life in its various components and mysteries cannot be divided up into male and female principles as easily as one divides up chess pieces into black and white; and that there is in fact, very little that can be stamped definitively "masculine" or "feminine". Sorry is further evidence of this, being a male with "female" strengths and powers. The rethinking and reorientating of such traditional "masculine" and "feminine" divisions helps to save Sorry as he eventually learns to integrate, rather than divide these principles within himself. It is also a lesson learned the hard way for Miryam and Winter. Their deference to the traditional understanding of "masculine" reason and "feminine" magic led them to assume that the infant Sorry did not possess

supernatural powers. This in turn led to his disastrous fosterage, and the missed opportunity to add his powers to their own in time to save the farm from the encroaching city (90-91). By failing to recognize him, the feminine fails Sorry in much the same way patriarchy has failed women. As Winter ruefully tells Laura, "We underestimated Sorensen, and we overestimated ourselves" (91).

For Mahy, the individual's humanity, male and female alike, depends on the reconciliation of Reason and Energy. The differences between the two are outlined for Laura in Chapter Seven when she asks Sorry what witches do:

> "We're like scientists," said Sorry. "We compel nature-- move it around according to our wishes--but scientists use rules that they've worked out through thought, and ours comes through imagination, I suppose."
>
> "...and exchange," Miryam agreed. "The scientist reasons and then, by experimental or industrial processes, applies his reasoning. The price that's paid for altering nature is often paid outside the scientist himself, but witches, when they institute a change, bleed something of themselves out into the world." (103)

Witches, operating from the realm of Energy, manipulate the world through "wishes" and "imagination." Scientists, grounded firmly in Reason, use "rules that have been worked out through thought." Because of the gender association already discussed, Reason and Energy are also assumed to promote "masculine" and "feminine" attitudes and behaviours. The image of witches who "when they institute a change, bleed something of themselves out into the world," is a very feminine one, recalling both the menstrual cycle and the birth

process. It emphasizes their reciprocal relationship with the earth, a relationship of "exchange," and co-dependence, promoting nurturing, even altruistic, attitudes, all considered to be traditionally "feminine" qualities. Thus, the Energy/magic of the witches, like the Feminine, becomes an organic principle, associated with nature, nurture, and primal beginnings.

By contrast, Reason spawns and motivates such typically "masculine" principles as industry, science, and civilization. Associated attitudes and behaviours are also decidedly "masculine," involving more force and less reciprocity. For example, the city in *The Changeover* is described as "an industrious amoeba, extending itself, engulfing all it encountered" (55). Similarly, the subdivision is "a bright rash over the subdued land" (55). Both threaten the natural oasis of Janua Caeli, the home of the Carlisle witches, stubbornly maintaining itself in the concrete heart of the Gardendale Subdivision.

Yet Mahy makes the point once again that almost nothing is exclusively masculine or feminine. The city is not always bad; it is at times friendly, familiar and exciting, and so loved by Laura. On the other hand, the gluttonous, consuming principle associated with Reason appears also in the realm of Energy in the person of Carmody Braque. Operating on pure Energy and instinct, Braque is a malicious and voracious "collection of appetites," one who consumes without giving

anything back. Carmody Braque also demonstrates the necessity of learning to reconcile Energy and Reason. Representing raw Energy without Reason, the parasitic lemure exists solely for physical sensation. Because of this, he is neither whole nor human, but is simply, as Laura says, "left-over bits" which must soon fall apart (191).

Miryam and Winter also feel the effects of living in a world dominated by Energy to the exclusion of Reason. They too have become "separated off" from humanity to a certain extent. Janua Caeli is dwindling, along with their power, and Kate tells Laura "Old Winter gets madder day by day and Miryam floats around staring into space as if she saw only tomorrow or the next day" (11). They are not really part of the everyday world, but exist on the fringes. Similarly, it is when Laura has undergone the changeover and feels the power of feminine Energy coursing through her that her Reason falters and her humanity is most threatened, as she is tempted to act out of revenge and hate towards the finally helpless Carmody Braque (184). Throughout the novel, Laura has a foot in both worlds: that of patriarchy and Reason, and that of the Goddess and Energy. Mahy makes it clear that unless Laura can reconcile these two worlds, they will continue to diverge, and tear Laura apart in the process.

Love and Hate

Blake's final set of contraries also appear in *The*

Changeover. Laura is pulled between love for her father, to whom she was, at one time, very close, and the smouldering anger and deep-seated sense of betrayal she feels toward him for leaving Kate, Jacko, and herself to marry another woman. Later in the novel, her love for her baby brother is matched in intensity only by her hate for Carmody Braque, and both threaten to overwhelm her. When she goes to pick up Jacko from the babysitter's, Laura is overcome with love:

> When he looked up and laughed at her, Laura felt her throat go tight inside, and her nose started prickling high up between her eyes, so that she had to shut them to avoid public tears. It was an attack of love and she knew how to cope with it...simply shut it away inside herself until it dissolved into her blood again. (16)

However, at this early point in the novel, Laura is not aware that shutting it away inside herself is *not* the best way of coping with love. She has also shut away the love she has for her absent father, but in so doing, the pain from the divorce continues to fester. Her love of Jacko also brings her pain as, helpless, she watches him becoming increasingly and desperately ill. After the changeover, revelling in her new-found power, Laura attempts to vent the pain caused by love, through an outpouring of hate:

> On other occasions people she had loved had hurt her savagely, but she knew they had to be forgiven because she herself hoped to be forgiven, too. It was part of the human agreement. But Carmody Braque was not human and could be punished for his wickedness. With her commands exploding in his mind he would howl like a dog, fling himself in front of the earth-moving machinery, bite pieces out of his own arm or tear off his clothes and dance naked outside the school gate, and all people would think

> was that he had gone mad. But even taken to a hospital and cared for by doctors, he would never, never escape her revenge. Laura was offered a unique chance to discharge her own burden of human anguish and to strike at the powers of darkness, and no one would know. So now she sent a crisp command to him, and, like a man who finds a rope tightening under his very feet, Carmody Braque sprawled before her. (183-4)

The flurry of violently cruel images running through Laura's mind as she anticipates her revenge with grim satisfaction, presents us with a glimpse of the Terrible Goddess encountered in the three preceding novels. Having undergone the changeover, Laura is now a bona fide witch and part of the Triple Goddess, and she gloats in her power over her helpless victim. Laura does not yet understand that any attempt to "discharge her own burden of human anguish" through hate would result instead in a discharge of her own humanity, and that anguish is part and parcel of being human. At this point, saturated with supernatural power, intoxicated by hate and the desire for revenge, and having left behind Reason for irrational Energy, Laura is in imminent danger of sinking down to the lemure's level, and of having her humanity sucked from her, to be replaced instead with patriarchy's grotesque caricature of the Terrible Feminine.

Sorry Carlisle is also an important part of the love-hate dichotomy. Given to a foster-home by a mother who didn't want him yet simultaneously couldn't bear to lose sight of him entirely (92), Sorry grows up with a loving family until fate turns the tables and love is betrayed by hate. Upon losing

his job, Sorry's foster-father becomes increasingly abusive, singling out Sorry for being different. Sorry finds himself no longer a cherished son, but an object of hate. Sorry tells Laura, "I got sinister in every way to Tim--my foster father" (114). Sorry then relates the terrible beating he received from Tim that drove him to seek refuge at Janua Caeli, adding at the end:

> "I c-c-c-could h-have k-k-k-" Sorry was abruptly unable to speak. He frowned, closed his eyes and then said in a strained but calm voice, "I could have killed him but I was too sc-scared, and besides that, in my head he still felt like my f-father . . " (115)

Although Tim's mindless hate had effectively dissolved any father-son bond that was between them, love counterbalances Sorry's anger, fear and pain even when subjected to the most terrible abuse, preventing Sorry from lashing back: "he still felt like my f-father."

The trauma of this, however, leads Sorry to close off all emotion so he feels neither love nor hate. It is his subsequent, unsettling coldness that contributes to the rocky relationship between himself and Laura. Furious and repelled by Sorry's apparent unconcern for her ailing brother, Laura is also attracted to him. Mutual attraction grows gradually into love as Laura catches glimpses of the gentle, sensitive young man within the shell, and Sorry tentatively begins to re-enter the world of human emotion and love. By extending love, and inviting him to return it, Laura saves Sorry from retreating into the inhuman realm inhabited by Ygerna, Laurel and Carmody

Braque. As Winter tells Laura, "a witch without humanity is a black witch nine times out of ten" (93). Sorry, however, saves Laura from a similar fate. When she is tempted to surrender to hate, and exact terrible and cruel revenge on Carmody Braque, it is Sorry who gently points out that it is only her humanity--her love and compassion--that separates her from Carmody Braque: "I suppose he was a real man once, but he got stuck, and maybe what caught him was the same sort of choice that you've got" (187).

Human Existence

Mahy challenges the feminine myth as directly and deliberately as Laura challenges the lemure. It is, in a sense, a trial by fire: can an author of fantasy endow her heroine with supernatural powers long associated with feminine mystique, surround her with witches and ritual, confront her with that patriarchal bogeyman (or rather, bogey*woman*) the Terrible Goddess, and still have her arrive at the end of the novel with both her humanity and her power intact? It is a necessary trial, however, since as Mahy has apparently realized, the only other strategy for outrunning the feminine myth would be to avoid everything associated with it, specifically: any connections between female characters and the supernatural or the mysterious. This, of course, is not really an option, for one can hardly write a fantasy without

dipping into the supernatural somewhere along the way. The feminine myth and the White Goddess, patriarchal constructions or not, possess a very real power over our collective social psyche and cannot simply be swept under the carpet and avoided. Thus, Mahy wisely chooses to meet the Goddess on her own mythological turf.

However, in so doing, Mahy risks losing Laura to the feminine myth, where she would become a stereotyped image of the Terrible Goddess or the Primordial Feminine. The difficulties Mahy faces as a feminist fantasy writer trying to avoid the dehumanization of her protagonist are paralleled by the danger facing Laura as a result of the changeover: the loss of her humanity. As Winter tells Laura, "a witch without humanity is a black witch nine times out of ten" (93). Sorry's humanity, Winter tells Laura, is in jeopardy as he has sealed off all emotion after being abused in a foster-home (93). Winter and Miryam's humanity is also compromised by their entrenchment in witchcraft and the Goddess to the exclusion of society. Cold and aloof, sequestered in Janua Caeli, they have moved themselves to the fringes of the world. Sorry warns Laura, "Listen, don't let Winter con you into anything, will you? She's a tough proposition, old Winter, and she always thinks of her own advantage first" (105). In Winter, who always "thinks of her own advantage first," we have a hint of the cold ruthlessness that was the trademark of the goddess-figures of Ygerna and Laurel in *The Marrow of the*

World and *Fire and Hemlock* respectively--a quality that also surfaces in the female protagonists of those novels. After the changeover, the threat to Laura's own humanity grows as she nurses her hate for Carmody Braque, and gloats in her power over him. As with Polly, Linda and Alison, Laura's human identity is sometimes threatened by the momentary emergence of the Terrible Goddess.

The division and splintering of the female self as it is pulled between the Terrible Goddess and its own human consciousness, seems to be a subliminal occurrence in Garner, Nichols, and Jones, a side-effect of their unconscious use of the feminine myth. Interestingly, all of the novels, including Mahy's, feature adolescent girls. The acquisition of a new and mysterious body--the body of a woman--is accompanied by a dislocation or a splintering of self, Alison being perhaps the most wrenching example of this. In *The Owl Service*, *The Marrow of the World*, and *Fire and Hemlock*, the identity of the protagonist is gradually supplanted by that of the White Goddess. This erosion of the self, and its replacement with the frightening entity of the Goddess, coincides with the characters' imminent maturation, reinforcing the myth that Woman is frightening, dangerous and unknowable, and that when a girl crosses over the threshold from childhood to womanhood, she leaves behind her humanity and becomes instead a mystery. Because she is no longer the safe entity that she was in

childhood, society decrees that Woman must be corralled into neat, restrictive definitions that confine and control, or else be dissolved into that patriarchal catch-all, the White Goddess, in which she becomes *not-real*: a creature of the night fluttering uselessly against old attic walls.

In *The Owl Service* and *The Marrow of the World*, the question of identity and the fragmenting of the self are essentially unresolved. However, for Mahy, who reconfigures the myth according to a feminist consciousness, fragmentation becomes an important motif. Mahy acknowledges it--as have many others (H.D., Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath and Margaret Atwood are just a few examples)-- as a very real danger to anyone seeking to break away from convention, and engrained ways of thinking about and perceiving one's self.

Early on in the novel, splitting temporarily apart from one's self is portrayed as a non-destructive way of experiencing and connecting with the world:

> Laura usually enjoyed the bus ride up Kingsford Drive. It was slower and easier than the anxious morning rush. Often she felt a little of herself running out into houses and telegraph poles along the way, as if she were a blob of bright paint put down on wet paper, spreading out and dyeing the world with faint traces of her own colour, even as she took colour back from the world. This is what it feels like to be *this* shape, this size! Greenness feels like this! Every telegraph pole stood centered on a single leg gathering wires up, looping them over little stunted arms, and Laura felt her way into being a telegraph pole, or a roof rising to a ridge and butting against itself. (29-30)

The exclamation marks convey a sense of exuberance and a

celebration of self and of life. There is a heightened sense of awareness. The idea of the self being intimately interconnected with the world is a strongly feminine one, alluding to the ancient premise of a Great Mother whose body is both earth and universe, womb and grave (Campbell). Laura visualizes herself as a "blob of bright paint," reflecting her own view of herself as a vital and vibrant being, full of creative potential. She imagines "dyeing the world with faint traces of her own colour, even as she took colour back from the world." Laura knows she has "her own colour," that she is unique and has the power to make her own mark on the world, while acknowledging that the world will inevitably and simultaneously make its mark on her. There is the understanding of a reciprocal relationship.

However, when Laura receives her "warning" in Chapter One, this delicate balance is disrupted. A developing and changing self is different from a fragmenting self, and when the opposing forces in Laura's life suddenly surge to the forefront, she does not know how to reconcile them:

> But for Laura, who had come apart from the world, reconciliations were not easy. (6)

She is coming apart from the world of Western rationalism, science, and conventions. As Laura's perceptions are wrenched into a new awareness both of herself (in her new "blatantly female" body), and of the forces that both threaten and beckon her, she flounders in confusion and desperation:

> Now...now...she would begin to come apart. Now the

> first crack would begin between her eyes though no one would know it was there except Laura herself. (19)

The image of Laura cracking is weirdly reminiscent of *The Owl Service* in which the solid pebble-dash wall cracks, and eventually crumbles to reveal in its place the image of the Goddess. Later, the portrait of Blodeuwedd also disintegrates into nothingness. Faced with the supernatural in the form of lemures, and warnings that come inexplicably from inside herself, Laura faces the same danger as Alison: the crumbling of the self as it is replaced by the Goddess of the feminine myth, and subsequent annihilation. Laura begins to see herself in terms of "bits" ripped apart and cast adrift from the integrated whole:

> A week ago she had been complete and continuous, with a true face turned to the world, but now she had come entirely to bits. (119)

The reference to "a true face" brings up another important point already discussed in previous chapters: the idea of a false face, the face of the Goddess, superimposed upon those who tap into the power of the Primordial Feminine. Laura becomes aware of this the first time she visits Janua Caeli and meets Miryam and Winter: "The faces of the witches looked out through their own faces as if through masks of grey lace" (69). Similarly, Sorry has "Two distinct and contrary faces...tangled into one" (142). Sorry, and his mother and grandmother, are further examples of selves divided between the dictates of reality and the supernatural.

Laura herself becomes aware of a different self at the very beginning of the novel, immediately following her *warning* when she looks at herself in the mirror:

> Sometimes small alterations are more alarming than big ones. If Laura had been asked how she knew this reflection was not hers she could not have pointed out any alien feature. The hair was hers, and the eyes were hers, hedged around with the sooty lashes of which she was particularly proud. However, for all that, the face looked back at her from some mysterious place alive with fears and pleasures she could not entirely recognize. There was no doubt about it. The future was not only warning her, but enticing her as it did so. (4)

The face Laura sees is, of course, her future face as a witch, after the changeover. It is also the face of a young woman who is no longer a girl. We have seen in the previous novels how the faces of their protagonists were similarly overlaid by the visage of the Goddess. However, unlike Alison in *The Owl Service* who cannot differentiate between her own reflection and that of the White Goddess (Garner 83,94), and subsequently has no hope of identifying and reclaiming a self of her own, Laura sees her reflection in the mirror but immediately recognizes its differences. It is her awareness of herself as a unique individual with equally unique powers that ultimately enables Laura to remain rooted in her own human individuality rather than be absorbed, as was Alison, by patriarchy's construction of the Goddess.

Another difference between Laura and the heroines of the other novels is their physical appearance. Polly and Alison are both beautiful: blond and blue-eyed, mirroring the

mythological appearance of the White Goddess. Linda in *The Marrow of the World* is dark, but mirrors the darkly seductive figures of Morgan and Ygerna, the goddess-figures of that novel. By contrast, though attractive in her own way, Laura is not beautiful. She has "woolly, brown hair" (4) and has resigned herself to the fact that she has only two ways to wear it: long and woolly, or short and woolly (38). Laura mirrors no one but herself. It is only when she begins to be split apart that she loses her "true face," her continuity, and is at risk of going the same route as Alison.

The changeover becomes a major step in Laura's journey to achieve a self of her own. As the ritual begins, Laura looks in the mirror and sees

> her woolly hair a dark halo, glittering as if touched by gold dust, her eyes like black holes burnt into a smooth olive face. She licked her lips and would not have been surprised to see a serpent's tongue flicker between them, but it was her own tongue, surprising because it showed she was solid all the way through and not just a phantom created by Miryam and the night. (138)

The serpent has long been a symbol of the Goddess of the ancient matriarchal religions (Condren 8). As Laura begins to feel the primordial power of the Feminine course through her, she feels herself to be inhabited by the power of the Goddess, and so expects to see a serpent's tongue issuing from her own mouth. Alison in *The Owl Service* actually resembles an owl, with her sunglasses making "discs" of her eyes (41), her white knuckles clenching the sides of the chair like claws, and her neck thrust forward in the stance of a furious bird (420),

Laura has not yet been supplanted by the Terrible Goddess of the feminine myth for, although she half expects to, she does *not* in fact see a serpent's tongue. Thus, Laura's own patriarchal/mythological conditioning turns out to be benign. She finds herself instead to be "solid all the way through and not just a phantom created by Miryam and the night." She is solid because she is, and will remain, human. She will not become a phantom like Blodeuwedd, created by others, but will create herself. Miryam, giving Laura the cup of mulled wine, tells her to "drink it slowly, and make yourself into a woman of the moon" (137). She does *not* say, "let *it* make *you*" but rather invites Laura to make herself.

The allusion to the serpent, however, takes on another, more important significance. Mary Condren tell us that in addition to representing the Goddess and being a symbol of life and fertility, serpents were also "ideal symbols of the rebirth of nature every year" (8). Laura is about to undergo the changeover, during which she will be reborn, the allusion to the serpent's tongue foreshadows Laura's rebirth both as a woman and a witch.

The lengthy description of the changeover which follows is full of feminine imagery and symbolism (outlined and catalogued in detail by Josephine Raburn in "The Changeover: a fantasy of opposites") as Laura proceeds to "make" herself, confronting and overcoming the painful things in her life that had been pulling her apart. At the conclusion of Laura's

changeover, birth imagery predominates.

> At one moment she seemed to be climbing a wet, helical path leading upwards, but a sudden twitch in perspective made her see she was, in fact, climbing down. It grew so tight she began to despair..It suddenly occurred to her she was being born again and, as this thought formed, the helix took her as if it had become alive. She was held and expelled, moved in a great vice, believing her intransigent head with its burdens of thoughts, dreams and memory must split open, and she came out somewhere into darkness. (150-151)

The imagery of birth in this passage highlights Laura's autonomy. It recalls her earlier thoughts of Jacko who, to Laura, seems "in some way her own baby, a baby she would have one day, both born and unborn at the same time" (16). She is both aware and secure in this aspect of her femininity. In a sense, she has just given birth to herself, becoming mother, womb and infant in the same instant. Yet birth, while it is uniquely feminine, is also universally human. Everyone, male and female, must thrust his or her way along that "wet, helical path."

Thus the earlier theme of balance and the reconciliation of contraries resurfaces. Mahy is not afraid to dress the feminine in a little bit of mystery. Unwriting patriarchy's "feminine mystery," she *extends* the mysterious and the supernatural to encompass *all* life, male and female. As a result, the feminine is not segregated, banished to the fringes with the unreal, the unknowable and the not-quite-human, but instead becomes part of a greater, mysterious whole. Mahy uses the metaphor of the hologram to

convey this idea of interconnectedness:

> Quite suddenly Laura knew that what Sorry had once said was true. Like a holograph, every piece of the world contained the whole of the world if you stood at the right angle to it. (211)

Laura comes to this realization at the very end of the novel, once she has made herself new and whole. The opposing forces in her life have clicked together and spun into place, permitting the progression of Laura's life.

By the end of the novel attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, masculine and feminine have been reconciled. Laura's attraction and repulsion to Sorry as a witch gives way to love as she comes to know him as a person. Sorry reconciles Reason and Energy by deciding to use his strengths as a witch to aid him in the science of wildlife conservation (202). His gentle reasoning prevents Laura from succumbing to pure energy to avenge herself on Carmody Braque (185). Laura subsequently tempers hate with compassion in her dealings with the lemure, and so remains human, a more or less average adolescent, at home and happy with her family: "Laura, too, felt the beginning of an unexpected relief. Life would settle down again and she would have a little longer to be Kate's daughter and Jacko's sister" (205). Like each of us, Laura is both unique and ordinary, and we as readers identify with her a little more closely because of that. Laura also chooses not to give herself to Sorry, either sexually or in a promise of marriage, at least not yet. Although Sorry offers her some help and guidance throughout the novel, in the end

she achieves her goals, heals herself and others, and awakens a new power in herself, largely on her own (Raburn 37). However, the true success of this novel lies in Mahy's remarkable and unique even-handedness with regards to her presentation of the masculine and feminine in the characters of Laura and Sorry. By focusing as much on their similarities as their differences, by emphasizing their humanity as much, or more, than their gender, and by allowing us to see their failures as well as their strengths, she breaks down the barriers built up by myth. By celebrating human individuality, Mahy achieves the reconciliation of the sexes.

CONCLUSION

At One with the World: Re-reading, Re-writing, and Re-imagining the Myth of the White Goddess

A literary critic made the following observation in realistic fiction, "the characters are expressions of their world, whereas in fantasy the world is an expression of the characters" (Stephen Donaldson quoted in Sullivan 127). It is, indeed, a rather apt description of the relationship between the characters and the alternate worlds in the cross-worlds fantasies we have been discussing. The alternate world, inhabited and dominated by the Feminine, reiterates the separateness, the *difference*, of the female in patriarchal society. Aspects of the other world mirror the Primordial Feminine/Goddess as she is imagined and projected by the author. In *The Owl Service*, for example, the unpredictable power and fury of Blodeuwedd is complemented by the wild and natural world of the ancient Welsh valley. In the valley, Nature is a force which defies civilization. Isolation and the looming hills discourage visitors; storms put out electricity, down telephone lines, block roads, and make all modern modes of transportation useless (chapters 26-7). Even the grass is sharp and draws blood (14). Like Blodeuwedd, and in part *as* Blodeuwedd, the other world of the valley is saturated with the irrational power of Nature and a mysterious

"feminine" magic, threatening to quench masculine civilization and reason.

Although it may be, at times, both beautiful and exciting, the valley is not a particularly pleasant place to be. The vacationing English children feel isolated, and Roger, in particular, wishes he were elsewhere (53, 105). Nancy, the Welsh housekeeper, is especially loath to find herself again in the valley of her mysterious and tragic past:

> "I should never have come," said Nancy. "I shouldn't have come. It's not right. Never go back, boy. Never go back." (57)

The valley is at the fringes of the world--that "no man's land" to which the Feminine is banished. Nancy disappears (dissolves?) into the storm and the wilderness of the valley, while Blodeuwedd is diffused into flowers. The other world, like the White Goddess, is primitive and dangerous, while the masculine world of Western civilization counters and contains this disruptive feminine force, restoring order and comfort.

A similar situation occurs in *The Marrow of the World*, although the alternate world is not so relentlessly hostile. Again, the other world is Linda's world, and is strongly identified with the feminine. It is a primitive, pre-technological world with nature being the dominating element. For Linda, it is a sort of Greenworld, a distorted Eden, which she finds strangely touching and desirable while recognizing its dangers and the disturbing revelations it offers. The world is, in some ways, an expression of Linda who, with her

uncanny affinity with animals, is described as "wild" (3)--the new world in which the children find themselves is "wilder than anything Philip or Linda had ever seen" (35). Like Linda, it is alternately dangerous and nurturing; like Linda, it is isolated and "other," separated off from conventional definitions and understanding of reality. As in *The Owl Service*, this world also is potentially a place of banishment for the feminine, threatening Linda with separation from family and home.

In *Fire and Hemlock*, the alternate world is not so completely segregated from the conventional world. Rather, Laurel's world overlaps with modern society. Nevertheless, it remains unmistakeably the world of the White Goddess and reflects the persona of Laurel. Riding the train to Hudson House for the final show-down with Laurel, Polly looks out the window at an unfamiliar ocean:

> White surf was folding and smashing almost beside the rails, and a myriad dazzles flickered off the gray water stretching toward the sun.
>
> "Is it always like this?" she asked.
>
> "I think it varies," said Tom. "I've only ridden in Laurel's train once before. It was hills and desert then. Whatever suits her sense of humour, I think." (320)

Laurel's world is a world of illusion and deception, mirroring the feminine myth's view of the Primordial Feminine. As in the other novels, it is a world which defies logic and operates according to magic and nature; initially seductive and enticing, it ends up being a place from which one desires to escape. Significantly, the name Polly and Tom give to

Laurel's world is "Nowhere." Are we meant to surmise that *Nowhere* is a feminine space, and *Nowhere* is where feminine power and magic are permitted to exist? Again, Jones' word-play invites the reader down interesting avenues of thought.

In *The Changeover*, an alternate world offers itself to Laura in the form of Janua Caeli, the estate of the Carlisle witches. The property's most striking feature is its elaborate garden, with its hedges and trees trimmed into extraordinary shapes. In marked contrast to the grey concrete of the surrounding subdivision, it also emphasizes once again the traditional Nature-Feminine connection. Laura is also unique, standing out from those around her, as does Sorry, who perhaps stands out even more. By the end of the novel, both Laura and Sorry achieve a new level of experience, making their lives, in a sense, richer and more fertile than those around them--like the gardens next to the concrete. They learn to shape themselves, and the world around them, much as the trees in Janua Caeli have been shaped.

As the novel informs us, "Janua Caeli" means "the door of heaven" (212). Interestingly, and as a quick peek in a Latin-English dictionary will confirm, "janua," in certain cases, may also mean the gateway of death or the otherworld. As the dangers of the changeover, and the world it opens up to Laura, are revealed, it becomes clear that Janua Caeli may be just as easily the door to death as the door to heaven; and it is always the door to otherness. As in the other novels, it is

a world of feminine imagination, intuition and magic, but whether it shall be a world of death or rebirth is Laura's choice. Laura shapes her own alternate world, her own feminine space, in the ritual of the changeover. "You're inventing your own terrain" Sorry tells her (143). It reflects Laura's personal difficulties and her own struggle to overcome them, from the tree which bears, instead of apples, "the hearts of Aztec sacrifices" (146)--reflecting Laura's pain over her parents' divorce--to the constricting, wet tunnel that signifies Laura's rebirth (150). Her surroundings also become an expression of her passion as she kisses Sorry:

> Thunder munched around the edge of the clouded sky.
> Sorry looked up and smiled
> "I love your sound-effects," he said. (144)

More successfully than either Miryam or Winter, Sorry and Laura manage to incorporate the world of Janua Caeli, and a unique aspect of themselves, into the modern, every-day world. Thus, unlike the protagonists in the other cross-worlds fantasies, they are not forced to choose between two worlds, nor to disown the part of themselves the other world represents; rather, both worlds merge to give the protagonists a new and deeper experience of life.

In the novels where patriarchal conditioning and the feminine myth are firmly engrained in the author's unconscious, the feminine continues to be portrayed with a certain amount of suspicion and superstition. The alternate

world is subsequently presided over by the White Goddess. When the female characters become empowered by their connection with the alternate world, they too are portrayed negatively, becoming frightening and dangerous. The conflict is resolved when the White Goddess is destroyed, vanquished or banished, and the character's connection with her is broken. The female protagonist, like Linda in *The Marrow of the World,* can then return meekly to the eminently more proper and desirable patriarchal world, happily powerless once again.

It should be noted, however, that these patriarchal novels, by including a feminine element at all, stand in contrast to earlier classic children's fantasies, such as *The Wind in the Willows*, *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. Graves' *The White Goddess*, while certainly non-feminist, does make an eloquent argument for the importance of the Feminine to literature, which may explain why so many authors of a certain generation responded so warmly to Graves despite his biases. Garner and Nichols are both obviously influenced by Tolkien, and their adoption of Graves' White Goddess, non-feminist though it is, may indicate their stuggle to cope with Tolkien's oppressive views of gender.[8] Yet their adherence to this artificial, masculine view of the feminine, simultaneously reverent and misogynistic, results in a confused and contrived representation of the feminine, and

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[8] I would like to acknowledge the suggestions and insightful comments of Dr. Margot Louis on this subject.

female characters who are flat and stereotyped because they are not permitted to develop beyond the parameters set by Graves.

Progressing through these four novels, we can see a gradual revisioning of the feminine myth, from the most reductive, oppressive image of the White Goddess to a celebration of feminine strength and sensibilities. In *The Owl Service*, the oldest novel, and the only one to be written by a man, we find a very two-dimensional image of the White Goddess: supernatural, subhuman, mindless, and destructive--an image that extends to include all of the other female characters in that book. The *Marrow of the World* presents us with a goddess-figure who is similarly destructive and frightening, but also self-conscious and intelligent. Nevertheless, Ygerna remains essentially a stock character, subhuman, with little personality or depth. Her persona is closely linked with Linda's, and the only way Linda can break the association with the Terrible Feminine is to forsake her world and her nature. Laurel, in *Fire and Hemlock,* is yet a more sophisticated version of the White Goddess. Cold and calculating, beautiful and fatally seductive, she is a chilling and effective presence in the novel. Polly too is overlaid with Laurel's power and identity, but only temporarily. Showing more strength and personality than Alison or Linda, Polly reclaims both her identity and her lover from Laurel, outsmarting (but not overthrowing) the

White Goddess. In Mahy's *The Changeover*, the White Goddess does not exist as a separate character or villain, but as the latent dark side of every person, male and female. There is a supernatural feminine presence in the novel, however, though it corresponds more closely to the celebratory, benevolent Great Mother described by Merlin Stone, Starhawk, and other "New Age" thinkers. Laura's identity changes, not because it is being taken over by an external, malevolent goddess-figure, but rather through her own self-initiated development into a "daughter of the moon." The feminine myth is broken down, and masculine and feminine are reconciled as Mahy invites us to contemplate instead the delightful mysteries of just being human. It is, to use a phrase coined by Sandra Gilbert, a "bracingly ontological" novel.

The purpose of this paper, then, was not to convince authors and readers that we must cross out the White Goddess as an invalid and inappropriate myth; or that we should erase her from any pages that may shape young imaginations. The myth of the White Goddess is, in its own way, rich and colourful and not without literary and imaginative value. However, there is no law saying we can not reinterpret and re-envision myth; it is neither sacred nor written in stone, and was never meant to be static, no matter how indignantly some might protest to the contrary (McCabe 42). Northrop Frye writes:

> Unconsciously acquired social mythology of prejudice and conditioning, is clearly also

> something to be outgrown. . .Genuine social mythology, whether religious or secular, is also to be transcended, but transcendence here does not mean repudiating or getting rid of it, except in special cases. It means rather an individual recreation of the mythology, a transforming of it from accepted social values into the axioms of one's own activity. (170)

Annette Kolodny, writing from a specifically feminist point of view, makes a similar point:

> But we cannot forget that the images of nature-as-Woman or Woman-as-Muse once held their own kinds of truths and worked forcefully within our shared cultural psyches; as such, they will always be with us--an inheritance from our past, not to be annihilated or forgotten, but, with a new consciousness of their less attractive implications, to be transcended, superseded, or even subsumed into something else. Hopefully, into patterns and images more satisfying to *all* of us, whatever our sex or sexuality. (91)

By becoming conscious of our mythological conditioning, both in the way we read and in the way we write, we can recognize, rename, and redefine the White Goddess inside ourselves.

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