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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Searching the Female Text in Sinclair Ross, Denise Boucher and Pol Pelletier

BY

© Catherine May McLaughlin

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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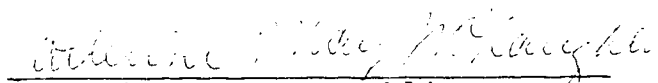

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Searching the Female Text in Sinclair Ross, Denise Boucher and Pol Pelletier" submitted by Catherine May McLaughlin in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Univ. Professor E.D. Blodgett, supervisor

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Assoc. Professor Claudine Potvin

June 15, 1994

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated, with deep love and gratitude, to the memory of my parents, Margaret Jane and Michael Patrick McLaughlin.

Abstract

Mythologists like Joseph Campbell, Barbara G. Walker, Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant, J.E. Cirlot and Northrop Frye have identified the existence of myths detailing the exploits of goddesses and their repeatedly sacrificed and reborn sons and consorts. These stories can be found, often in inverted form, in patriarchal texts like the Bible and Greek myths. The goddess legends are also extensively alluded to in the Canadian works examined in this thesis, which comprise Sinclair Ross's novels *As For Me and My House*, *The Well*, *Whir of Gold*, and *Sawbones Memorial*; Denise Boucher's play *Les fées ont soif*; and Pol Pelletier's play *La lumière blanche*.

Sacrifice of a god, the son/consort of the goddess, is central to the goddess myths; creation, according to Cirlot, is sacrifice's ultimate aim. In Ross's novels, sons, aided by wives or mothers, replace husbands and fathers. However, Ross's works also allude to the patriarchal palimpsest in which mythologists find the goddess legends: despite their mythically ascribed capabilities, wives and mothers in these novels remain mired in patriarchal roles, their talents sacrificed. Similarly, *Les fées ont soif* hints at the goddess origins of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene; in so doing the play recalls the suppression and inversion of such origins in biblical and church texts. Indeed, church and court conspire against the play's Mary Magdalene figure in a symbolic re-enactment of that suppression. The stakes are

again raised to a metatextual level: the stories of the goddesses come to represent stories of female power and experience erased from the patriarchal canon.

In Pelletier's *La lumière blanche*, goddess allusions again abound, and patriarchy's limitations are once more painfully met; as in *Les fées ont soif*, a female character is openly sacrificed. However, the play refuses to pit patriarchy against matriarchy, seeking rather to deconstruct both ideologies, to break apart and re-examine gender roles: those assigned both to patriarchal heroes *and* to goddesses. Writing emerges from this iconoclasm. Indeed, the production of texts serves as a measure of renewal in all of the works studied in this thesis. In *La lumière blanche*, in nearly all of Ross's novels and in *Les fées ont soif*, female-created texts detailing womanly experience take form alongside, or indeed out of, stories of repression, indicating that sacrifice's drive towards creation has not been futile.

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Introduction

> A characteristic of ancient mythology is the idea that each reign must give way to another, even on the plane of the divine; it was an idea which was inextricably bound up with the notion of life as continuity and succession, and of sacrifice as the sole source of re-creation. The successive cosmic reigns of Uranus, Saturn and Jupiter provided a model for earthly government, for the 'ritual assassination of the king' at certain astral conjunctions or at the end of certain periods, and later for the displacement of this bloody ceremony by its simulacra. In Rome, the Saturnalia was the most outstanding example of such sacrifice and simulacra. Frazer notes that it was a general practice in ancient Italy to elect a man to play the part of Saturn and enjoy all the prerogatives of the god for a while before dying either by his own hand or by sacrifice. The principal figure in the Carnival festival is a burlesque image and a direct successor of the old king of the Saturnalia. (Cirlot 279)

> The cycle presided over by the earth-mother of *natura naturans* is, in Plato's phrase, the cycle of the different, the life that emerges being always different from the life that gave birth to it. Hence the emphasis on renewal and the obliterating of the past. Eventually, as society becomes more complex, mythology expands toward the conception of *natura naturata*, nature as a structure or system; and the symbolism of cyclical movement shifts to the sky. This is because the sky illustrates rather the cycle of the same, it being clearly the same sun that comes up the next morning, the same moon that returns from the dark. Such a cycle suggests planning and intelligence rather than mysterious power, and as this sense begins to dominate mythology the supreme god comes to be thought of increasingly as a sky-father. He is a father because he is a deity who does not bear or nurse his children, and hence a god who *makes* the world rather than one who brings life into existence by giving it birth. (Frye 69)

E.D. Blodgett identifies "a thematics of sacrifice" in the anglophone novels given the Governor General's Award (1993, 13). Among early winners of the prize, notes

Blodgett, "[t]he scene is one of almost unrelieved tragic peripeties that perceive a future of dubious outcome. All seem to agree that life will be hard, and worse, it will be stodgy" (1993, 2). In this thesis I interpret sacrifice not simply as a tragic reversal of fortune, but as fortune itself, as Saturnalia, as the necessary, mythically encoded means to renewal, which is the goal, or the putative goal, of the cyclical myths of regeneration which unfold in the works under examination here. These are the four novels of Sinclair Ross and, moving out of the anglophone sphere, two feminist plays from Quebec, Denise Boucher's *Les fées ont soif* and Pol Pelletier's *La lumière blanche*. The plays, and Ross's *As For Me and My House*, *The Well*, *Whir of Gold*, and *Sawbones Memorial*, are permeated with the mythology of sacrifice, with allusions to the divine personnages Northrop Frye generalizes as the "earth-goddess" and

> her subordinate, usually male, companion who represents the cycle of life and death itself, as she represents the continuing process underlying it. This companion may be her son, her lover, or a 'dying god,' a victim either of herself or of some aspect of the 'dead' time of the year, whether winter or the late summer drought. (69)

I contend that such cyclical cosmologies underly Ross's works and the two plays, sacrifice being mythically, and dramatically, in the case of the works studied here, the hub

of the wheel, the machine which insures continuation of the cycle. However, whether such continuation means renewal is a point which, I believe, the novels of Ross dispute.

Indeed, what of benchmarks? How to gauge renewal? "The central idea of cosmogonies is that of 'the primordial sacrifice,'" suggests Cirlot (276). "Inverting the concept, we can deduce that there is no creation without sacrifice" (276). Creation, then, might prove a measure of the success of sacrifice within these works. Besides sharing allusions to the mythic stories of cyclic renewal, each of these works contains a text or texts within its text: a diary, prayers, songs, memories; a letter, a will, a newspaper article. I believe this is not coincidental: according to critics like Joseph Campbell, Adrienne Munich and Christine Froula, the myths of cyclic renewal are themselves to be found buried within other, patriarchal texts like the book of Genesis. As Campbell notes,

> [n]o one familiar with the mythologies of the goddess of the primitive, ancient, and Oriental worlds can turn to the Bible without recognizing counterparts on every page, transformed, however, to render an argument contrary to the older faiths. In Eve's scene at the tree, for example, nothing is said to indicate that the serpent who appeared and spoke to her was a deity in his own right, who had been revered in the Levant for at

> least seven thousand years before the composition of the Book of Genesis. (Campbell 9; see Froula 1988, 201)

This is metatextual fare, a business of revision and exegesis which calls to mind the status of both Bible and myth as texts. Indeed, suggests Campbell,

> there is . . . an ambivalence inherent in many of the basic symbols of the Bible that no amount of rhetorical stress on the patriarchal interpretation can suppress. They address a pictorial message to the heart that exactly reverses the verbal message addressed to the brain; and this nervous discord inhabits both Christianity and Islam as well as Judaism, since they too share in the legacy of the Old Testament. (17)

Significantly, Campbell mentions Genesis above, wherein not simply objects and animals and people are made, but the names for these things are formed, language itself created. Herein enters nervous discord: Adrienne Munich, who examines gender and language, asserts that the creation story recognizes "the power of the word over creation . . ." (239), and turns that power over to Adam. "By naming creation, he possessed for himself language's power. To validate further his authority and to avoid possible controversy, he performed these acts before Eve was created"

(238). "Usually," however, "the first namer is female," suggests Munich (241). Citing Dinnerstein (1976) and Chodorow (1978), Munich indicates further that

> [m]others convey names to children; the metalepsis suggests that their nearly absolute pedagogic control over the years of infancy, when people learn words, threatens male dominance. . . . The violence of the wish to obliterate women's role in language-making is masked by denial. Denying her existence absolves the text of its violence. (241)

However, suggests the critic, the very violence of this denial proves the existence of a "female presence" (241) and that "female authority occasions the myth" (242), at least this "gender-polarized" version of it (242). Munich, noting the work of Phyllis Trible (1973), asserts that

> patriarchal interpretation has made a generic word--*'adham*, meaning 'humanity'--into a male proper name. As Casey Miller and Kate Swift report, *adamah* (soil or earth) is a feminine noun, suggesting a derivation from a Hebrew concept of mother earth (1976, pp. 150-1). Interpretation, then, has taken an idea, possibly more female than male, polarized the genders, and then erased the female. (242; see Froula 1988, 197-201)

I argue that female erasure from texts and text-making,

and its opposite, female authorship, is a measure of sacrificial failure or creative achievement in the works examined in this thesis. As Munich explains, in order to deny Eve the creative power of the word, she was erased from the words--from the text of creation itself. Where goddess myths are to be found buried within other texts is also to be found, therefore, an allusion to this textual dynamic. Texts themselves, and their relationships to the texts they enclose, become an object of study. The myths recuperate Eve's creativity and her role in language-making: female authorship of the prayers, songs, letter, will, article and other texts within the novels and plays would seem, therefore, to restore in like manner a creative power to female characters. Thus the fate of those texts within texts and the extent of their female creative input will be under scrutiny.[1] Indeed, rather than entering a theological debate on the veracity of goddess existence or the truth of the myths themselves, a debate which is well beyond the scope of the thesis, I choose to maintain argument at this metatextual level, looking at goddess-centered stories as ancient plots which detail the creative and destructive exploits of powerful female characters: the reworking of these tales in the novels and plays under examination here witnesses to that same power.

The difference in genres, novels versus plays, argues against combining Ross's works with Quebec feminist drama.

However, references to drama in Ross are nearly as plentiful as mythic allusions. *As For Me and My House* plays out in front of "a quivering backdrop, before which was about to be enacted some grim, primeval tragedy" (78). Protagonist Chris Rowe of *The Well* is an actor: he lives under an alias (4), "pose[s]" (8), "play[s]" (53), is "[i]ndiscriminate in his need for someone to see him and be amazed . . ." (45). Sonny McAlpine of *Whir of Gold* is an unemployed musician, a performer who takes part in a small-time heist as if he were a "last-minute substitute" in a "well-rehearsed play" (138). *Sawbones Memorial* is comprised entirely of dialogue and interior monologue which much resemble action and soliloquy presented on a stage (see McMullen 118, 129). There is also a plethora of repeated names among the novels, in addition to people and animals whose reappearances throughout the four works encourage a view of these characters as stock figures.[2] The presence of Larson and Lawson, two Coras, two Minnies, Lona Painter, Mrs. Painter and Mrs. Paynter, plus a crew of motherly wives, son-consorts, musicians, horse-goddesses, goddess-horses, and, significantly, the stage luminaries Harlequin and the Doctor (see Bakhtin 35, Oreglia 56-70, 84-91), turn the four novels, read as a quartet, into commedia dell'arte, carnival's stage descendant (Bakhtin 34). Indeed Paul Comeau suggests Ross's stories and his four novels follow "an almost classical progression through tragedy to irony and comedy, broadly

paralleling human emotional development from the expectancy of youth through the disillusionment of middle years to the acquiescence of old age" (183). E.F. Dyck asserts Ross's "mode, at least in the best of his novels, is dramatic as much as narrative (the diary voice of Mrs. Bentley in *As For Me and My House*, for instance, is a prelude to the more overt dramatic structure of *Sawbones Memorial*, 1974)" (xi). Finally, John J. White, in his book *Mythology in the Modern Novel*, goes some way toward suggesting that myth and drama are quite alike (25-6).[3] He notes that a myth "is little more really than the equivalent of a simple plot. . . . Its essential quality is that of a basic configuration of actions" (25). On a mythic level, the same configuration of actions, the same drama--the figurative sacrifice of a god--occurs in different fashions in all of Ross's novels and in both of the plays.

It might seem that *Les fées ont soif* and *La lumière blanche* will be exploited here as mythic and dramatic illuminators of Ross, allusive kin but ideological foils which inevitably get to point out--reward for their exploitation--Ross's failure to be a feminist. Not so. Significant here is Frye's account of a metaphor shift in mythology from concentration on the earth mother, natura naturans, to veneration of a sky-father, natura naturata, cited above. According to Frye, this was a necessary transformation:

> The maleness of God seems to be connected with the Bible's resistance to the notion of a containing cycle of fate or inevitability as the highest category that our minds can conceive. All such cycles are suggested by nature, and are contained within nature--which is why it is so easy to think of nature as Mother Nature. But as long as we remain within her cycle we are unborn embryos. (107)

Ross's male characters seem to have made the same metaphorical adjustment. Lorraine McMullen suggests that the author's "most persistent themes" are "the problems of the artist and the search for a son . . ." (9), while Dick Harrison notes that the "disappearing father" is a major focus in western Canadian fiction and in Ross's work (188). In *Sawbones Memorial,* for instance, Doc Hunter is "surrogate father" to Nick and Duncan (Harrison 188); in *As For Me and My House* Philip spends his life

> trying to live up to, yet live down, his heritage, and in the orphan boy Steve he evidently sees an opportunity to set another generation to work at the same fruitless task. In *The Well* old Larson attempts to make a son of the young drifter Chris in response to his own needs. For Ross, in fact, the failure of any natural father-son relationship is a major concern and one of his most consistent

> themes long before the disappearing father becomes a feature of contemporary fiction. (Harrison 188-9)

The flip side of the search for fathers, is, for Philip Bentley, Chris Rowe, Sonny McAlpine and Doc Hunter, the quest to get rid of mothers, and their incarnations as wives and female lovers. Indeed, David Stouck notes of *As For Me and My House* that "Philip's desire to duplicate his father's life is what binds the Bentleys together in such a negative mesh and gives their story a logical inevitability. His aversion for his mother extends to all women and accounts for the narrator's hopeless situation" (144-5; cf. Weis 36). "The same situation," asserts Stouck, "occurs in *The Well*. At the end of the novel the mother-lover figure, Sylvia, who has persuaded Chris to kill her husband, says to him, when he decides to turn himself over to the police: 'You'd rather take the rope than me'" (Stouck 145, note 6; cites Ross 256). The earth-mother's "containing cycle of fate or inevitability" (see above) looms: we must, after all, "break from" our mothers, says Frye, "in order to get born at all" (108). Yet Ross's novels do not stint on showing the circumscription of women's lives in motherly and wifely roles. Patriarchy, the cycle of the same (see Frye 69), prevails in these works, and it fails both men and women. Women are accorded mythic powers of manipulation, yet seem content to operate within, indeed to uphold patriarchal

structures.[4] Myth and sacrifice thus become ironic: no Saturnalian role reversal or carnivalesque upending of hierarchy occurs. There is a hint of rapprochement between the sexes in *Sawbones Memorial*, in the form of the cooperative husband and wife reporter team of Nellie and Dan Furby, but by and large men and women remain distanced and male and female roles firmly cemented in these novels.[5]

How then to account for the goddess mythology which the novels contain? Again, a return to the metatextual dynamic is useful. Like Campbell and Munich, Christine Froula considers Genesis an "act of naming" (1988, 201) in which naming itself is at issue. "Adam's naming," like that of the author of Genesis, "seeks to counterbalance woman's visible privilege of maternal creativity in nature with a morphologically mimetic act of male creativity in the symbolic realm" (1988, 201). Froula asserts the tenacity of such a project: discussing Jacques Derrida's analysis of a "commentary on Genesis" by Emmanuel Levinas (1988, 208), Froula points out Derrida's own "repression of . . . the name of the mother . . ." (1988, 209), and suggests that ". . . the internalized fathers defend against that unnameable threat, woman as natural *and* cultural creator . . ." (1988, 209). Perhaps Frye, seeking a break from mothers, and Ross, inscribing his heroines as failed goddesses, are also listening to their internalized cultural fathers: ". . . the male writer who ventures unbelief

either risks his own empowerment by the father's law or has to reimagine the ground of his own authority" (Froula 1988, 198). However, the texts, again, are the thing: possibly Sinclair Ross, but certainly Philip Bentley, Chris Rowe, Old Larson, Sonny McAlpine and Doc Hunter swear fealty to the father's law. Meanwhile, however, texts by and about women inscribed in the novels of Ross question that Genesis-given ground of male authority and give names--Mrs. Bentley, Sylvia, Madeleine, Anna, Nellie--to the "threat" of female creation.

Perhaps then the greatest difference between Ross, on the one hand, and Boucher and Pelletier on the other, is not genre or ideology but a greater faith on the part of the Quebec writers in the possibility and efficacy of obliterating the past. The plays are explicitly carnivalesque, indeed Saturnalian works: through bawdy humour and, crucially, sacrifice, they try to topple patriarchy and to give birth to a different society. However, Boucher's success is, I contend, questionable. Her triad of characters fail at times to include themselves in the humour; the carnival atmosphere dissipates and with it, Bakhtin's promise of laughing regeneration (see Bakhtin 1-58). The play's final call to imagine a new world is expressed as a command: the sense is not of renewal, but of the installation of new power brokers. In Pelletier, however, the figurative dismemberment of the play's central

character exemplifies Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque, wherein death is "part of life as a whole--its indispensable component, the condition of its constant renewal and rejuvenation" (50). Indeed in the dung heap where the feminist Torregrossa ends up there are "vers," worms and words, and where these are, there also is "Torregrossa," reborn (Pelletier 104). Together they make compost of the past and spread it on next year's garden. Where Ross sees only another crop failure? and Boucher blames the gardeners, Pelletier works to replenish the soil.

Notes

1. Annette Kolodny's article "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts" is useful here in its treatment of female strategies of reading and interpretation, which have implications for female authorship and reception of female-authored texts among women and the larger reading community. The examinations by Munich and Froula (1988) of female characters and authors are also very influential. Munich's article looks at female characters in both male and female-authored works and argues against dismissing male-authored works (cf. Munich 244-257). Froula (1988) examines male and female-authored discussion or "rewritings" (197) of Genesis by Harold Bloom, Jacques Derrida, Mieke Bal, Clarice Lispector ("The Message") and Virginia Woolf (*The Voyage Out*, *To the Lighthouse*, *The Waves*, and *Between the Acts)*. Her work provides a model for my own search for allusions to Genesis and goddess mythology in the texts examined here. Another Froula article, "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy" (1983) details reading strategies which uncover not simply patriarchal biases in canonical texts but betrayals of the encoding of such biases in those very texts (cf. 324, 326, 329, 332, 333, 335, 337-8, 339).

2. George Woodcock, similarly, detects allusions in Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* to the *Odyssey*, and describes the presence of "symbolic characters that will recur in various permutations in his later novels . . ." (1970, 14). David Stouck links Sonny McAlpine, Philip Bentley, Chris Rowe and the protagonists of two of Ross's short stories (143-4), suggesting that these characters represent the "hero-as-failed-artist in various guises . . ." (144, note 4; cf. 144). Sandra Djwa notes forerunners of the characters of *As For Me and My House* in Ross's short stories (49).

3. More accurately, White notes Howard S. Nemerov's "approximate identification of myth with drama and hence plot . . ." (White 25; cf. 25-6 for his quotation of Nemerov's *The Quester Hero: Myth as Universal Symbol in the Works of Thomas Mann*. Harvard, 1940. p. 3).

4. Munich calls "the silence of Eve" complicitous (255): "What is women's stake in acquiesence? Why doesn't Eve object to Adam's usurpation? Why does she accept the image of absence?" (256). Munich suggests of Eve and the protagonist Nel of Toni Morrison's novel *Sula* that, "[a]lthough undoubtedly strategies for survival in a misogynist culture, theirs are none the less the aspirations of the courtier or of the one who rocks the cradle in order

to rule the world" (256).

5. Weis notes the theme of "alienation . . . between people" in Ross's works, "usually men and women" (25; cf. 29, 30-3, 36-7).

6. Weis discusses the "'failed harvest' motif" in Ross's works (29; cf. 13-19, 29, 31, 32, 34-5), an indicator of "social" and "sexual" "isolation" and "alienation" (29). "Since not all Ross characters are farmers, he uses a 'failed harvest' motif to unite the different stories, so that human endeavor resembles the sowing, and hoped for reaping, of a harvest" (29).

Chapter One

In my introduction I posed sacrifice as the thread which binds the works discussed in this thesis: specifically, I examined sacrifice as it is figured in cyclic myths of renewal, in stories of goddesses and dying gods. Drama is also important here as an amplifier of myth, as an outline of its plot, and as a stage descendant and celebrant of the old stories. Before beginning my discussion of the mythic, sacrificial and dramatic world of Sinclair Ross's first novel, *As For Me and My House*, I wish to briefly summarize some of the sources from which this discussion stems.

1. Myth

A number of critics have discerned the presence of myth in *As For Me and My House*.[1] Paul Denham calls the work a "powerfully mythical novel" (117), which could be read as "a symbolic account--closer to *The Double Hook* than to *Fruits of the Earth* . . ." (118). Barbara Godard asserts that the text, "[l]ike Joyce's *Ulysses* or Watson's *The Double Hook*, . . . is founded on the juxtaposition of myth and muddled human life" (122). Signalling the presence of a story of sacrifice, Godard suggests that Ross

> has created a religious portrait in this story of a Holy Family. Though they may follow false gods and create idolatrous images, the echos [sic] of Christ's birth in young Philip's illegitimate

> origins invoke the Biblical myth of both Israelites and Christians. (137)

While George Woodcock detects in the book a kind of Dantesque "Hell," complete with "concentric circles" (1990, 31), Ken Mitchell, in contrast, senses an "anti-Church creed" in the novel (and "in much of [Ross's] work") (48).[2] Indeed, Donald Stephens says that Mrs. Bentley "almost envisions herself as a goddess, all-seeing . . ." (21). For his part, David Williams considers that Mrs. Bentley "is one of those who hate the 'land for which ye did not labour' (Joshua xxiv. 13) and has not 'put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt' (v. 14) . . .'" (164).[3] Paul Comeau, on a similar note, points out teacher/amateur etymologist Paul Kirby's statement in the text that the impulse to assert one's own self-importance "'is the source of all religion'" (Ross 26 in Comeau 179). The critic obliquely suggests that Mrs. Bentley deifies her husband in an attempt to overcome her own "insignificance": ". . . by clinging to Philip she ironically clings to religion as tenaciously as the poor farmers at Partridge Hill," a perpetually drought stricken area in preacher Philip's new parish (Comeau 179). Barbara Mitchell describes Partridge Hill as "pagan country" (52), a site where the social strictures of the town are unknown and the Bentleys "can be themselves . . ." (52). Paul Kirby officiates here, at what Mitchell describes as a "pagan

rite" (52).[4] Via his horse Harlequin, Paul becomes a "sort of Shakespearean fool" (48), a possessor of a "pagan spirit" (59), and a role and rule breaker: "Paul's atypical emotionalism awakens in Mrs. Bentley a recognition of a need to reassess her conventional definition of male and female . . ." (51). Though she does not state it baldly, Barbara Mitchell signals Paul and Harlequin' as carnivalesque figures--as challengers of Church and other official cultures (cf. Bahktin 8-12).[5]

2. Sacrifice

Like a number of the critics noted above, Linda Jane Rogers sees a blend of pagan and biblical influences in the novel. Rogers counts a need for "symbolic sacrifice and redemption" a characteristic of a number of prairie novels, including *As For Me and My House* (93), and very directly links myth to sacrifice in the latter. She suggests "the rhythm of the diary echoes biblical cadences . . ." (44). The Bentleys, the critic asserts, adhere to a "doctrine of salvation through sacrifice, a notion which is focused in the symbolic offering of Judith and the psychological self-flagellation and false martyrdom of both Mr. and Mrs. Bentley" (12; see 51). Rogers suggests that Mrs. Bentley "wants to be the earth mother, manipulating husband and step-son in a world she has created. It is ironic that she lacks the capacity to give life. Her only child was born dead" (45). The diarist, asserts Rogers, "is a destroyer,

not a creator. The real white goddess is Judith and Mrs. Bentley is unable to undermine what she is, either in life or death" (45). Judith, Philip Bentley's doomed paramour, ". . . is the small town's offering to the angry gods. . . . Her death culminates the puritanical motif of sacrifice in the novel. Death, in the case of Judith and of all mankind, means continuing life" (55). Indeed, "[h]er real martyrdom is an ironic comment on the false martyrdom of the minister's wife. She is the El Greco madonna, the real earth mother, whose life and death consummates the marriage between heaven and earth" (55).

Like Rogers, several critics consider Judith the novel's sacrificial lamb. Ken Mitchell speaks of Judith's "'crucifixion'" and her "Christ-like martyrdom" (49); Ellen Tone Prytz notes of the young woman that, "Christ-like, she is sacrificed so that Philip can be reborn. There is nothing left for her but to retreat to the wilderness from whence she came and let nature work its will" (79)--"significantly," says Prytz, Judith dies in the fields (79, cf. 54). Lorraine McMullen brings the notion of divine vengeance into Judith's sacrifice, suggesting that although "art replaces religion as a spiritual and creative force" in Ross's work (139), the author reserves "harsh punishment for his erring characters at the hands of some cosmic power"--witness, notes McMullen, Judith's fate (140). Dick Harrison names Judith a victim of sacrifice and includes *As For Me*

and My House in the following summary of 1930's prairie fiction, post Frederick Philip Grove:

> Possibly the bitterness of the 1930's brought out the need for human sacrifice. Man clearly has had a responsibility for his disharmony with nature; the world which had been disordered in Grove's fiction is now beyond remedy. It demands ritual atonement. (127)[7]

Other critical nominees for sacrificial victim include Steve (Prytz 36); Philip, whom David Stouck suggests is Christ-like (148);[8] and Mrs. Bentley herself. Roy Daniells suggests that

> in her [Mrs. Bentley] the principle of self-sacrifice out of love and a desire for reconciliation shines in all its pristine Puritan beauty. And with an added pathos suited to this later age, she is Eve comforting Adam after a fall in which she has played no contributory part. (vii; cf. Barbara Mitchell 54, 55, 56, 59; Prytz 6)

Lorraine M. York notes that Paul Kirby outlines

> a concept which is at the very heart of *As For Me and My House*: 'Did you know that offertory comes from a word meaning sacrifice?' Not only Mrs. Bentley's acceptance of Judith's baby, but Paul's silent love for Mrs. Bentley will prove major

> instances of sacrifice in the novel. (York 170-1; cf. Barbara Mitchell 52; quotation is from Ross 11)[9]

A greater number of critics, however, see Mrs. Bentley as the agent, not the victim, of sacrifice. They speak of Mrs. Bentley's possessiveness (Williams 159; McMullen 87; Stouck 145-6; John Moss 1991, 143), her power (Jackel 51; Stouck 145) and her manipulative tendencies (John Moss 1974, 151; Prytz 45, 53, 54; Stouck 149; Woodcock 1990, 46; Rogers 44, 46, 47; John Moss 1991, 147; McMullen 83, 87; Compton 68; New 26, 31; Stephens 23; Godard 131; Wilson 28; Djwa 59; Banting 38). Stephens, diplomatically, suggests there are "ambiguities" in her character (21). A most prominent critical voice here is that of Wilfred Cude, who considers Mrs. Bentley a "high priestess of hypocrisy" (1979, 484). Cude detects in the diarist "a deliberate tendency to manipulate other people into carrying out her wishes" (1973, 8).[10] However, Helen Buss mitigates this judgment by suggesting that the narrator, as

> patriarchal woman, given (and accepting) only the narrow private world in which to exercise her creativity, uses what she has, in the way a male artist might use the larger world at his disposal, as material for the realization of the self. (198; see 190-208)

Buss continues: "What life offers her are individuals whose

propensities and needs she observes and integrates into her own reality construct" (198)--individuals like Judith and Philip (197-8).[11] Nonetheless, "although Mrs. Bentley is an artist shaping the material life she presents, she is no god, not even the powerful castrating witch of patriarchal fears" (198-99). Certainly "[f]emale creativity, not permitted its full expression anywhere else than in motherhood can seem demonic" (Buss 205). Anne Compton, similarly, asserts that

> . . . Mrs. Bentley's journal reveals her experience of powerlessness while recording at the same time an exercise of power which is in its nature 'tyrannically capricious,' a malignant form of power, which as Mary Wollstonecraft notes, arises in powerlessness. (68)[12]

Indeed, says Compton, ". . . if she is manipulative, it is because she is hopelessly oppressed. The oppressors are spatial, temporal, physical, domestic, and marital" (68). Margaret Atwood also hints at a balance of power and victimhood in Mrs. Bentley. In her book *Survival*, she notes Robert Graves's discussion of the goddess as a triple figure embodying Maiden, Venus and Crone aspects; Crones, according to Atwood, predominate in Canadian fiction (199). The critic nominates both Mrs. Bentley and Judith as Dianas (Maidens) or Hecates (Crones) (207, 210). She also describes

> the Nature-Woman metaphor in Canadian literature: not just an Ice-Virgin-Hecate figure, but a Hecate with Venus and Diana trapped inside. And perhaps the 'plots'--the stories that can be told--about the Ice-Virgin-Hecate Nature-Monster are not limited to how one is destroyed by or manages to escape or conquer this figure; the story can also be about the attempts of the buried Venuses and Dianas to get out, to free themselves. (210)

3. Drama

Besides mythic allusions, drama in *As For Me and My House* is also well-noted, or, at least, covertly suggested by critics. Prytz, for instance, indicates that Mrs. Bentley "consciously plays a role, and she plays it well" (31, and see 32). Stouck also speaks of the Bentleys' "roles," and Paul's function as "Greek chorus" (144-5, 143).[13] Daniells, similarly, notes that Steve, Judith, El Greco and Paul are "agents" existing in the text to "reveal" the Bentleys, while other Horizonians act as "chorus" (vii). Ross himself suggests in an interview that he intended Paul Kirby "'to be a kind of chorus . . .'" (Lacey C5). Stephens, similarly, contends the novel's characters "are marked by typical characteristics . . ." (18); "[t]hey are at once types and individuals, yet never really discernable as one or the other" (20). Ross, Stephens asserts, offers "action" upon a "stage" (19). McMullen echoes this by

noting that landscape in Ross's works is "at once backdrop and actor in the drama" (145); Stouck concurs (148). I recorded in the Introduction E.F. Dyck's assertion of Ross's dramatic "mode," particularly in *As For Me and My House* and *Sawbones Memorial* (xi). Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen see *As For Me and My House* as "dramatic monologue" (148); Cude dubs the work a "play" (1979, 485), one which "offers tragedy of a very high order" (1973, 18).

4. Palimpsest

I begin my own account of *As For Me and My House* with Robert Kroetsch, and his oblique hint that the diary which the novel comprises is a creation myth: "Sinclair Ross, in his novel, infuses the ordinary world, the familiar world with the mystery of the narratives that tell us into being" (1989, 221; cf. 218). In its beginning, in the first entry available to readers, Mrs. Bentley wishes "for a son again . . ." (7); exactly one year later, again, on April 8, Philip junior is born.[14] The precision of the baby's birth on the anniversary of this first diary entry--the first marking the Bentleys' arrival in the town of Horizon--implies a cycle not inherent in the linear, six day span of creation found in the biblical myth: indeed what a "wide wheel" this year runs (Ross 215).[15] References to biblical creators abound in the text, as Sandra Djwa points out, citing town matron Mrs. Finley, "up to her eyes in the task of managing the town and making it over in her own image"

(Ross 8; cited in Djwa 58); and Philip Bentley, eyeing the Finley twins with thoughts, his wife speculates, of his own son, "building in his own image, too" (Ross 9; cited in Djwa 58 and Stouck 147).[16] Nonetheless, an older mythology, as critics suggested above, also informs the work. Kroetsch hints not only at the presence of biblical creators in the text, but at the opening scene's status as a kind of flawed Eden:

> It is an evening in spring, another time of transformation. It is Saturday, with its promise of earthly pleasure and the renewal of Sunday morning. Except that, against all the promise, we learn it is the eighth day, the day after the magic seven of creation. (1989, 217)

Indeed this opening writing--the novel's first act of creation--takes place in a skewed first Genesis,[17] a "formless wasteland," where a "mighty wind" sweeps "over the waters" (Genesis 1:2), but where a female creator presides:

> It's an immense night out there, wheeling and windy. The lights on the street and in the houses are helpless against the black wetness, little unilluminating glints that might be painted on it . . . . There's a soft steady swish of rain on the roof, and a gurgle of eavestroughs running over. Above, in the high cold night, the wind goes swinging past, indifferent, liplessly mournful. (8)

Here are wind and waters and the void of an "immense night," but Eve creates, while her husband Philip, like Adam cast into sleep so that his rib might be excised (Genesis 2: 21-24), is still unconscious.[14] "I wish Philip would waken," notes Mrs. Bentley (8). The diarist is up and about, naming her experience and that of her spouse, hinting that the primeval abyss might be artificial, a patriarchal construct--a mere canvas, a backdrop, with stars "that might be painted on it."

As I indicated in the introductory chapter, scholars assert that the biblical creation myth transformed in this opening writing scene itself paints over an earlier tradition. Signalling Mrs. Bentley's description of Philip's face, briefly unclenched, revealing "the dreams that are there, underneath, like the first writing of a palimpsest . . ." (Ross 202), E.D. Blodgett asserts that the palimpsest, in this novel, is "a sub-text indeed" (1982, 203). As Campbell and others suggested, Eve, "mother of all the living" in Genesis (3:20; Campbell 30), is but a reworked anthropomorphization of the mother goddess: "And Adam, therefore, must have been her son as well as spouse . . ." (Campbell 30).[15] Moreover, the serpent, says Barbara G. Walker, was "originally identified with the Great Goddess herself" (1983, 903); it also figured as her consort (1983, 904) and, as Walker and Campbell indicate, was a god in its "own right" (Campbell 9; see Walker 1983, 905).

Campbell notes the serpent embodied the phallus, "and, as swallower, the female organ also is suggested . . ." (10). In shedding its skin the serpent was "the master of the mystery of rebirth" (9), an earthly associate of the waxing and waning moon (9), and a "lord of waters" too (10), gliding "with a motion of waves" (10). "When imagined as biting its tail," notes Campbell, "as the mythological uroboros, it suggests the waters that in all archaic cosmologies surround--as well as lie beneath and permeate--the floating circular island Earth" (10).

In her December 24 diary entry Mrs. Bentley evokes the uroboros, inscribing Horizon as an "island in the snow" surrounded by drifts like a "sea with an angry swell . . . suddenly . . . frozen by the moon" (194)--by the serpent's symbolic counterpart. On this island world, Mrs. Bentley is goddess. Djwa points out that Philip and Mrs. Bentley are explicitly figured in the text "as pagan priest and priestess ministering to an Old Testament World" (54). She suggests the Bentleys display "a modern form of paganism in which the forms or conventions of a faith are perverted into a substitution for faith itself" (55).[20] While Djwa's remarks signal the novel's subversion of biblical myth, the critic, ignoring that myth's existence as palimpsest, suggests its restoration (in "a movement from the Old Testament to the New" [56]) at the end of the book: "It is not until the novel has moved full cycle through sin,

sacrifice, and repentence [sic], that there is a pulling down of the old false gods and revelation of the true self" (54). However, as Cude points out, the old false gods and goddesses can't be so easily dismissed. He discusses the fertility deities Baal and Astarte, and their predilection for human sacrifice: "Given Mrs. Bentley's obsession with her own sterility, her insistence that the Bentleys adopt a child, and her harshness that helps drive Judith to her death, we might look with caution at her assumption that the rites of the small-town gods are harmless" (1979, 487, note 7; cf. 474). Indeed, we might also look at Mrs. Bentley's incarnation as the huntress and moon-goddess Artemis, whose ". . . priestesses wore the masks of hunting dogs" (Walker 1983, 58): "primitive, green-eyed" (15) during her first Sunday service in Horizon, she is a companion to the green-eyed (169, 186) wolfhound El Greco, who bays, appropriately, at the moon (169; Hinz and Teunissen note this "ominous dog" reference, 154), in a folkloric foreshadowing of death (Walker 1983, 240). Mrs. Bentley is also Nemesis, slotting herself into a role in what she speculates is Philip's belief in "a will stronger than his own deliberately pitted against him" (24), in a "kind of Nemesis" incarcerating him in "Main Streets" for his compromise with the church (25): "For these last twelve years I've kept him in the church--no one else" (141; cf. McMullen 69 and Djwa 59, 63). Just as Nemesis and Artemis are goddesses of both death and life

(Walker 1983, 58, 722), Mrs. Bentley inscribes herself as destroyer and creator: ". . . I wished for a son again, a son that I might give back a little of what I've taken from him, that I might at least believe I haven't altogether wasted him, only postponed to another generation his fulfillment" (7).[21]

Eve, bringer of death to the garden (cf. Walker 1983, 290), and Mary, mother of the life-restoring Son, also figure in this inscription, and indeed both women, says Campbell, represent the goddess.

> The recurrent mythological event of the death and resurrection of a god, which had been for millenniums the central mystery of all of the great religions of the nuclear Near East, became in Christian thought an event in time, which had occurred but once. . . . Through Adam's Fall by the Tree in the Garden, death had come into the world. Through God's covenant with the Children of Israel a people had been prepared to receive and to clothe in flesh the Living God. Through Mary that divine being had entered the world, not as myth, not as symbol, but in flesh and blood, historically. (Campbell 334)

Significantly, Mrs. Bentley's evocation of Horizon as uroboros occurs on Christmas Eve, eve of the historical birth of the recurrently resurrected god. And this birth is

enacted again: at the end of the novel, as Kroetsch predicts, baby Philip doesn't look like his father, but his father "is starting to look like him. It's in the eyes, a stillness, a freshness, a vacancy of beginning" (Ross 216; cf. Kroetsch 1989, 218). Philip senior protests to his wife that with two Philips "'in the same house you'll get mixed up. Sometimes you won't know which of us is which'" (216). Kroetsch comments on Philip's "fulfilment in, replacement by, the figure of the child" (1989, 218); Stouck suggests "the progress from one generation to the next is hopelessly repetitive and circular" (145).[22] Certainly, in the old myths, son and spouse were mixed, and indeed a number of critics point out Mrs. Bentley's role as mother to Philip (Stouck 145, 147; Rogers 37-8, 51; McMullen 82, 84; Prytz 37, 49; Tallman pt.1, 8; Cude 1973, 13, 17; Woodcock 1990, 57). Mrs. Bentley herself affirms her status as such: "That's right, Philip. I want it so" (216).[23]

Judith West is the serpent in this particular mystery: "She gives a peculiar impression of whiteness while you're talking to her, fugitive whiteness, that her face seems always just to have shed" (Ross 16). Judith sheds whiteness just as the serpent sheds its skin. Moreover, that whiteness, like the serpent's symbolic shucking of an old life, has a ghostly quality, synonymous with death. Indeed, the text symbolically associates Judith with death: as D.G. Jones notes, Mrs. Bentley worries that Judith's "queer white

face" will "haunt" the Bentleys after they adopt Judith's child (Ross 211; cf. Jones 42).[24] Judith's surname is West. Significantly, she is the only woman in the text whose Christian name and surname are given, explicitly, together.[25] West, "[f]or the Egyptians and the Greeks . . . is where the kingdom of the spirits is to be" (Cirlot 369); the English expression "go West" means to "be killed, lost, wrecked, etc." (*Concise OED* 1223). Judith herself dies at the end of the book, but, like her mysterious ability to shed whiteness, to symbolically cast off death, she is, as critics suggest, connected to life: out of her death comes baby Philip (see Rogers 54 and D.G. Jones 42).

Kroetsch, and others, signal that a number of characters in the novel "serve as images of the other . . ." (Kroetsch 1989, 220).[26] Like the pre-biblical serpent, Judith is an androgynous figure, connected, as McMullen notes, to both Philip and Mrs. Bentley (70-1): certainly John Moss suggests that both Philip and Judith defy "gender conventions" (1991, 145). In the church choir, Judith sings "a full, deep contralto," (15) the lowest female part; "[s]omehow, so white and silent and shy," the young woman, until the wind whips back her dress and outlines her breasts, "had never occurred to" Mrs. Bentley "as a woman before" (102). Moreover, her whiteness links her to Philip:

Like Philip who is invariably described as

> 'white-lipped' and 'wincing,' Judith is remarkable for 'that queer white face of hers,' and Mrs. Bentley notes that 'her smile comes so sharp and vivid that it almost seems there's a wince with it.' (Stouck 147-48)

Young Philip, as Warren Tallman suggests, is fascinated by trains as his means of exit from small town life: "Somewhere, potential, unknown, there was another world, his world; and every day the train sped into it, and every day he watched it, hungered, went on dreaming" (Ross 39; see Tallman pt.1, 17; Weis 41; Burns 171). Similarly, as a number of critics note, a younger Judith made excuses to go "'down to the station at night when the train came in'" (Ross 75; McMullen 71; Rogers 50; cf. Rogers 112).[27] The young woman's characteristic gesture on walks with Mrs. Bentley is to throw pebbles: "She sat tossing pebbles at a big white stone across the track . . ." (73); "She sauntered off presently, and gathering a handful of pebbles started aiming them at a pile of ties across the track" (102). Philip, in a foreshadowing, or, perhaps, a postshadowing of his intimate involvement with Judith,[28] sits with Mrs. Bentley in the ravine during what is only the second walk husband and wife take together in the novel, "picked up a handful of pebbles, and started throwing them at a small white rock on the far side of the ravine" (155-56). Mrs. Bentley foregrounds the action, signalling its importance:

"If you hadn't known him you'd have said that pebbles were his favorite sport" (156).[39]

Judith and Mrs. Bentley also double each other. D.G. Jones suggests that because Judith "represents equally the unconscious side of Mrs. Bentley, there is a sense in which she does not die at all, but simply fades out as a separate figure" (42). McMullen suggests that Judith shares with both the Bentleys a "longing for a different life" (71), and like them, she is an artist (71). Music certainly connects the trio: Mrs. Bentley plays piano; Judith sings. Philip first meets Mrs. Bentley after one of her recitals and proposes to her after another; as McMullen indicates, Judith's performances in the church choir attract the new minister's attention: "It's seldom he listens to music, but as soon as she began tonight he turned in his chair behind the pulpit and sat with his eyes fixed on her all the way through the hymn" (Ross 51; see McMullen 71). One of Mrs. Bentley's music teachers tells her she has a "masculine attitude to music" (Ross 198). Similarly, Judith's verve to get away from Horizon sends the young woman "stooking in the harvest fields like a man" (Ross 165).[40] Indeed both women actively save money in order to escape the town: Mrs. Bentley notes that if she and Philip "were careful and saved, we might be able to go into a city or big town and start a book and music store" (140); Judith is "still saving out of her twenty-five dollars a month, and maybe in a year

can try the city again" (142). Davey sums up these connections:

> Judith's ambition to return to the city is the same as that of the Bentleys; her solitary singing connects with Philip's solitary painting, or Mrs. Bentley's solitary piano playing. Her having worked 'like a man' connects with Mrs. Bentley's feelings that she will bring disapproval upon herself and her husband if she repairs stovepipes or digs her garden, with her 'masculine' piano playing, and with the 'mannish verve' of Laura. Her employment as secretary and as kitchen help places her in subservient roles familiar to women in western culture and certainly visible in the novel in such concepts as 'ladies aid' and 'preacher's wife.' The various codes of gender, art, farm, small town, and city mix and compete in this passage. Judith is the girl who would transgress gender and class roles, who would refuse conceptions of the normal, the familiar, who looks for 'something more'. . . . (Davey 186-7; "'something more'" is from Ross 74)

Stepping outside the 'familiar,' Mrs. Bentley even mirrors Judith's ghostliness. Walking in the dark by the river at the Kirby ranch after being rejected by Philip, Mrs. Bentley describes the scene as the "lair of the terror . . .": "For

like draws to like they say, which makes it reasonable to suppose that, when you've just walked away from a man because you feel he doesn't want to be bothered with you, you're capable of attracting a few ghouls and demons anyway" (126). Finally, during Judith's pregnancy, Mrs. Bentley is "restless too, expectant and uneasy. I went out after supper and walked myself tired, but it hasn't been much use" (207). A few days later an "expectant" Judith walks herself into exhaustion, gives birth, and then dies (211).

5. Rehearsals and Drama

The painted on stars of the diary's first entry made a canvas of Genesis, hinting at its artifice (and ironically subverting the painter Philip's powers of creation); those stars also form a backdrop for Mrs. Bentley's writing, linking creation--and creation mythology--to drama. In my introduction I took up John J. White's suggestion that myth and drama share an emphasis on plot; I stated my own view that the sacrifice and rebirth of a god are the events which shape each of Ross's novels. *As For Me and My House* traces Philip Bentley's sacrifice and renewal as baby Philip--the old Philip is erased by the new--under the directorship of the goddess Mrs. Bentley, with the aid of backdrops and rehearsals and her serpent consort, Judith.

Indeed, the novel fixes these dramatic roles early on. For example, we watch Mrs. Bentley watch Philip watch Judith sing: "I could see him in the little mirror over the organ

that's there for the organist to watch the progress of the collection plate, and know when it's time to taper off the offertory" (51-52). Paul Kirby, schoolteacher and amateur philologist, has helpfully signalled to readers in the diary's first entry that "'*offertory*'" means "'*sacrifice*'" (11).[31] Rogers suggests Judith's will be the "sacrificial death" (55), but Mrs. Bentley's look pins Philip as scapegoat; Judith, fixed in Philip's own gaze, will participate in this drama as serpent. Judith, as Djwa notes, is sacrificed too: ". . . it would appear that there was, in fact, no other way for Judith, either in terms of the deterministic nature of Ross's art or of the novel's mythic structure" (62). But in that mythic and dramatic structure her death signals rebirth.[32] She is, indeed, a key player, and besides the audition in the organ mirror, Mrs. Bentley actively recruits her: "I like Judith, and I like playing the hostess" (142). This makes Judith a guest, whose connection to ghost, and its root Geist--her haunting whiteness was noted above--evoke an ancient practice of inviting ancestral spirits to certain "tribal feasts," sometimes for oracular consultation (Walker 1983, 340).[33] Mrs. Bentley even denigrates Judith's career aspirations as theatre: it "'just wouldn't have been right . . . ,'" Judith maintains, if there were nothing for her but farm life, "'cows and pigs and people like Dan . . .'" (74). "'You mean, not dramatically right,'" suggests Mrs. Bentley

(74).

Even while this cast is being assembled, a stage is set and rehearsals begin.[34] The opening scene's canvas gives way later in the novel to dust clouds forming a "quivering backdrop, before which was about to be enacted some grim, primeval tragedy" (78). Still later, the parsonage's "pressed emptiness" becomes "a screen" on which Mrs. Bentley's "dread began to live and shape itself" (180). The Bentleys' holiday at the ranch belonging to Paul Kirby's brother splits the text in two, marking certain events in the text's first half as foreshadowings of occurrences following the ranch section, events which contribute directly to the drama which achieves baby Philip. The diary foregrounds such practice performances: after returning from the ranch, the Bentleys' adopted son Steve gets into a fight with the Finley twins which culminates in his removal to a Catholic orphanage. Mrs. Bentley steels herself while Mrs. Finley prepares to strike Philip, who has "coolly" watched the proceedings: "I seemed to know what was going to happen, as if I had seen it rehearsed, but I couldn't bring myself to speak or move" (151). Mrs. Bentley *has* seen this rehearsed, during Steve's very first Sunday School session: ". . . he celebrated it having a fist fight with one of the Finley twins" (87) and after breaking up this first scuffle, Mrs. Finley slaps Steve, as she later strikes Philip.

Steve's removal leaves a gap to be filled by baby Philip. Indeed Steve himself; Peter, the frail twelve year old son of Lawson, a man who, Mrs. Bentley says, "reminds me of Philip" (50); and the Bentleys' own son, stillborn a year after their marriage (45), all prefigure, or rehearse, the second son's birth.[16] The text also foreshadows the means of the baby's arrival.[17] Philip and Mrs. Bentley go for walks together only twice in the novel, both times to a ravine outside of town. After the first outing, Philip comes down with a cold (45), the town matrons arrive with homemade remedies, and he ends up "sick at his stomach . . ." after trying Mrs. Pratt's soup (46). The next evening Mrs. Bentley notes she's ". . . put Philip to bed. There's a high, rocking wind that rattles the windows and creaks the walls" (47). The rocking wind conjures up a cradle, supporting a child-like Philip tucked in bed by his mother. After the couple's second ravine walk, post-ranch, post-Steve, it is Mrs. Bentley who gets a cold and ends up in bed (158); Judith, rather than the town matrons, arrives to help with household chores, and she ends up in bed with Philip. As D.G. Jones notes, "[w]hen Mrs. Bentley becomes ill, Judith comes in to help out. She does so by seducing the Rev. Mr. Bentley" (42). The baby is born eight months later.

As noted above, the Kirby ranch scene marks a turning point between rehearsals and enactment of the events leading

to Philip junior's birth. McMullen suggests that the ranch section brings "resolution" to the Bentleys' "dilemma" (67). Ken Mitchell describes the ranch scene as "a kind of structural and thematic interlude" (44), a "spiritual green oasis," where "strange magical things happen to the Bentley 'family'" (45). Kroetsch locates the ranch in the pre-Edenic mythology under discussion here:

> Paradise has once again retreated over the horizon and into the west. The snake in this place is seemingly older than the garden itself. And the labyrinth of naming and misnaming is complicated further by Paul's own boyhood fancy--he still insists that a hill across the river be called 'the Gorgon.' (1979, 78)

Barbara Mitchell, similarly, notes the ranch's mythic implications. The critic senses the Bentleys returning at the Kirby spread to "their true selves. Morally, aesthetically, and sexually they are rejuvenated. The landscape itself takes them back to a mythic or primeval time, 'a forbidden country'" (58). Rogers, in contrast, suggests the sexuality in evidence at the ranch is "carnality" and not "regeneration" (42).

The ranch is certainly a locale rich in death and fertility imagery. Hills "[l]ike skulls" top its river valley (122); at night the "close black hills, the stealthy slipping sound the river made . . ." (125) transform the

valley into "dead, forbidden country, . . . the lair of the terror that destroyed the hills, that was lurking there still among the skulls" (126). Yet the riverbanks contain a record of life: ". . . only a hundred or so miles away, there are fossil remains of the prehistoric lizards" (132).[37] And there's the lively Laura: her "mannish verve" and girl-like suppleness, plus the text's use of her first name (122) link her with Judith.[38] Kroetsch suggests that Laura, like Judith, is serpent-like: she "is almost the androgynous figure who exists prior to all coupling . . ." (1979, 78).[39] Moreover, Laura's romance with "a cowboy a few summers ago" nets her chaps, a "buckskin stallion" (125) and a role prefiguring Judith's affair with Philip.[40] The fertility connections continue: there is a picture of a "moon-faced Hereford" bull above Mrs. Bentley's bed (126) whose son is named "Priapus the First" (130) after, as Barbara Mitchell explains, "a god of fertility," "son of Aphrodite and Dionysus" and "guardian of gardens (where Paul tells Mrs. Bentley about the gods and goddesses of love)" (58).[41] And there are horses: the buckskin stallion emblematic of Laura's infidelity (Cude 1979, 479; cf. 488, note 9),[42] "symbol of the excitement and passion" missing in Laura's life (McMullen 68); and the "little ghost-horse" belonging to a young cowboy with whom Mrs. Bentley flirts, hoping Philip will be jealous (129). "I hoped he would resent him," she writes, "but he didn't"

(129). Indeed "Philip is not perturbed by the incident, but Paul is perturbed, . . ." as Cude (1973, 6) and several other critics point out (Cude 1979, 479; Barbara Mitchell 57-8; Hinz and Teunissen 158). The teacher reinforces the text's connection of horses and sexuality: "After a long, celibate week on the range just what did I think brought the cowboys to town on Saturday night? It was especially bad being asked to go and see a horse" (Ross 129; Barbara Mitchell 57-8; Hinz and Teunissen 158).

Horse symbolism, says Cirlot, "is extremely complex, and beyond a certain point not very clearly defined" (152). Cirlot records Eliade's finding that horses were "associated with burial-rites in chthonian cults . ." (152), as well as Mertons Stienon's consideration that the horse is "an ancient symbol of the cyclic movement of the world of phenomena . . ." (152). Death, war and motherhood are also embraced by equine symbolism (Cirlot 152): "Jung came to wonder if the horse might not be a symbol for the mother, and he does not hesitate to assert that it expresses the magic side of Man, 'the mother within us', that is, intuitive understanding" (Cirlot 152). Ken Mitchell suggests that the horse, for Ross, is a symbol "of vitality, sexuality, freedom" (41); Barbara Mitchell notes that "revelations about life and relationships often" occur to Ross's male characters through their associations with horses (53).[43] Paul Kirby and the *Oxford English*

Dictionary point out that the name Philip means "'a lover of horses'" (Ross 213; *OED* v. 11, 680; see Barbara Mitchell 54). Walker records that horse mythology is primarily "funerary" (1983, 411); she also notes, however, the association of the horse with fertility rites (1983, 412-3) and, in the story of "Bellerophon and his father," with yet another myth of "the reborn deity" (1983, 413). As Kroetsch noted above, among the features Mrs. Bentley describes in her first ranch entry are driftwood logs scattered "like writhing, petrified serpents" on the riverbank beneath a hill Paul has dubbed "'the Gorgon'" (Ross 121). Barbara Mitchell explains that in the myth of the Gorgon, Medusa "fell in love with Poseidon and was punished for this by being turned into a monster with serpent hair and eyes that could turn men to stone. From their union, however, came Pegasus, the winged horse" (58). Campbell deems the legend of the Gorgon Medusa an early goddess myth transformed, like the story of Adam and Eve, by a patriarchal culture: ". . . though it is told from the point of view of the classic Olympian patriarchal system, the older message can be heard" (25). The new message details Athene's command to Perseus to decapitate Medusa: ". . . from the Gorgon's severed neck the winged steed Pegasus sprang forth, who had been begotten by the god Poseidon and now is hitched before the chariot of Zeus" (Campbell 25; cf. Burns 23). In the older message, Athene and Medusa were one: she was a

goddess of wisdom, ". . . the Destroyer aspect of the Triple Goddess called Neith in Egypt, Ath-enna or Athene in North Africa" (Walker 1983, 629). Indeed, Pegasus "had archaic, matriarchal origins" (Walker 1983, 780). He took his name from "the Pegae, water-priestesses who tended the sacred spring of Pirene in Corinth" and who

> preserved an ancient dying-god cult, as shown by the myth of Bellerophon, who mounted Pegasus and tried to ride to heaven 'as though he were an immortal.' He failed, and fell. Bellerophon's predecessor (mythologized as his 'father') also failed, and was devoured by wild man-eating mares. (Walker 1983, 780)

Bulls figure obliquely here too. The bull, records Campbell, was Poseidon's animal (54), and "the animal of the moon: the waning and waxing god, . . . the lord of tides and the productive powers of the earth, the lord of women, lord of the rhythm of the womb" (60). Mrs. Bentley's "guardian Hereford" (130), is, appropriately, "moon-faced."

There are shades in Bellerophon's tale of the Philip Bentley story. Stouck notes Philip's "actions are always directed by a search for self in the likeness of his father--the search in the mirror" (146). Young Bentley has followed in the footsteps of a preacher father who wanted to paint, whose library, like Philip's, contains more books "on

art and literature than theology . . ." (Ross 40); at the end of the novel, Philip seems about to be replaced by, or at least reborn in, his son. Mrs. Bentley even suggests that Philip mistakes adopted son Steve "for Pegasus" (70) and the little mare Minnie finally selected from the ranch "as the proper horse for Steve . . ." (130), "would have been Sleipnir or Pegasus . . ." (139-40) had she been male, "but for a mere mare plain Minnie has to do" (140). But plain Minnie is a "Scotch diminutive of Mary" (Jobes pt. 2, 1107), and Mary, as noted above, is but another face of the goddess:

> [E]very one of the mythic motifs now dogmatically attributed to Mary as a historic human being belongs also--and belonged in the period and place of the development of her cult--to that goddess mother of all things, . . . the mother-bride of the dead and resurrected god. . . . (Campbell 43)

Certainly Minnie's fertility connections come to the fore during Philip's and Judith's affair, when Mrs. Bentley dreams that "someone was stealing Minnie's hay" (162).[44] In fact, all of the horses' names in the text have goddess connections. Sleipnir is "Odin's eight-legged gray horse, a Norse symbol of death, likened to the gallows-tree on which Odin hung" (Walker 1983, 943). But Odin hung on the gallows-tree that he might plumb the feminine underworld,

and "learn the secret of the 'wise blood' in the Earth-mother's uterine cauldron . . ." (Walker 1983, 733). In yet another "dying-and-reborn god" story (Walker 1983, 734), a "reincarnation or son, Balder" appeared from Odin's blood, who in turn "was slain and sent to the underground realm of the Goddess Hel" (Walker 1983, 734). And the Goddess Hel, the "cauldron-womb" from which the English "hell" derives its name, lends her title to "ancestral ghosts known as *Hella cunni*, 'kinsmen of Hel,' corrupted in the medieval mystery play to Harlequin, lover of Columbine the Dove-maiden, who was another version of the Goddess" (Walker 1983, 380).[45] The name Harlequin, whose link both to goddess mythology and to theatre make it particularly apt for this text, is the name, as Barbara Mitchell pointed out earlier, of Paul Kirby's horse.

6. Carnival

Indeed Mitchell's signalling of the importance of Paul and his horse deserves examination. Harlequin has roots in the commedia dell'arte (cf. Oreglia 56-70), which in its turn claims a connection to carnival (Oreglia 3, Bakhtin 34). According to Bakhtin, the medieval carnival was "linked externally to the feasts of the Church," and "genetic[ally]" to "ancient pagan festivities, agrarian in nature . . ." (8). Carnival opposed order and officialdom (6,10), suspended hierarchy and prohibitions (10) and engendered "a special type of communication impossible in

everyday life," a language of "marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other . . ." (10). This "folk humor" (18) also celebrated the "material bodily principle" (18), a principle "contained not in the biological individual, not in the bourgeois ego, but in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed" (19). Degradation, "that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract . . . to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity" (19-20), effected renewal: "Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one" (21). Small wonder that in one of Philip's drawings depicting a "broken old horse," Mrs. Bentley feels its "return" to the earth: "You sense a flow, a rhythm, a cycle" (91).[49] As Burns asserts, the drawing "suggests a cyclical pattern of life from death" (181). Nor is it surprising that Paul Kirby is deemed "vulgar," as Barbara Mitchell points out (55), for his use of words like "*belly*" and "*sweat*" (Ross 92, 120 cited in Mitchell 55). François Rabelais, from whom Bakhtin culls many of his examples of carnival humour, "was proclaimed by Victor Hugo the greatest poet of the 'flesh' and 'belly,'. . ." notes the Russian critic (Bakhtin 18). Indeed, "the bodily element is deeply positive" in carnival's tradition of "grotesque realism": "It is

presented not in a private, egotistic form, severed from the other spheres of life, but as something universal, representing all the people" (Bakhtin 19). Severance, however, is exactly what town matron Mrs. Wenderby has in mind when she reprimands Paul for his choice of words: "There was another note from Mrs. Wenderby at noon today, warning him that if he insists on saying *sweat* in the classroom instead of *perspiration* she'll use her influence to have the school board ask him to resign" (Ross 120; cf. Barbara Mitchell 55).

Paul's ties to carnival signal the importance of language in the process of renewal, an importance I noted in my introductory discussion of patriarchal revisions of goddess myths and Genesis's matriarchal palimpsest. Indeed, Barbara Mitchell stresses Paul's "creative vision" (47) and sees him as an important catalyst of change for the Bentleys (50-52). She suggests Paul's "philological musings" (49) and his quotation of a Lewis Carroll nonsense riddle prove he favours "open and ambiguous language," "ordered disorder," "the conversion of the ordinary into something new and adventuresome, and the stretching of the imagination" (49). Certainly, "liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order . . ." (Bakhtin 10), "ever changing, playful, undefined forms" (Bakhtin 11), and "ambivalent laughter" (Bakhtin 12) are all carnivalesque traits. Moreover, Mitchell's signal that Paul

encompasses both masculine and feminine characteristics (Barbara Mitchell 50, 51) smacks of a carnivalesque toppling of hierarchies, of a breakdown of "barriers of caste, property, profession, and age" (Bakhtin 10). Certainly gender, in 1930's Horizon, has its own barriers, as Davey, for one, noted above.[47]

A final rehearsal:

> I took a rake yesterday and went round the garden, gathering the last few withered stalks and leaves. There was a single poppy that flowered while we were away. I snapped the pod off yesterday, shook the seeds into my palm and scattered them. 'Casting the ashes to the wind,' an unexpected and unfeeling Philip asked, and I answered, 'Obsequies.' (138)[48]

Although Mrs. Bentley evokes funeral rites here, the poppy is also a symbol of fertility. In Greek mythology, it is "an attribute of Aphrodite, Demeter, Hera, Hypnus, Morpheus," and is "[i]dentified by some as the Sumerian tree of life . . ." (Jobes pt. 2, 1287). The poppy head, specifically, "[s]ymbolizes sleep" (Jobes pt. 2, 1287), and Mrs. Bentley's need for sleep (and Judith's for fertility) during her ravine-walk induced illness, after the couple's return from the ranch, removes a last obstacle to Philip junior's conception. (Indeed, El Greco's three day snooze

under the influence of Dr. Bird's sleeping draught--designed to keep him from howling while the Bentleys were away at the ranch (139)--rehearses Mrs. Bentley's experience with the doctor's sleeping powders ["[t]here had just been enough of the powder to stupefy me . . ." (161)] on the night of Judith's seduction.) Moreover, Joseph Campbell's *Occidental Mythology* contains a picture of a "Mycenaean seal ring" (70), depicting a goddess of life and death holding "a triad of poppy-seed pods" out to one of her "devotees" (72): Mrs. Bentley's obsequies, coupled with the poppy's significance for fertility, are, after all, appropriate to the text's inscription of her as a goddess of life and death.

7. Conclusion

But what about such an inscription? The critics are divided. "The novel is not open-ended, but it carefully avoids a pat or sentimental solution to the dilemma which it so powerfully presents" suggests Lawrence Ricou (89). Meena Shirwadkar notes a "theme of regeneration" in the novel (154) and senses a "final mood . . . of forgiveness, reconciliation, regeneration and faith in the work of God" (155). Rogers, in contrast, contends that salvation is "a possibility" for the Bentleys, "suggested but never realized" (94). The critic asserts that "[t]he son Philip is the focus of promise at the end of the novel, but we are also reminded that the father Philip was a boy too" (Rogers 37). Harrison, similarly, forecasts that the "new cycle

beginning with the new-born Philip should, logically, initiate a new set of misunderstandings" (152).[45] Atwood, while noting that Canadian literary babies can signal "spiritual rebirth for the other characters" (207), suggests that Mr. and Mrs. Bentley are "crazy" if they think Judith's son will save their marriage (207).[53] Comeau also sees doom at the end: the baby is, "as his name and heritage ironically suggest, destined to be another Philip, which is precisely what Mrs. Bentley wants and needs" (181). Cude concludes that at the end of the novel the "marriage is finished": the "old Philip is back with a vengeance, and he was a poor thing at best. Mrs. Bentley has at last gained possession of her husband, the possession that she predicted might well terminate their relationship" (1973, 17). He suggests further that

> [t]he concluding crisis is engineered by Mrs. Bentley herself: she becomes the artist at last, a perverse Pygmalion turning her spouse into a statue. The reader can see all this, but Mrs. Bentley cannot: and thus, the novel offers tragedy of a very high order. (1973, 18; cf. 1979, 479, 487)

Though Mrs. Bentley takes on the role of Philip's Nemesis, and figures herself as a kind of Mary desirous of the son who will restore her husband's wasted potential, though she senses primeval tragedy in the air, and, through

her invitations to Judith, may be throwing the young woman at her husband (cf. Cude 1973, 4, 7; Cude 1979, 479, 480; Rogers 47; Banting 38), the novel itself, in its provision of a green-eyed wolfhound, a serpentine choir soloist, horses named Harlequin and Minnie, and a plethora of twelve year old boys, inscribes Mrs. Bentley, whether she approves or not, as a great goddess directing a drama of creation and destruction. As Davey suggests, ". . . Mrs. Bentley herself is a textual construction," part of a larger such construction, ". . . a text which constructs its narrator by constructing that narrator's construction of events" (178). Davey indicates that Paul's etymological musings; "the male sexuality the text locates in horses and at the Kirby ranch . . . ," a sexuality indicated by the names of horses and bulls; Steve's ethnic background; Judith's death; and the novel's diary format "all evade recuperation by appeal to her personality" (Davey 178).[12]

Indeed, with its symbolic manipulations and its evocation of a writerly Eve, the text certainly underscores Mrs. Bentley's subversive, creative power. But to what avail? Some renewal seems promised by the sacrifice of the old white-lipped Philip for a newborn son, for a Philip reborn as father and small businessman.[13] Kroetsch insists on Mrs. Bentley's "novel-making impulse," disguised as the diary (1989, 220). But Mrs. Bentley's own stake in the musical half of the proposed "book and music store" (140) is

abandoned by the end of the book (210), and her writing falls off after the baby's arrival: nearly an entire month passes between the second last and the last diary entries. Barbara Mitchell notes that the novel's oblique inclusion of Pegasus, "symbol of poetic inspiration" (53), indicates a "potential rebirth of the imagination . . ." for the Bentleys (59). Besides his relationship to Poseidon and Medusa, Pegasus is known for kicking open the Hippocrene well, the source, indeed, of poetic inspiration (Walker 1983, 780; Burns 23, cf. 25, 193); however, writerly production seems truly less important to Mrs. Bentley than physical fertility, and language here is irrevocably in the service of patriarchy: "Did I know," asks Paul upon hearing Philip junior cry, ". . . that in the early ages of our race it was imitation of just such a little wail as this that had given us some of our noblest words, like father, and patriarch, and paternity" (213). Barbara Mitchell suggests that in this, "Paul's last lesson," the teacher "restores paternity to an acceptable position" and "leads Mrs. Bentley into acceptance of family love" (61). What Paul really does in this last lesson, however, is abandon his role as challenger of official culture, and restore creativity and language-making to its biblical usurpers. Instead of engendering language, as in Paul's formulation, Philip junior seems to be damping writerly inspiration. Indeed, considering Philip's attempt at a novel after the stillbirth

of the Bentleys' first son (45), writing turns into compensation for a missing child. Kroetsch hints as much, conflating child and story:

> Mrs. Bentley tells us before her first diary entry is complete that 'I wished for a son again.' She has a story that is in need of resolution. She will enter into elaborate and careful stratagems with herself, with the written page, with Philip, with the people around her, with the town of Horizon, in order to create or to discover that resolution. (1989, 218)[53]

And, considering Mrs. Bentley's distaste for Philip's text--"[e]ven I might have done it better" (40)--the diary, as Banting notes, may compensate for her husband's stillbirth as an author (31).[54]

Indeed, Kroetsch asserts that Mrs. Bentley

> joins herself with the other that is Philip by finding in him the wish if not the will to write. In that finding, her other becomes herself and she can write the story of her own psychic and even social life. In keeping herself nameless, she is able to name her own complexity and contradictions and fears and desires. (1989, 220)[55]

While York suggests that the baby becomes a "symbol of the fusion of the verbal and non-verbal: 'The Word made flesh'"

(174), Banting asserts that it is Mrs. Bentley who is "pure writing" (32), ". . . not the author-as-God (Ross) or the preacher-theologian (Philip) as hermeneutic agent of the Word . . . ," but ". . . the woman, whose traditional domain has been silence" (32).[56] Indeed, suggests Compton, "[i]t is in the diary she is made--self-born . . ." (69). Compton notes that Mrs. Bentley "almost disappears as the journal entries peter out" (71). The diary becomes an agent of presence, documenting "her meaninglessness in the cosmos and in her marriage. Writing it out, she confronts it" (Compton 74). Mrs. Bentley, Compton asserts, is a "ruthlessly frank female narrator, one whose words name, and in naming overcome, the condition which threatens her" (75). She takes up, in other words, Eve's rightful role as namer and female creator. But the journal entries do peter out (see McMullen 60): silence falls at the end of the novel as the diary diminishes and Mrs. Bentley exits into motherhood.[57] Indeed the diary itself becomes the final sacrificial victim on a stage already littered with bodies. Cude takes Mrs. Bird's description of a town drama production as prophetic: "It's a rather serious play, with drama and a moral. In the last act I die'" (Ross 184; Cude 1979, 484). Certainly

"there is death enough in 'the last act,' by any dramatic standard," suggests Cude (1979, 485). He provides an inventory: "El Greco, torn to ribbons by the coyotes; Judith, expiring of exposure and grief; and the two members

of the House of Bentley, suffering spiritual extinction" (1979, 485).[58] Indeed by the end of the final diary entry, Judith is dead and Philip senior erased; Mrs. Bentley, along with her writing, disappears; Paul, the "pagan spirit," former champion of carnivalesque language, now plugs for patriarchy.[59] Sacrifice has achieved a boy-child, but not a text; the palimpsest's original writing, a female story, fades.

However, all subsequent writings are also effaced. As Roland Barthes asserts,

> un texte n'est pas fait d'une ligne de mots, dégageant un sens unique, en quelque sorte théologique (qui serait le 'message' de l'Auteur-Dieu), mais un espace à dimensions multiples, où se marient et se contestent des écritures variées, dont aucune n'est originelle: le texte est un tissu de citations, issues des mille foyers de la culture. (65)[60]

At the end of the novel we have indeed a restoration of a New Testament state of affairs, as Djwa predicted; with the son's arrival God returns, and from him, not the goddess, is language--"father," "patriarch" and "paternity"--to flow. As Davey notes, "the Word--the books on which Philip founds himself, the Bible, the male names which define almost all the women" is "one of the main sources of power and identity in the novel . . ." (185). Certainly Philip's identity is

textually based, asserts Davey: the critic links Bentley senior's books, the college education shared by father and son, their joint entry into the ministry and, finally, Philip's projected return to a "university town" to open a bookstore as important components of that identity (182-3):

> Although the church and university and university town may be nameless, they nevertheless still guarantee access to the word itself, to the Bible from which the novel's title is taken and to the bookstore to which the Bentleys eventually will move. (182-3)

Mrs. Bentley, while a textual construction (Davey 178) and a participant in other such "constructions" (Davey 183), is also "the unnamed woman excluded from official discourse, the writer who works in a genre, the diary, of which the first mark is that it is unread" (Davey 189; cf. Banting 31). Banting goes so far as to suggest that ". . . Ross 'appropriates' the diary of a woman to make his book" (32). Adrienne Munich asserts a "denial" of "'female presence'" in the Biblical creation story: Adam names creation even before Eve is created, thereby possessing "for himself language's power" (238). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar suggest

> the patriarchal etiology that defines a solitary Father God as the only creator of all things, and the male metaphors of literary creation that

> depend upon such an etiology, have long 'confused' literary women, readers and writers alike. For what if such a proudly masculine cosmic Author is the sole legitimate model for all earthly authors? Or worse, what if the male generative power is not just the only legitimate power but the only power there is? (7)

In *As For Me and My House* the arrival of the son and the disappearance of the mother reenact this biblical denial.[61] But this is a novel about a diary, a text about a text--as Banting notes, "it is Mrs. Bentley's writing which makes up the text . . ." (35)[62]--and the coincidence of the diary's dimunition with the son's birth not only plays out but comments on this patriarchal manoeuvre. Unlike the creation story, Eve's defection here marks the end, and not the beginning of the tale, underscoring Barthes's point that a text is not the work of an Author-God, but a product of other texts: not simply the diary, but the novel itself ends at this juncture.

Mrs. Bentley stated her wish that the two Philips be confused, one for the other. "These words," as Helen Buss notes,

> are not her spoken answer to her husband; they are Mrs. Bentley's written ending to her self-constructing diary. They are Ross's chosen closure. The son has achieved the death of the

> father and the full attention of his mother's creativity. The patriarchy has re-established itself. . . . (207)

But Buss also senses

> in this text a desire that reaches out to mine and speaks of a world denied in all the texts of my tradition, a world that does not demand such scathing binary opposites, such rigid gender-sex stereotypes . . . , a world in which mothering does not demand the death of the voice that scales the wind, in which adult womanhood is not a condition of lack, a condition that requires the death of the female voice in the birthing of sons. (207-8)[53]

The death of the diary points towards such a world. Patriarchy may prevail, but it is not portrayed as a creative option.

I turn in the next chapter to Ross's remaining novels, *The Well*, *Whir of Gold* and *Sawbones Memorial*. Again, I look at the mythology of sacrifice, and, taking a cue from Mrs. Bentley's diary, at the fate of texts and female authorship as clues to sacrifice's achievement of creative renewal or patriarchal stasis.

Notes

1. Blodgett's discussion of Hugh MacLennan's *The Watch That Ends the Night* is significant to a discussion of myth in Ross (1982, 39-52, especially 40, 43). See also Kroetsch (1979, 77) and Banting (30) for allusions to Eden. For other hints at and/or discussion of mythic or cosmic dimensions of the novel and other works by Ross, cf. Thieme (93); McMullen (77, 84); Stouck (149); Ken Mitchell (5, 13, 76); John Moss (1991, 138-147, especially 138, 142); Weis (12-19, 20). Karen Burns discusses the coexistence of "benevolence and destruction" in Ross's works, "in conflicting but dependent pairs of values: hope and despair, life and death, creativity and destruction" (12-13; cf. iv, 112, 115, 223).

2. A number of critics comment on the role of the Church and of religion, or of religious and biblical elements, in the novel and in Ross's work in general. Cf. D.G. Jones (61); McMullen (140, 142); Djwa (53, 54, 63, 64-5); Stephens (18, 19). Others note the role of the prairie in the construction of a religious or apocalyptic vision--"creation, the fall, redemption, the apocalypse" (Harrison 190)--in Ross and in other prairie fiction (cf. Harrison 190, Rogers 1). Still others comment on the role of nature, wilderness, the environment and "forces" stronger than the characters themselves (Prytz 34), and their impact on or mirroring of characters' lives in *As For Me and My House* and other works by Ross (cf. Prytz 58, 82, 94; John Moss 1974, 149; Ken Mitchell 10; McMullen 10; Ricou 94; Tallman pt. 1, 16; D.G. Jones 38-9, 40, 41, 48).

3. Williams (164), Djwa (56-8) and Cude (1973, 13, 14; cf. 1979, 474) discuss the title's biblical origins. Cude detects another biblical allusion in the figure of Judith: "As in the Apocrypha, Judith provides the means of destroying the man who would be her lover" (1973, 18).

4. Cf. Barbara Mitchell on paganism at the Finleys' supper (Ross 9 in Mitchell 52). New comments on the reduction of Church ritual to paganism in another Partridge Hill episode (28, cf. 29) and, elsewhere, on the Bentleys' hypocritical Christianity (28). New suggests that "April rains are usually a symbol of hope, of nurture for new growth, or Christian sacrifice and forgiveness . . . ," but not here (28). T.S. Eliot's description of April as "the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain" (37) is perhaps a more appropriate vision of April in this context.

5. Ken Mitchell dubs Harlequin a "'clown' horse" (43).

6. Buss deems the novel an example of Bakhtin's "the 'dialogic imagination'" (204). On Ross's part, "[a]dapting the diary style, carrying on a creative act of writing through the adoption of a consciousness both displaced yet very close to the self, leads to such a dialogic utterance" (204).

7. Paul Denham, by contrast, judges Judith's death "an unsatisfactory plot device" (124).

8. Stouck judges Philip "a Christ figure, crucified by 'a world of matrons and respectability'; El Greco drugged for three days and Philip slapped across the face three times by Mrs. Finley are possibly more than casual details" (148). Djwa, for her part, suggests that Philip "undergoes a kind of salvation through grace. He does find other-directed subjects for his art and he is given a child which he so desperately wants. Most importantly it is a child with all of the New Testament implications of 'a little child shall lead them'" (63).

9. Cf. York on "verbal and non-verbal power" in the novel (170), including "[i]n the former category . . . various examples of how human beings rely upon the word" (170). Paul is important to this "linguistic theme" (170). Following Paul's etymological lead, the critic points out the "sacrifical imagery" in the derivation of "'company,' 'the ones you break bread with'" (Ross 48 in York 171).

10. Cf. Cude (1973, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17; 1979, 483); Prytz (43, 53, 54); Djwa (59); Stephens (20); John Moss (1974, 151); Woodcock (1991, 31), Rogers (44), Thacker (190), for further discussion of Mrs. Bentley's manipulations. Djwa notes Mrs. Bentley's attempts "to structure her husband's life" (59), and depicts Philip's existence as Mrs. Bentley's "creation" and "also her god and ground of being . . ." (59). John Moss suggests Mrs. Bentley mythologizes Philip, and tries to make of him a "heromale," a role she herself then "usurps" (1991, 142).

11. Buss suggests very clearly that Mrs. Bentley steers Judith towards Philip in order to realize "her maternal needs," beginning with the showing of Philip's drawings of Judith to their subject: "This moment will draw Judith's feelings to the image of Philip. The diarist has created this moment" (198).

12. The Wollstonecraft quote is from *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Ed. Miriam Brody. London: Penguin Books, 1972, p. 132. Mrs. Bentley, asserts Compton, is "a

character of complex ironies" (68), "a prisoner who imprisons ("I've destroyed him") and a watcher who is herself watched . . ." (68).

13. The roles Stouck sees the Bentleys playing are those of Philip's father and mother (144-5). Stouck also suggests that landscape in the novel "is always viewed as a backdrop or metaphor for the human drama. The wind and dust mirror the dryness and futility of the characters; the dustbowl conditions of the thirties and the Puritanism of a small Canadian town are aspects of time and place which dramatize the sense of doom and inescapable defeat in which the Bentleys are trapped psychologically" (148). He also cites Mrs. Bentley's assertion that "wind and dust" form a backdrop for "'primeval tragedy'" (148), noted later in this chapter.

14. A number of critics comment on the "April to April" structure of the diary (Compton 71). Ken Mitchell notes the "diary runs from April of one year to May of the next, through a complete cycle of seasons and changes" (28). Rogers points out that Mrs. Bentley begins her diary in April and the baby is born in April (37). The dating is even more exact: the baby is born on the anniversary of the first Horizon entry. See also New (27), Kroetsch (1989, 221).

15. Cf. Stouck (145), John Moss (1974, 151) and Burns (193) on the "wide wheel" reference. Cf. Blodgett on cycles in Grove and Roy (1982, 156, 158, 159, 193, 196: "endings are new beginnings . . ."), on the pastoral (1982, 180, 181, 203), and on the Osiris myth in Cohen (1982, 175, 178, 185, note 45: he cites the "traditional Christian link between the goddess [Isis] and Mary"). Also, cf. Blodgett (1982, 204, 205, 206, 207). For other discussions of cycles, seasons, the repetition of history, or the "repetitive round" (Daniells viii) of the characters' lives in the novel, cf. Djwa (55); Kroetsch (1989, 221); John Moss (1974, 149, 151); Rogers (37); Ken Mitchell (42: a "dramatic cycle," 49, 50); Ricou (85, 87); McMullen (60); Prytz (27, 57, 70, 92); Stouck (145); Daniells (viii, ix); Djwa (55); Woodcock (1990, 48, 58); Weis (21), Burns (223). The etymology of "Bentley" is also pertinent to the theme of cycles and circles in the novel: the *Oxford English Dictionary* records that "bent" means "[c]onstrained into a curve, as a strung bow; curved, crooked, deflected from the straight line" (v.2, 117). "Bent" also denotes "[a] place covered with grass, as opposed to a wood; a bare field, a grassy plain, unenclosed pasture-land, a heath" (*Oxford English Dictionary* v.2, 116). The prairie is evoked in this derivation.

16. Stouck suggests Philip is on a "quest for a son" (147). Djwa points out "that Mrs. Bentley has been raising up her own images, in particular that of Philip . . ." (58). Cf. New (29), Weis (72, 75).

17. See Harrison on the garden myth in prairie fiction (30-34, 72, 75), and on desert imagery in *As For Me and My House* (39-40). The notion of the prairie as Eden still underlies "the popular tradition of prairie writing" (99), and in more serious works it appears as "an ironic image of human illusions" (99). Prairie realism depicts a "fallen" world, which "must be redeemed by suffering and sacrifice . . . ," like the death of Judith (100).

18. Kroetsch, as noted earlier, evokes Genesis in Ross's novel (1989, 217-8). Kroetsch also suggests that the Philip of the diary's opening is "parodic of the saving 'father' he is supposed to be in his ritual role. It is the *eighth* day of a month in spring, as if he has already arrived one day too late" (1989, 218). Cf. Burns on wind (168-9). Burns's thesis discusses the wind as a symbol of destruction in Ross's works. Buss notes Mrs. Bentley's opening description of the church, "'black even against the darkness . . .'" (Ross 8 in Buss 196). Buss asserts that Mrs. Bentley's "diary is the site of her subversion of some aspects of the patriarchal order represented by that church" (196). Buss suggests that wind eventually comes to mean "the taking on of linguistic power, of figuratively 'stealing' language 'to represent herself rather than to remain a mere representation of man'" (Buss quotes Sidonie Smith, *Poetics of Women's Autobiography* 41). Mrs. Bentley takes "on the power of language to restructure reality" (Buss 196). Banting notes that in this scene--Philip asleep, Mrs. Bentley writing--"[n]arrative issues from the body of the Other, the man, the husband. . . . Mrs. Bentley *is* writing" (33). The critic wonders if in Canada the muse is male, and writing feminine (32). See Froula's analysis of Woolf's *The Waves* (1988, 214-16). Froula notes Woolf's allusion to "the repressed maternal aspect of the waters, the matter or *mater* over which the spirit-god broods to create the world" (1988, 215; see 220, note 31). She also points out the incarnation of Mrs. Ramsay of *To the Lighthouse* as that very spirit god in an early draft of the novel: "Not Jahweh but Mrs. Ramsay, not a father-god but a mother-god, walks in Woolf's imaginary garden . . ." (1988, 214).

19. Brother and sister pairings also existed. Chevalier and Gheerbrant discuss the goddess Isis and her counterpart Osiris, "son frère et époux défunt, qu'elle ressuscite de son souffle . . ." (524).

20. Cf. Djwa (56). The critic sees a number of reversals of Christianity in the novel.

21. Djwa discusses paganism and/or its relinquishment in the novel in a number of passages of her article. Cf. (54, 56-7, 58, 65, note 2). Djwa also, importantly, figures Mrs. Bentley as a creator (albeit a biblical one): "There are also suggestions throughout the text that Mrs. Bentley has been raising up her own images, in particular that of Philip, the sensitive and impressionable artist who must be mothered along in the direction which she best sees fit" (58-9).

22. Others besides Kroetsch also note this replacement. Cf. Stouck (145, 146). Cf. D.G. Jones (42) and Prytz (79) on Philip's rebirth.

23. Banting suggests this is not a substitution of child for father, but an expression of hope "for a change in the relationship . . ." (39). Woodcock fears "a triumph of maternalism, with son indistinguishable from father and the matriarch supreme" (1990, 59). Barbara Mitchell suggests this passage indicates Mrs. Bentley's desire for disorder, her "certainty about uncertainty" (61). (See below in the chapter's text a section on carnivalesque disorder). For other discussion of the significance of this passage see John Moss (1974, 151), Compton (72), Rogers (38), Stouck (145), Cude (1973, 17; cf. 1979, 476, 483). For further discussion of Philip's emulation of his father, Mrs. Bentley's motherly relationship to Philip, and Philip's status as a child, cf. Stouck (146, 147); Tallman (pt.1, 8); Weis (70, 71: Judith, during their lovemaking, is cast in Philip's mother's role); Rogers (51); Stephens (23). See also Kroetsch, who, in a discussion of *As For Me and My House* and Willa Cather's *My Antonia*, suggests that "the bride, so often, without being wife, turns into mother" (1979, 82). See Buss on Mrs. Bentley as "patriarchal mother," basing her claim to motherhood of Judith's baby on the fact of Philip's--her husband's--paternity (200). Judith becomes "surrogate" (200). See Munich on Eve's acquiescence in patriarchy (256).

24. D.G. Jones notes Judith's ghostly aspect, and her connection to Mrs. Bentley. "Judith conveniently dies in childbirth. Since she represents equally the unconscious side of Mrs. Bentley, there is a sense in which she does not die at all, but simply fades out as a separate figure. Symbolically she lives on in Mrs. Bentley . . ." (42). Denham also comments on the convenience of Judith's pregnancy and death, suggesting these are "means of neatly resolving the action" (124). Burns asserts that Judith is "wraith-like, not of this world . . ."; Philip "is unable to

capture her essence" in his sketches (186). "The 'swift whiteness' of Judith's face allies her with the illumination of the dimension of the imagination" (187).

25. Cf. Cude (1979, 477, 487, note 8) for discussion of patronyms.

26. For critical commentary on characters doubling, mirroring or identifying with one another see Godard [Ross and Mrs. Bentley] (125); Stephens [Judith and Philip] (23); Stouck [Judith and Philip] (148); Daniells [Philip and Mrs. Bentley] (vii); Cude [Philip and Lawson] (1979, 482; 1973, 14); Comeau [the Bentleys and the Lawsons] (179); D.G. Jones [Judith represents the Bentleys' creative side; she also mirrors nature] (42); Prytz [Judith and Philip; the wilderness-identified Judith releases the artist in Philip] (78, 79); Harrison [Philip's artistry is "released by the land . . ."; Judith, identified with the land, releases Philip's "strength as a man"] (152); York [Judith's white face is also Philip's] (169); John Moss [Philip and Judith are connected by their silence, and their "defiance of gender conventions"; Paul and Mrs. Bentley "relat[e] to reality through words . . ."] (1991, 145); Ken Mitchell [Philip and Mrs. Bentley] (28-9). Meena Shirwadkar, in perhaps a sweeping statement of similarity, suggests that "Judith, Steve, Paul are types rather than individuals" (155).

27. Tallman notes that trains "in times past had signalled to him an escape from the desolation of his childhood" (pt.1, 17). Cf. Barbara Mitchell (53); John Moss (1974, 159); Rogers (112); Weis (39-41).

28. Kroetsch seems to cast doubt on the reality of the entire seduction scene: "The Philip who was asleep and fully clothed in the opening sentence *may* have been brought awake to Judith's bed, and that while Mrs. Bentley, finally if fitfully, both slept and dreamed" (1989, 220-21).

29. Tallman notes an oblique connection of the ravine and Judith. When Mrs. Bentley "becomes aware of the force of mute passion with which Judith West breaks through Philip's constraint she is at once reminded of the April day she and her husband 'sat in the snowstorm watching the water rush through the stones'--the silence, the snow, the water and the stones--the story of their lives in a profound moment, a magnificent scene" (pt.1, 17). Djwa also connects the two ravine scenes, citing the second trip to the ravine as the marker of the beginning of the novel's second half, a scene wherein ". . . Philip takes stock of himself and determines to shape his own way. . . . His decision, 'if a man's a victim of circumstances he deserves to be,' inevitably leads

to Judith West" (60-1). See also New (30), for a connection of Judith with the ravine. Burns discusses the role of wind, snow and train in the early ravine scene as directional signs for the Bentleys (170, 171).

30. John Moss suggests "Mrs. Bentley's identification with her own gender is no more stable than that which she allows her husband" (1991, 142; cf. 143). Davey discusses Laura's masculine attributes and suggests that all the married women in the work "have identities through their relationships to men and usually to men's activities" (182). Women "are tempted by dreams of androgyny" in prairie writing, suggests Kroetsch (1979, 81): the critic notes Mrs. Bentley is "capable of doing both women's and men's work," and does not accept "the assigned role . . ." (1979, 80).

31. Barbara Mitchell notes the context of this derivation: a gathering of Paul and the Bentleys at Partridge Hill, in a "pagan rite" at which Paul is minister, lighting "the sacrificial fire" (52). "Here, though, the offering is a true giving of self, not an offering to false gods" [in contrast to the Finleys' dinner] (52). New (29) notes the general thematic relevance of Paul's etymological musings in the novel; cf. Cude (1973, 5).

32. Rogers suggests Judith has a "simultaneous experience of life and death" (42). This links her to the carnival grotesque, discussed below in the essay. For further critical commentary on sacrifice in the text cf. New (28), Stouck (148), Djwa (54, 62). Kroetsch (1989) insightfully links the Eve and Adam of the opening scene with Mary and Christ: Philip's "first appearance at once anticipates future bedroom scenes and his own fulfilment in, replacement by, the figure of the child. His first appearance evokes recollections of the Pietà and anticipates the substitution of Judith West into beds and into stories of death and childbirth" (218). Kroetsch also notes that "[w]e are told in the second entry of the diary that, in the choir's need to sing its place in the larger story, 'The only voice is Judith West . . .' And it is Judith West who is, by the story's end, brought to bed as mother of the son that Mrs. Bentley would and will have" (220). There is some suggestion here of Judith's role in a drama--a "larger story" at least--and of Mrs. Bentley's manipulation of it.

33. Blodgett discusses D.G. Jones, who, "[p]laying on a playful suggestion of J. Hillis Miller, . . . observes that the text may be considered a host, a word whose connotations extend to 'guest,' 'enemy,' and 'sacrificial victim.' Thus the poet as sacrificial victim becomes consumed, and the translator, in whom the poem lives on, becomes transformed as host" (Blodgett 1982, 28-9). This has ramifications not

only for Judith's inscription as sacrifice, but for the sacrifice of Mrs. Bentley's writing, and her own aspirations, for the sake of her son at the end of the novel.

34. Critics hint at the notion of rehearsals in the text, and point out the importance of the ranch scene. Stouck notes connections among Philip, Steve, the Bentleys' stillborn child, Joe Lawson and Joe Lawson's son (147). "The parallelisms and repetition of detail give the novel a highly stylized quality" (147). Stouck also seems to hint that events in the first and second halves of the book shadow each other: the "burnt-out garden" and frozen flowers evoke Mrs. Bentley's sterile love of Philip; moths whirling self-destructively around a summer lamp and, later, spinning snowflakes, imitate Mrs. Bentley's passion for Philip (148-9; cf. Burns 173-4). Stouck also comments on the ranch scene, noting that "the whole pattern of the novel is reversed: they are in the hills instead of on the prairie, in the country instead of the town . . ." (149). There is a mood of "freedom rather than inhibition and the characters are able to express themselves" (149). While suggesting that at the ranch the characters "are also able to see more clearly the nature and design of their existence in Horizon" (149-50), Stouck notes that "the imaginative design of the novel remains the same" there [Mrs. Bentley still wants Philip; Philip is still averse to women] (149). Blodgett signals the ranch section as "[o]ne of the most important sections of the novel, and one which suggests the design of a complex pastoral . . ." (1982, 203; cf. 204). Cf. Burns (184) on the ranch scene. Cf. Blodgett (1982, 71) for a discussion of rehearsal in Alice Munro's "Walking on Water." Djwa also suggests a two-part structure to the novel. The novel's "first half develops through a cycle of wind and drought chronicling Steve's coming and going, and the eventual rains where the Bentleys are reunited; the second part of the novel works through the darkness and despair of winter, ending with the death of Judith and the birth of her child in April" (55). Furthermore, "[i]n the first cycle of the novel," Mrs. Bentley "is threatened by Philip's affection for Steve and in the second by his affection for Judith" (59). Djwa also cites the two ravine walks as markers of what she perceives as the novel's two halves (60-1). Kroetsch conflates the ranch with a kind of "underworld," where the characters learn "life-giving truths . . ." (1989, 219); the town the couple visits during the ranch section "echoes and inverts Horizon," and the dance they attend "parodies the first diary entry . . ." (1989, 219). He also comments on "false harmony," false resolutions to Mrs. Bentley's quest in the form of Paul and Steve (1989, 219). He connects, again, the opening scene depicting the sleeping Philip with the sleeping Mrs. Bentley

and Philip's affair (1989, 220-21). Tallman's discussion of the two ravine scenes is pertinent here (see above). Williams suggests that "[i]n one of a long series of paired chapters, Judith follows Paul to Mrs. Bentley's house, apparently to say something about the impending or continuing liaison . . ." (158). I cite this as an example of a possible structuring device in the novel: i.e. Paul's visit to the Bentleys' as a rehearsal of Judith's arrival.

35. Ricou and Stouck discuss Philip's molding of Steve "in his own likeness" (Stouck 147) and the likelihood of the perpetuation of this practice (Ricou 87-8, Stouck 147). There are hints in their comments of the dying god story and of Philip's own boyhood as a rehearsal for the son's arrival (cf. Stouck 147). Stephens notes Steve is "the image for [sic] what the Bentleys have wanted . . ." (23).

36. D.G. Jones has a slightly different version of this forecast. Remarking upon the seduction in the shed, he suggests that "[t]he shed at the back of the parsonage houses Philip's true life. It was prepared to make a room for an orphan boy whom Philip had tried to adopt, and it becomes finally the nuptial bed on which he begets a son of his own" (42).

37. McMullen notes the "flowing river also suggests life and vigor" (68).

38. Davey says that Mrs. Bird's first name is also known: it is Josephine (Davey 181; he cites Ross 29). However, the critic also asserts Laura's "sharp contrast to the women of the town . . . ," and the fact that "she is the only married woman whom Mrs. Bentley can manage to call by her given name, and the only one never called by the text 'Mrs.'" (181).

39. Barbara Mitchell suggests that Laura "flout[s] . . . stereotypical male/female roles" (59), and encourages "sexuality; it is she who puts Mrs. Bentley in the room with pictures of 'pure-bred bulls,' who encourages Mrs. Bentley to go to the dance, and who is the single recipient of a gift from Philip (significantly a painting of her stallion) . . ." (59).

40. Cf. Barbara Mitchell (58-9), and Cude (1979, 479) for hints of foreshadowings of Philip's affair.

41. Priapus, explains Walker, is the "[g]od of the phallus . . ." (1983, 816). More mythological allusions: Paul, as Barbara Mitchell notes, refers to towns near the ranch as "'Grasshopper towns'" (Ross 127; cf. Mitchell 58). Mitchell explains that this refers to ". . . Eos's seduction

of Tithonus, who, because he was granted immortality without agelessness, is turned into a grasshopper as an act of mercy" (58). Eos is a birth goddess (Walker 1983, 281): perhaps there is foreshadowing here of Judith's pregnancy. Barbara Mitchell also notes of an earlier mythological etymology session with Paul--he discusses *"Cupid, Eros, Venus,* and *Aphrodite*" (Mitchell 57; she cites Ross 101)--that "[t]he Bentleys have replaced the original mythic gods, goddesses, and heroes with false gods of social convention" (57).

42. Laura's horse "is the most direct indication of the sexual symbolism of the horses in the novel" (Cude 1979, 488, note 9). John Moss notes horses' associations in the novel "with coming to manhood, and then with masculine sexuality," and also with "infidelity" (1991, 144).

43. For further discussion of the role of horses in Ross, including their role as prompters of "contemplation or action," as catalysts of "transcendent thought or experience"--sexuality included here--or as confidants, cf. Weis (45-6). Cf. Weis (47-53) for more discussion of horses in Ross's works, including mention of the Pegasus legend, as connected with one of his short stories (48).

44. Cude suggests Minnie is Mrs. Bentley's "animal surrogate" in the dream (1979, 481), while El Greco is Philip's animal surrogate (1979, 481).

45. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records that "[t]he Italian word is possibly the same as OFr. *Hellequin, Herlequin, Herlekin, Hierlekin, Hielekin, Helquin, Hennequin,* a devil celebrated in mediaeval legend, esp. in *la maisnie Helequin, Harlequini familia* (Miège), a company or troop of demon horsemen riding by night. Of this the ultimate origin is possibly Teutonic" (v. 6, 1119). Similarly, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* reports that ". . . fr. MF *Helquin, Hannequin, Hennequin,*" the word denotes a "leader of a troop of malevolent spirits popularly believed to fly through the air at night, fr. OF *Hellequin, Hielekin, Hierlekin,* prob. fr. (assumed) ME *Herle king* (whence ML *Herla rex*) King Herle, mythical figure who may orig. have been identical with Woden, chief god of the Germanic peoples" (1034). Skeat ventures his own "guess": "Perhaps *hellekin* may have been of Teut. origin; thus OHG. *hella cunni,* OFriesic *helle kin* (AS. *helle cyn,* Icel. *Heljar kyn*) would mean 'the kindred of hell' or 'the host of hell,' hence a troop of demons. The sense being lost, the OF. *maisnie* would be added to keep up the idea of 'host,' turning *hierlekin* into (apparently) a personal name of a single demon" (261).

46. Blodgett would perhaps disagree with such an assessment. He quotes the "broken old horse" passage, and Mrs. Bentley's remark that the town, with its "upstart, mean complacency" (Ross 91), offers a contrast to the horse picture: ". . . one has the sense that her intuition of cycle is significant for what it says about the town, for the novel itself does not reinforce a notion of flow and rhythm. In fact, the reader's only sustained perception of the prairie is of a pre-human wilderness where everything takes on the contour of death" (1982, 204). [He also notes later that Judith, in "refus[ing] the false," may be "a synecdoche of the prairie in an undivided, organicist state . . ." (1982, 213): there is perhaps a hint here of Judith's connection to cycles]. Burns asserts that "Philip's dying dream of artistic fulfilment, like the old horse, is part of the cycle of renewal which is contrary to the static existence of the town" (181). Indeed, "though the horse is old and broken-down, some of the flux and motion of the surrounding environment is evident . . ." (180). Cf. Cude (1979, 485-6).

47. As Buss points out, patriarchy was a fact "in the historical world Ross lived in during the depression and the second world war . . ." (207; cf. Lacey C5, Barbara Mitchell 55; Weis on "alienation" between men and women 25, cf. 29-30). Woodcock (1990) suggests critic Gaile McGregor sees the novel displaying "a very Canadian, patriarchal" pattern (20; cf. McGregor 421).

48. A number of critics link the garden with a perceived failure of creativity on Mrs. Bentley's part: cf. Rogers (39); McMullen (85-6); Cude (1979, 481; 1973, 11); Stouck (148). John Moss (1991, 144) and Denham (121) note the failure of Mrs. Bentley's pre-Horizon garden and the death of their first child; Moss also connects that first garden's failure to Philip's failed attempts to write (1991, 144). Barbara Mitchell notes the sexual associations of the ranch and the fact that Priapus is associated with gardens (58): perhaps this is a foreshadowing of the poppy seed fertility scene.

49. A number of critics complain about the bookstore. Stephens dismisses it simply because it is Mrs. Bentley's plan (20-1), as does New (26). Harrison suggests Mrs. Bentley's escape plan moves the couple "[b]ack to the city, where *she* came from" (152). "If Philip is stifled, it is by social forces, and Mrs. Bentley seems to be Delilah like delivering him into the power of the Philistines" (152).

50. Atwood cites *As For Me and My House* when describing "[t]he Great Canadian Baby . . . ; it could in some cases be termed the Baby Ex Machina, since it is lowered at the end

of the book to solve problems for the characters which they obviously can't solve for themselves" (207). Atwood identifies the "Great Canadian Baby" and the "Great Canadian Coffin": "But stunted or doomed fertility, the identity of birth and death, are what might be expected from the Ice Goddess" (208; cf. her mention of "levitation of cradle out of coffin . . ." in James Reaney [208]; cf. [222] on death in Canadian, especially Quebec, fiction). Judith certainly dies giving birth; Bakhtin describes the "ambivalent" carnivalesque image of "senile pregnant hags": this is "pregnant death, a death that gives birth. . . . Life is shown in its two-fold contradictory process; it is the epitome of incompleteness" (25). For discussion of ambivalence in the novel, cf. New (26-32); Godard (123); Prytz (11, 39); Banting (35). John Moss suggests "[a]mbiguity in Ross's novel . . . is a function of irony" (1974, 158). Irony in Ross does not go unremarked upon either: cf. Moss (1974, 151); McMullen (10, 58, 142-44); Thieme (93); Williams (165); Stouck (149); Comeau (178); Woodcock (1990, 13, 20, 33, 57); Godard (123, 127).

51. Buss adapts the writings of H. Porter Abbott on the construction of reality by diaries and diarists to her discussion of Mrs. Bentley's diary (cf. 194). "Thus, the 'diarist, through the agency of her writing, can effect an evolution as a human being or, through that same agency, impede or prevent it . . . She hones a new image of herself' (Abbott 43) and by consequence, as she reconstructs herself she reconstructs the way she relates to others and the world, and to some degree reconstructs the way others and the world relate to her" (194). These comments deflect Davey's observation and restore power to Mrs. Bentley and her narrative.

52. Cf. Cude (1973, 17-8; 1979, 488, note 13) and John Moss (1991, 143) for forecasts of doom. Davey suggests the novel's approval of events (cf. 189, 190). Prytz, more optimistically, asserts that naming the baby Philip suggests "Philip's mental rebirth" (36).

53. Kroetsch offers very important insights into Mrs. Bentley's status--indeed mythic or divine status--as a creator (cf. 1989, 217-21). Kroetsch concludes by evoking Mrs. Bentley at the end of the novel as a subversive and goddess-like Eve; the critic highlights language as Mrs. Bentley's creative tool: "In naming the son Philip, Mrs. Bentley creates the son in her husband's image--and in her own. In her shaping of the web of language, in her responding to the shape of the web of language, she names herself quite possibly the most compelling and disquieting character in Canadian fiction" (1989, 221).

54. Banting notes that Mrs. Bentley "says of Philip's failed novel that even she could have done a better job, and the reader wonders whether the text is 'simply' her diary or rather her attempt to 'use the pliers and hammer twice as well myself'" (Banting 31; quotation is from Ross 5).

55. Kroetsch suggests that Mrs. Bentley is "able to be the artist by not being an artist, by insisting all the while that the artist in the family is Philip" (1989, 220). Kroetsch also notes that Mrs. Bentley does not name herself in the diary, and that she suggests, in the autobiographical journal's first entry, "that the subject is not herself at all but rather her husband, Philip" (1989, 217).

56. Banting ponders: "I wonder, in Canada, is the muse male? Is writing feminine? Is Mrs. Bentley not the muse in need of a great artist but the artist herself? In both Canada and America, is the woman who *refuses* to name (herself or the Other, respectively) paradoxically the one most able to speak the great spaces and the enormous silences? Is masculine writing an attempt to appropriate the feminine text?" (32). Cf. Banting (30, 32, 33, 34, 39-40, note 7) for instructive comparisons to Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Critics insist on the artistry of the diary: cf. Woodcock (1990, 49; 1991, 31), Harrison (149). Critics also see the diary as a weapon against "spiritual annihilation" (Harrison xi), as "self-creation" (John Moss 1991, 147), as the "embodiment" of Mrs. Bentley's "bicameral mind" (John Moss 1991, 147).

57. Cf. McMullen for discussion of the frequency of diary entries (60). McMullen suggests the diary tapers off after Mrs. Bentley discovers Philip's affair; there are "several entries" in April, when the baby is born, "and the final note in the journal is made on the Bentleys' last day in Horizon in May" (60). There are indeed a spate of entries shortly before the birth, but in fact there are only three entries following this event, including the final May chapter. I note above that a month passes between the second last and last diary entries; there is also about a three week gap after Christmas preceding the baby's birth, so longish lulls are not unknown. However, the diary does end after the baby's birth. Denham notes that diary entries fall off in the winter months (119-120). See also Froula (1983) on the "silencing" of "woman's culture-making power in 'matrimony'" (343).

58. Cude continues: "Within this somber play, Ross has redefined the age-old concept of tragic fall, giving us a loss of integrity as the most calamitous reversal of human fortunes" (1979, 485).

59. John Moss notes that "[w]ith the end of the text, the Bentleys end as well. The novel, however, remains intact, a perpetual presence in the reader's mind" (1991, 147). I suggest in the chapter's text that the novel ends with the end of the diary.

60. Cf. Davey for discussion of Philip Bentley's striving after an Author-God (182-3). Davey, echoing Barthes, notes Mrs. Bentley's comments on Philip's attempt at a novel and an article: "The novel here has Mrs. Bentley emphasize the textualized quality of Philip's identity, the dignity constructed through 'puffy imageless language' and the faith produced by pastoral metaphor. Behind this and the other musings it allows her on the gap between discursive constructions and the experiences they attempt to represent, the novel repeatedly places the concept of hypocrisy--with its implications of a single and 'correct' text" (183). Davey suggests that not only Philip but Mrs. Bentley too "participate[s]" in "textual constructions," often unwittingly (183).

61. Davey would suggest the novel's complicity in this denial (cf. 189, 190). Cf. Froula's analysis of Clarice Lispector's short story "The Message" (1988, 203-7). A male/female split occurs in the story: "The anguish and language that seemed at first to belong to both of them is now appropriated to the male culture that exiles her while saving him. Rewriting Genesis, Lispector anatomizes male initiation into the father's culture and exposes female initiation as an exile to a position outside that culture . . . " (1988, 207). There is an echo in Froula of Mrs. Bentley's exile from language, from writing, into motherhood and its attendant concerns of the flesh.

62. Banting suggests that the House of Bentley may also refer to "the House of Language" (35). Banting discusses Mrs. Bentley's struggles with language, which make her an artist (36).

63. Buss speaks of Judith here, but Mrs. Bentley's voice also dies with the arrival of a son.

Chapter Two

> 'There are a lot of fanciful things in your *Genesis* too, you know. Just another attempt, in fact--not by any means the first or last--to explain and account for the scheme of things.' (*Sawbones Memorial* 127)

I noted in Chapter One Genesis's attempt not only to account for the scheme of things, but to suppress an earlier such accounting. The presence of goddess mythology as palimpsest in *As For Me and My House* and in Genesis foregrounds the very existence of these works as, in Barthes's words, a tissue of quotations "issues des milles foyers de la culture" (65).[1] Moreover, the novel's encoding of goddess myths links it not simply to Genesis, but to the biblical story's practice of suppressing tales of female power. Unlike the Bible, however, the novel shows up this suppression; as if to undermine the power of God's authorship and underscore the necessity for a female role in language-making, the text itself disappears with the arrival of the patriarchal son, emblem of the Author-God. The fate of female-authored texts--benchmarks of the success of sacrifice's drive towards renewal--will also be a concern in the following discussion of Ross's other three novels.

1. *The Well*

Cyclic stories of sacrifice again prevail in these works. I begin with *The Well*, Ross's second novel, wherein Sylvia Larson replaces Mrs. Bentley as director of the dying god drama. Indeed, a number of critics have noted

similarities between the two texts. Married to the rich elderly widower Larson, Sylvia becomes the lover of Chris Rowe, a young runaway Larson brings home as a substitute for his dead son. Sylvia and her paramour plot Larson's murder and dump the body in a well on Larson's old homestead. Chris, however, is only a reluctant participant in these dirty dealings: despite his criminal past, he has a "soft streak" (103; cf. Burns 124) and feels a bond with the old man. Sylvia is in fact "the one who spoil[s] things . . ." (85) for the two men (see Burns 131), and Chris finally decides to confess to his part in Larson's death. Although his fate is left unsealed at the end of the novel, both the crime and Chris's eventual salvation have been prophesied in an earlier scene in which Larson shows Chris the well: "'Drop something in and you lose it for a while. Always comes back all right, but you've got to give it time" (104).

According to J.C. Cooper, wells stand for "[t]he feminine principle; the womb of the Great Mother; the psyche" (190).

> Having contact with the underworld, the well often contains magic waters with powers of healing and wish-fulfilling. . . . In Christianity it represents salvation and purification. The well, spring, or fountain at the foot of the Tree of Life in Paradise gives rise to the Living Waters and the four rivers of Paradise. (Cooper 190)

The feminine principle in *The Well* is both motherly and monstrous: the well was dug by hand by Larson's faithful first wife Cora to provide life-giving waters in the midst of a prairie Chris describes as "desert-like and sinister" (13), but it also forms part of bloodlusty Sylvia's murder plot.[2] The well also foretells Chris's absolution and contains the waters of his baptism as Larson's son. Moreover, it becomes the regenerative uterine cauldron of the underworld goddess Hel, whom we glimpsed briefly in *As For Me and My House*: things dropped into the well "com[e] back all right. . . ."[3] Ken Mitchell suggests that the novel ends on a note of "redemption" for the young protagonist (57):[1] Larson, the signs predict, will be resuscitated in his protegé.

Margaret Atwood explained Robert Graves's division of the triple goddess into Virgin, Mother and Crone figures and assigned Judith and Mrs. Bentley places in this pantheon (see Chapter One). Walker similarly notes tha early cosmologies split the goddess into three, into a "trinitarian form of Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer" (1983, 1018). Sylvia seems an apt candidate for queen of the underworld; Larson's first wife Cora, who gave birth to the couple's only child and helped construct the life-sustaining well, is an appropriate Creator.[4] Chris also meets a Preserver during his stay with the Larsons: young Elsie Grover is a virginal conquest of Chris's whose faith.

he believes, will sustain him during the prison sentence he expects for his part in a botched robbery in Montreal and his role in Larson's murder. "Just to know she was there," he reassures himself, "to remember--for the moment that was enough" (255).

Despite their trinitarian affinities, however, the interests of these three women are at odds in the novel, the feminine principle splintered. Notwithstanding the title's imagery, *The Well* at first glance seems to concentrate on fathers and sons. In the thesis's introduction I noted Dick Harrison's account of "[t]he disappearing father" in Ross's work, including *The Well* (188-9). Ken Mitchell concurs, suggesting that a "prominent theme is the mutual father-son quest pursued by Larson and Chris" (53). Lorraine McMullen also asserts that ". . . Larson hopes to find a surrogate son in Chris, to find in this present reality a replacement for his own illusory world" (92). She notes the importance of the "search for a son" in *As For Me and My House, The Well*, and *Sawbones Memorial*, and links that search to "creativity" (141).

Stouck suggests that in *As For Me and My House* baby Philip's arrival is heralded by the Bentley's stillborn son, by Lawson's[6] dying son Peter, and by the Bentley's adopted son Steve (Stouck 147). Stouck also points out other "such parallels" in *The Well* (147, note 7). Chris Rowe's place in Larson's family, and in the dying god story, is certainly

prepared both by Larson's son, who is killed as a child in an accident with a horse, and by the farmer's sickly nephew, who, as McMullen notes, is "also significantly named Chris . . ." (95). Stouck suggests Chris's name associates him with Christ (148); indeed the "'[r]eal nam[e]'" of Larson's nephew is "'Christian'" (Ross 4).[7] Young Christian dies at age seven;[8] Chris, similarly, is seven years old when his childhood ends and he is saddled with the "enormous responsibility" of keeping his wayward father home (83). Chris becomes father to his immature parent: indeed "the tall stranger" is "so much younger than he had expected, so much more like one of the big boys he sometimes watched playing baseball or riding motor-cycles . . ." (83). The big boy abandons his son in an ice cream parlour (84); at Christian's funeral, Chris mourns this loss of innocence. "Chris began remembering when he was seven" (215):

> Seven was easy. He could have met his Maker pure then too, held his own with the best of them. Tired, this fellow was saying--every so often He wanted somebody young and innocent because He got tired of so much sin. Jesus! Who didn't? If that was what you called it: the jobs you didn't have the guts for, the big-time act you tried to fool yourself with . . .--the unwantedness, the envy. (216; cf. Burns 130)

Unwantedness has driven Chris into a big-time act that

includes botched robbery and the accidental shooting of a shop proprietor, Baxter, who figures as yet another lost father. This time failure turns Chris, ironically, into a wanted man. The young man wants not only a father, but a chance to be a son: on the run, he adopts as an alias the patronym Mackenzie, "the name of a teacher who once had tried to persuade him to quit his gang and spend more time studying" (4).[9] He ends up, however, sheltering at the home of yet another man unsure of his position as father, a train-watcher, a man who plots imaginary disappearances: "'. . . I keep on thinking about the trains, listening and taking off on a trip'" (18).[10] Larson--son of Lars--takes orders from his own dead son: "'All along it's him I've been doing it for. Sure, he's dead--sort of a game I keep playing--thinking things up for him, supposing to myself he's going to drop in on a visit and look the place over'" (18). The boy, perhaps sensing Larson's inadequacies, adopted a surrogate father of his own, an inspirational teacher named Mr. Norris (15).

There are shades here of Philip Bentley's adoration of his own preacher-father.[11] Paul Kirby noted that Philip means "'lover of horses'" (Ross 213; cited by Barbara Mitchell 54); "Norris," similarly, is a "[m]asculine name from the Teutonic, meaning horseman" (Jobes pt. 2, 1181). In the tradition of the disappearing father we witnessed in action in *As For Me and My House*, Norris leaves, and the boy

names his dog after him, in much the same way that Chris pays homage to the teacher Mackenzie. Larson, emulating his son, has ensured that there has been a cattle dog named Norris on the farm "'ever since'" (29). When the boy himself disappears, falling fatally from his horse Minnie (cf. *As For Me and My House*), his last words are not a plea for fatherly succour, but instructions on farm management, based on a hint from Norris: "'Grow alfalfa.' Same as his mother, digging her nails in and saying 'Keep him at school'" (16). Larson does grow alfalfa, successfully; and, as if honouring the commands of a powerful patriarch, he makes other improvements, like putting "'in electr light - that was for him. Last summer I painted the house over--that was for him too'" (18).[13]

Women seem incidental to these relationships, although Cora, like her son, has her share of memorials on the farm. "'It was on her account I put in the bathroom,'" says Larson (26), who likens the facility to a tombstone: "'Here I can look in as often as I want to'" (27). The bathroom temple--another feminine well[14]--contains a gramophone, a belated wedding present from Larson to Cora (27) which the old man plays to spite Sylvia on "'[n]ights she wouldn't . . .'" (27). The implication is that Cora would have: she was a model wife, the bearer of Larson's child--an Eve after the Fall, whose "'urge'" is for her husband (Genesis 3:16).[15] She was also a workhorse. Sylvia, complains Larson,

"'[w]on't lift a hand outside. . . . [S]he'd be a poor one for a bad year if you were just getting started'" (28). Cora, in contrast, was a good one for getting started--she hand dug the well with her husband and Ned the horse (104). Cora and Ned are certainly identified with each other in the novel (see McMullen 90-1, 97). Larson keeps the deaf and blind animal alive because he dates "back to Cora's time and the sod stable'" (38-9): he is a symbol of Cora's devotion.

I pointed out horses' symbolic and mythic connections in my discussion of *As For Me and My House*, including their association with "the cyclic movement of the world of phenomena . . ." (Cirlot 152), and their Jungian interpretation as symbols of the mother (Cirlot 152). Both are appropriate here, considering Cora's role as mother of Larson's son, and the cyclic movement of father-son relationships in the novel. Certainly the identification of horses and women doesn't end with Cora, something which portends further female involvement in cyclic phenomena. Indeed, as McMullen asserts, "[f]or Ross's farmers the horse is a companion, and sometimes a reliable and accepting surrogate for a dissatisfied wife . . ." (91; see Weis 48-53). The dissatisfied Sylvia is perhaps a surrogate for a companionable horse: she certainly has the stallion North's "imperiousness" and "brute beauty" (41). She also resembles Minnie, the mare which threw and killed the boy: "'A fast little sorrel. . . . Smart and mean and pretty'" (15).

Indeed, the narrator describes Sylvia in the same terms used to depict the horses: Sylvia "was a handsome, big-breasted blonde" (20); "Ned was a gaunt, rangy bay" (38). North snorts when Chris first reaches out to touch his nose (41); the horse catches Chris's shirtsleeve and tears it "from shoulder to elbow" (42). The text focusses similarly on Sylvia's equine nostrils and dangerous mouth in Chris's initial meeting with her:

> The nose was strong and straight, with flared nostrils that gave her a look of suppressed, hard-breathing energy. The mouth had a sinewy twitch when she spoke, as if it were an exposed muscle. As she advanced towards him across the kitchen her deep-set eyes had a look of contempt that she made no effort to conceal. (21; cf. Ken Mitchell 52)

Larson keeps North as a studhorse: "'Just for that. . . . Kind of job I wouldn't mind myself'" (43).[15] As McMullen notes, Sylvia is also sexual chattel, acquired to distract Larson from his wanderlust (93). "Their marriage was strictly a business arrangement" says the critic (93). As Larson complains,

> '. . . Sylvia was supposed to help me get over wanting trips, but she's too young, she just puts up with me. When it's over it's over. Cora now--with her it lasted. All night, or all week, depending. But we were both young, and maybe it's

> not fair putting all the blame on Sylvia. I've no right to her; I'm only getting what I pay for.' (Ross 74; cf. Weis 74)

Innocent, submissive Elsie Grover, Chris's country dance conquest, becomes Cora's replacement in the novel. She is a horse too: when Chris kisses her "he felt her body set defensively--like Minnie, he thought, when he was tightening the saddle girths" (146). Indeed, often in Ross "the horse which is linked with sexuality is a young mare" (McMullen 92); Chris, moreover, "demonstrates his virility by handling the stallion, North" (McMullen 92). Certainly when Chris and Elsie move on to the prairie to make love, Chris is reminded

> of the mares that came to North, . . . the way they braced themselves and waited, as if it were something imposed upon them, their lot, against which there was no appeal. The comparison amused and pleased him. It also touched a deeper level and gave him a sense of mastery, of right, such as he would not have derived from mere consent. (148)

Larson jestingly envied North's job as studhorse; Chris fulfills his adopted father's ambitions (see Weis 49).

The women may seem to play second fiddle to the father-son relationships with which the text primarily concerns itself, but, like equine deae-ex-machina dropped into the

action, the female characters and their symbolic baggage are essential to the plot's dramatic orchestrations. Everyone is an actor in this novel. Sylvia exaggerates Larson's failings and fakes concern: "'Other times make out I'm worried. The way he's always talking about trains, I'm scared some day he'll catch one. Like there's more to it than people realize'" (184). McMullen, pointing out that "illusion versus reality" is a major theme of the work, suggests that "[b]oth Chris and Larson live in unreal worlds" (99). "Year after year [Larson] . . . continues to depend on the illusion of his dead son returning to give meaning to his life, to his work, and to his success. Chris lives in the illusory world of Boyle Street admiration . . ." (99). Indeed Larson theatrically reanimates his dead son: "'Sometimes that's the way I play it: I get him a wife and a new house of his own. He's been away, seeing places, just like you. Then he comes home and I've got everything ready waiting'" (18). A chip off the old surrogate block, Chris, as McMullen explained above, plays the same game, gathering past acquaintances around him: "Rickie and the Boyle Street boys were still necessary; to keep them impressed he brought about changes swiftly, with style. The farm became a ranch, pulled up its fences and rolled back to the horizon" (51). I noted rehearsals and post-ranch final performances in *As For Me and My House*: similarly, sex is "performance" to Chris

(129); moreover, his relationship with Sylvia is prefigured by a paid tryst in Montreal with an older woman (134). Chris's misadventures in Montreal and the accidental shooting of Baxter also rehearse his role in Larson's murder.

The novel's all-encompassing script, however, is, again, the dying god story. Chris/Christian/Christ's role and that of the disappearing father have been discussed above, but women are also crucial to this plot. Larson, for instance, notes that both he and Sylvia are Swedish (4,5), and the text offers up Sylvia as a horsey Norse death-goddess:

> Ancient kings of Sweden were torn to pieces by horse-Valkyries or horse-masked priestesses of Freya, known as *volvas*. Medieval folklore redefined a *volva* as a witch able to transform herself into a mare. She embodied the spirit of the Scandinavian death-goddess who rode a winged black horse known as the Valraven (Raven-ridden-by-Valkyries). (Walker 1983, 413)[16]

Appropriately, Freya, "[l]ike all forms of the Goddess, . . . represented sexual love . . ." (Walker 1983, 324): "Her consort Frey sometimes took the form of a phallus. In Uppsala his name was Fricco, 'Lover,' cognate with the phallic god Priapus, from the Indo-European root *prij*, to make love. . . ." (Walker 1983, 324). Frey, a member of the

company of sacrificed gods, "was the god of Yule, the pagan solstitial festival assimilated to Christmas. At the turning of the solar year he was born of his virgin-mother-sister-bride" (Walker 1983, 324). Appropriately, Sylvia-Freya and Chris-Frey are not only lovers, but comprise a mother and son pair. Because ". . . Sylvia is wife to Larson, she becomes a substitute mother to Chris," suggests W. . (31). Stouck, similarly, asserts that Sylvia is a "mother-lover figure" (145, note 6). McMullen too notes that "[i]n many ways Sylvia is a mother-figure. She is older than Chris who sees her as stronger than he is" (93; cf. 93-4). She suggests an oedipal connection, a triangle of "son- father-figure- mother-figure" which finds a precedent in Chris's childhood relationship with his mother (94). Chris, asserts McMullen, felt betrayed by "the taking of a lover by his mother" (94).[17]

I described above another Yuletide figure associated with Sylvia: Minnie, the horse whose name, as discussed in *As For Me and My House*, is a diminutive of Marv, yet another incarnation of the Great Goddess, mother/consort of the dying and resurrected god. The original Minnie in this novel--the one Chris Rowe rides is the "'[s]pit of the first Minnie, except she's bigger'" (39)--threw and killed Larson's son. As Larson explains, "'[p]eople were always telling me she was no horse for a boy. She'd get the bit in her teeth and go anywhere she wanted. Sometimes she threw

him--more times I figure than I ever heard about" (15-16). The boy's relationship with his horse mirrors Larson's marriage to Sylvia: she throws off his sexual advances, and refuses outdoor work. "'. . . I give in on a lot of things,'" Larson admits (28). Moreover, the son's death under Minnie's hooves prefigures Larson's murder. Larson describes Minnie's role in his son's accident:

> 'It was the saddle; she had a trick of taking a deep breath so you couldn't get the girths tight, and this morning, just as they were going through the gate, it turned. Soon as she felt him round her feet she went crazy--it didn't take her long.' (16)

As if to emphasize the equine connection between the boy's death and his father's murder--between Minnie and Sylvia as goddesses of destruction--Larson's body is slung over a horse to be taken to the well for disposal, an ironic evocation of the horse's association with "'funerary'" mythology and practice (Walker 1983, 411) and "burial-rites" (Cirlot 152).

Minnie rebelled against the saddle's domestication. Sylvia's life is similarly circumscribed: "'I'm not his wife. He's still got Cora--Cora and the boy. I'm just for the meals and going to bed with. He's just paying me'" (181). Sylvia, a former farm girl turned waitress (28, 60), has married Larson for his money, but only after long

association with "'the wrong kind'" of men (189). "'Money didn't mean anything till I got tired at last and tried him,'" she explains to Chris. "'It hasn't worked out, so now I want to start over'" (189). Chris is the chosen new consort: "'Somebody like you's worth hanging on to'" (189). The young woman fears that any child fathered by Larson would "'just be his'" (190). Chris's children, however, "'would be different. I keep thinking what we could do for them: two or three, maybe, you all over'" (190).

Sylvia's dream of producing replicas of Chris is a biblical, "[l]et us make man in our image . . ." (Genesis 1:26) creative outlet. It is the outlet Mrs. Bentley ultimately opts for, at the expense of her writerly and musical talents. And it is the option Sylvia chooses, despite the divine powers of manipulation which the narrator assigns her, and which she shares with Mrs. Bentley (see Munich 256 on Eve's "acquiescence"). It is seemingly strange then that Chris, who conjures up a "sense of mastery, of right" (Ross 148) during his seduction of Elsie Grover, balks at this invitation to take his place in the patriarchal order: ". . . at the thought of this [Larson's] gentle foolishness giving way to the reality of a stranger's son--his son and Sylvia's--he shrank back with a feeling that it would be double murder" (191). Double murder: Larson and his lineage extinguished. Though Sylvia is little more than a paid mistress, as both she and Larson

admit, she is still Mrs. Larson, bearer of the Lacanian ". . . Name-of-the-Father: the patronym, patriarchal law, patrilineal identity, language as our inscription into patriarchy" (Gallop 47, quoted in Furman 71).[18] Indeed, Jane Gallop considers "[i]nfidelity . . . a feminist practice of undermining the Name-of-the-Father" (Gallop 48, in Furman 71). It is a reading strategy, suggests the critic, which "strays from the author, the authorized . . ." (Gallop 48, in Furman 71), and "ignores," as Nelly Furman explains, "an author's presumed intentions or the assumed meaning of a literary work" (71): "In the marital contract, the wife's fidelity or the mother's word guarantees paternal origin and hegemony. Betrayal of authorial trust therefore implies denial of patriarchal rule" (Furman 71).[19] In *The Well*, Sylvia has no trouble disposing of the marital contract, but Larson authors another text before he dies, a handwritten note naming her his murderer and Chris his heir. Larson nearly expires before he can produce the document's most important feature, his signature: "'But it's no good like that--you've got to sign it too. . . . Try- you've *got* to--or they'll believe *her*'" (241). The patronym, the Name-of-the-Father, asserts the author's hegemony: there is no room for alternative readings here.[20] Not only are material possessions transmitted, but also a version of events, a history, an interpretive strategy:

> All at once the bit of paper was important simply

> because it was written by Larson, represented their relationship, because with a kind of foresight he knew there would be times when he would need it to help justify and accept himself. (246)

Significantly, Chris is able to wrench himself away from Sylvia's influence only after seeing her disregard for Larson's spilled blood (250-1): the connotations of this word include "parentage, lineage, descent" (*OED* v. 2, 303). The narrator describes Chris's outrage: "Larson's blood--and to see her it might have been spilled tea. There was nausea a moment, then pounding anger. 'No!' That he raised his voice revealed the power she still exerted. 'No--you can't make me'" (251).

Dick Harrison asserts that the disappearing father "in post-pioneer" prairie fiction signals

> the end of the patriarchal prairie of earlier fiction. The missing or false fathers . . . suggest dead, lost, or obscured antecedents. The search for a father is, of course, a classic form of search for one's own identity, but there is a more specific implication here of lost continuity with the past. (189)

Perhaps Ross's novels also invent--or reprise, considering Genesis's excision of Eve from a creative role--the disappearing woman, similarly cut off from her

antecedents.[21] The paper Larson gives Chris offers the boy continuity, identity, a means of self-justification, much as Genesis provides a link with a patriarchal past. Campbell notes that one of mythology's functions "is to support the current social order, to integrate the individual organically with his group . . ." (520). The "nervous discord" (17) which Campbell detected reverberating through revisions of goddess-centered myths is a product not simply of theological but of social conflict:

> For, as a great body of evidence shows, the social as well as mythic orders of the two contrasting ways of life were opposed. Where the goddess had been venerated as the giver and supporter of life as well as consumer of the dead, women as her representatives had been accorded a paramount position in society as well as in cult. . . . And opposed to such, without quarter, is the order of the Patriarchy, with an ardor of righteous eloquence and a fury of fire and sword. (Campbell 21-2)

"*Chris didn't do it, it was Sylvia*" writes Larson (240):[22] Adam didn't do it; it was Eve. Indeed, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar might add "pen" to the patriarchal inventory of fire and sword which Campbell lists above. They discuss "the metaphor of literary paternity . . ." (6): "In patriarchal Western culture, . . . the text's author is a

father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis" (6). Larson's will echoes Genesis's condemnation of Eve, a pronouncement motivated by anxiety concerning Eve's powers not simply to destroy, but also to create. However, Sylvia is unquestionably a murderess, "genuinely destructive to life," as Burns puts it (132): events in the novel support Larson's accusation. This time there is a real criminal loose in the garden: the novel's metatextual link to Genesis reflects not so much on the novel as on Genesis itself. Froula, examining Eve in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, expresses interest "not in the dimensions of Milton's views on women as such but in the lines of force already inscribed in the Genesis story that Milton's retelling makes visible" (1983, 154). *The Well*, similarly, offers justification for the suppression of Eve: women are decidedly destructive; control of creation, "generative power," is hence better left in male hands.[4] The circumscription of Sylvia's life as Larson's sexual chattel and the bleak possibilities for divorcées in prairie patriarchal culture may both explain and excuse her crime; the texts, however--Larson's will, *The Well*, Genesis--offer no such excuses.

2. *Whir of Gold*

Ross's third novel, *Whir of Gold*, moves from Genesis to the Gospels. The opening paragraph introduces "'Sonny and Mad--craziest names you ever heard of but they got a swing.

Listen now--sort of go together'" (1). The names certainly do go together. Mad is Mary Magdalene: "Thirty-one, experienced, weathered in the street, and every time as if it was the first" (1). Sonny's name, as Stouck points out, evokes Christ (148): "As if I were performing miracles," Sonny explains of Mad's response to his lovemaking, "conducting an experiment in rapture" (Ross 1). Their trysts, significantly, take place in Sonny's room on Ste. Famille Street (1). Like God the Father communing with His only Son, Sonny's omnipotent mother hovers in the back of her offspring's mind, exhorting him to musical greatness and encouraging resistance to temptation: "'Work hard and keep away from the drink'" (2). She wants Sonny to avoid turning out "'like the rest of them . . .'" (1; see Weis 24 and 52)--like his "cloddish" father and elder brothers (2). Significantly, Madeleine becomes mother's mouthpiece, assuring Sonny that job offers are on the way, that someone will "'wake up and realize how good you are'" (1; see Burns 140). Indeed "[i]t was because of" his mother that Sonny meets Madeleine: "Objecting to Charlie--Charlie and his offer of a dirty job--that was what finally drove me out" (3; see McMullen 104).[24]

Sonny fears falling in with a "waywardness" (2; see Weis 24) akin to that which plagues the male members of his family, and indeed the crook Charlie's presence in the novel hints that father/son relationships are again a main

concern. "Assured" (4), "big-brotherly" (4), "shrewd" (6), rooming house neighbour Charlie introduces himself to Sonny in a fit of concern over Sonny's persistent cough (4). But Charlie is one of Harrison's "false fathers" (189). As Mad assesses, he needs "'[s]omebody to lean on . . .'" (47). He combines the "awkward look of an adolescent--wanting approval, watching for signs of it . . ." and "the craftiness of an old man, isolated in suspicion and defeat" (41-2): "A mixed-up little man with an adolescent itch to shine" (62). When Sonny finally agrees to help Charlie rob a jewelry store, the plans go awry, Sonny is shot, and Charlie fails to show up with the getaway car. Madeleine rescues Sonny, procuring a (male) doctor who will treat his wound without informing the police. The doctor, an amateur musician, finds Sonny a long-awaited job interview, and Mad is discarded.

Similarities between *Whir of Gold* and its two predecessors begin to make themselves known.[25] Like *As For Me and My House* and *The Well*, the novel boasts a central goddess figure. Madeleine is a golden-hearted Sylvia, a country girl who waitresses in the big city and tries her luck with men (24), looking for "'the right one'" (13). She thinks she's been misnamed: Madeleine "'was supposed to be some kind of saint. French maybe--a long way back'" (13). However, a long way back Mary Magdalene was the "sacred harlot" (Walker 1983, 613), "another form of Mary the

Virgin, otherwise the Triple Goddess Mari-Anna-Ishtar, the Great Whore of Babylon who was worshipped along with her savior-son in the Jerusalem temple" (Walker 1983, 614). She was a facet of the trinity of Marys at the crucifixion, identified by the Gnostic *Gospel of Mary* "with one another, as if they were the same Triple Goddess who attended the death of the pagan Savior" (Walker 1983, 605).[26] And she was mother too. According to Walker, church father and theologian Origen confused Mary Magdalene "with the Goddess by calling her 'the mother of all of us . . .'" (1983, 613).

Ross's Madeleine similarly combines innocence and experience, "motherly devotion and sexual need" (McMullen 111): she's a "[h]arlot with a heart of gold . . ." (Ross 33). "'Talk about knowing a right one when I see him--oh Sonny, if ever I was a virgin I'm sure not going to be one now'" (1). Despite her "expertise" in bed (22), however, Madeleine is as much mother to her "Sonny" as lover. As McMullen suggests, Mad "moves into his sleazy room to look after him" (101). The morning after their first night together she cleans Sonny's room, washes his clothes (Ross 28-9), gives him money (32), "shoo[s]" him out to get groceries, and cooks breakfast (33). She brings the groceries herself to their next meeting: "'Something hot on your stomach's what you need to fight that cold'" (38). Sonny resists her charity, and wonders to himself "what was at stake, why I was fighting her so hard" (38). Madeleine's

"country thrift and common sense" evoke his telling response: "'I'd hate to be your little boy'" (25).[27] Indeed, Sonny wages the same battle of independence with the ghost of his mother, wishing her, at times, "out of the way" (1).

Perhaps in order to avoid remaining an unborn embryo trapped in Frye's "mechanical cycle of repetition" (108), Sonny, not unlike Chris Rowe, transfers his passion for women to a horse (see Weis 50-53). Isabel is another Minnie, "[t]he most impractical of horses--there was even the story that she had thrown and killed a man . . ." (52). When he sees her at a sale, "desire" to own the horse "overwhelm[s]" young Sonny (52); his initial desire for Madeleine is partially aroused by the young woman's "shining and smooth and silkily compact" hair, which reminds him, as Burns points out, of "the way Isabel used to shine after I'd rubbed her down with buttermilk" (Ross 11; Burns 139-40; see Weis 50).[28] The horse is a goddess too, a "priestess of her kind, in communion with her deity" (52). Isabel is also, point out Burns and McMullen, Pegasus: "Music and the spirited horse," notes McMullen, "provide stimuli" to Sonny's "imaginative life . . ." (102; see 91, 103; see Burns 139, 152).[29] Indeed, the horse is inspiration, muse: "A witch of a horse: from the rock her hoof had struck there would always flow a clear bright stream, never the bitter waters of remorse and failure" (Ross 94; cf. Weis 52,

79; Burns 145). This bodes well for Sonny's jazz career, as Isabel is indirectly responsible for it: Sonny, as McMullen points out, meets his first bandleader at a horse race (Ross 101; McMullen 105). Indeed, when he is at a low point, embalming "all the big dreams . . . like corpses in a morgue," he thinks of Isabel: "For she, too, had been in on the beginnings and, whatever or whomever else I was laying out, I wasn't laying out her" (94; cf. Weis 52, Burns 145). Isabel is, finally, a well-rounded goddess, a maternal figure who adds her voice to Mrs. McAlpine's directives: "[T]he head went up and the hoof came down--'That's not what you're here for. If small-time's your size then go back where small-timers belong . . .'" (82). When Sonny is wounded and freezing to death in the snow, Isabel, disclaiming responsibility for his "horsemanship" (147), exhorts him to "stand up and walk, stand up and walk--" (148; cf. McMullen 103).[31]

Indeed Sonny connects the tumbles he has taken from Isabel's back--"Head first into a snowdrift, spitting snow . . ." (147)--with his misadventure in Montreal. McMullen suggests that "[i]n a number of Montreal experiences Sonny's behavior parallels that in his boyhood, indicating that 'The child is father of the man'" (105).[32] Like *As For Me and My House*, and, to a certain extent, *The Well*, *Whir of Gold* is split into rehearsal and reality, audition and opening night.[33] The cleft--the robbery--is,

as McMullen points out, a bit of theatre, a "performance of a well-rehearsed play" in which Sonny walks on as "a last-minute substitute" (138; McMullen 108, cf. Burns 150).[33] But the role "wasn't right for me," notes Sonny; "I was more embarrassed than afraid" (138; McMullen 108).[34] He self-consciously embellishes his escape with stage directions: ". . . I was embarrassed at the way I had staggered in and asked her to wipe the blood off the stairs--*fugitive enters, wounded, desperate*" (153). Mary Magdalene was first to see Christ after the resurrection (Walker 1983, 613); Mad, who had, significantly, "'the third biggest part'" in a hometown production of a play about Jesus (185), similarly helps Sonny back from his underworld journey.[35] The refrain "*Sonny and Mad,*" intoned like a mantra--like Isabel's instructions--helps him survive the walk home (149-50). Sonny sends up prayers to Saint Madeleine during his recovery too, "[d]eriving assurance from" Mad's guarantee that he will "'be fine again, fine again,'" "wanting to believe" her words "and at the same time ashamed of such childish trust . . ." (166), repeating "like a litany the string of her motherly assurances" (167). Madeleine's divine namesake was also a source of succour:

> Mari-Ishtar the Great Whore anointed--or *christ*-ened--her doomed god when he went into the underworld, whence he would rise again at her bidding. That is, she made him a Christ. . . .

> The christening-vase of holy oil was the ubiquitous symbol of Mary Magdalene in Christian art--though the virgin Mary also bore the harlot's title of Holy Vase. (Walker 1983, 614-5)[36]

Mad anoints Sonny with peroxide and pills (166, 171), and, procuring a doctor to treat the blood poisoning in Sonny's wound, unwittingly finds the patient a sky-father. Charlie, as noted earlier, auditioned for the part. Past players include the adjudicator of a piano competition who urged fifteen year old Sonny to "'give everything you've got . . .'" to a musical career (75): ". . . make every sacrifice. For years. . . . Above all, get away'" (75). Bandleader Larry Turnbull steps onstage briefly--"There was Larry, of course, to teach and persuade me, to say why not?" (81)--and when he goes "to the hospital" Sonny takes over the band (91). From the hospital, appropriately, arrives the final performer. The young doctor who treats Sonny lends the patient a saxophone and lines up a long-awaited and promising audition (190; see Burns 157).[37] Sonny no longer needs his underworld guide, and his relationship with Madeleine ends.[38]

As For Me and My House figuratively sacrifices Philip Bentley; *The Well* murders Larson. Sonny is shot in the foot, but otherwise he and his surrogate fathers--except perhaps for Larry Turnbull, whose fate is unknown--emerge comparatively unscathed from Hel's cauldron. Madeleine,

however, like Mrs. Bentley and Sylvia before her, disappears at the end of the novel, her motherly talents no longer needed; this time, though, the text more openly acknowledges the dispatch of a female character. Several critics suggest Sonny's treatment of Mad parallels his boyhood entrapment and destruction of a flicker, the "whir of gold" of the novel's title (McMullen 105; Mitchell 58, 61-2).[39] Madeleine, sensing the imminent end of her relationship with Sonny, goes to church to pray: "'There was such a lot to explain--about us--about me, and how I got this way--and all at once it came to me that the right place would be church. . . . '" (193). Her desperation echoes Christ's agony in the garden of Gethsemane: Madeleine, and not Sonny, figures as sacrifice here.

Unlike Christ, however, Madeleine is unable to articulate her wishes to the Father God. "'But I couldn't pray there either'" she says of her failed attempts to talk to God both in Sonny's room and in a church.

> 'Just like here--couldn't explain. Nothing but remember--things I didn't want to remember--they just kept pouring in. How I cut them up at home so bad and everything that's happened since--everything right up to you--trying to pray and instead just remembering.' (193-4)

Rather than communicating with God, Madeleine ends up composing a text culled from her own experience--an

unwritten diary.[41] Inspiration "pour[s]" in (193; see above). Indeed, as if to reinforce the fact that this remembrance is a creative deed, Madeleine breaks off her story and absentmindedly "pick[s] up the clarinet" (194), the novel's central creative tool.[41] Moreover, composing this journal of experience turns out to be a rewarding process after all, an act of catharsis:

> 'But when it was over, out on the street, I started feeling fine and I said to myself well anyway you've been there. Maybe that'll do for now--and then next Sunday you can try again. Maybe that's what you've got to do--get it all out first and then start over.' (194)

Getting it all out and starting over sounds like journal entry-keeping, although Madeleine doesn't consciously link her text to her mood of accomplishment, to her pride in having "been there." She resolves to try prayer again. However, the memory-text stands, as does the novel's opening and closing refrain, also composed by Madeleine (see McMullen 114). Madeleine's words follow Sonny "for a long time, streets and days" after her departure: "'Sonny and Mad--they got a nice swing. Listen now--sort of go together. Sonny and Mad--Sonny and Mad--just like it was intended'" (195, and see 1).[42] Jazz "swing[s]": "Listen now." Again, Mad's text-making is linked to the clarinet, the central symbol of creativity in

the novel. Her texts--the refrain and the unwritten journal of experience to which she resolves to add new entries, to "start over"--endure. These are not missives directed to or received from the Author-God; Madeleine's texts are out of the patriarchal line, but they do, despite the novel's privileging of Sonny's creative struggle, survive.

Sacrifice thus effects some renewal in this novel. However, the return of the closing refrain to the novel's opening suggests the start, for Madeleine, of yet another futile search for a "'right one'" (13), and, perhaps, another downward spiral for Sonny.[43] McMullen asserts that Mad exits "with her dream still intact" (112); "Sonny's dreams, in contrast, have all turned to nightmares" (113).[44] However, saxophone in hand, and with the doctor as guide and mentor, Sonny's future might indeed be brighter than Madeleine's. Madeleine has a "'girl friend Cora'" (19) who offers support, but Cora's aid has not helped Madeleine escape the cycle of male rejection. Nonetheless, the novel clearly shows that Madeleine, if she would only recognize them, has creative resources of her own. Certainly acknowledgement of female creativity is an important subtext of Ross's fourth novel, *Sawbones Memorial*. This time the "Holy Harlot" offers assistance to the doctor himself, and although she does not author her own text of appreciation, a cooperative male/female effort is launched to publish her story.

3. *Sawbones Memorial*

In *Sawbones Memorial*, a doctor again plays a deity. The unities of action, place and time are closely adhered to in this combination of "dialogue and monologue" (McMullen 118).[45] Indeed, the work is as much theatre as narrative: "Dialogue emerges like lines spoken in a play, revealing personalities, giving essential information, and contributing to mood" (McMullen 129). As McMullen summarizes, Doc Hunter and friends reminisce at a party commemorating the physician's 75th birthday, the 45th anniversary of his arrival in the town of Upward and his official retirement from medical practice, all of which coincide on the same April day (McMullen 118-9, 121). "Time stands still as past and future come together in the present moment" (McMullen 118). Much speculation centers on the impending arrival of thirty-three year old Nick Miller, Doc Hunter's protegé and replacement (McMullen 118-19, 121). Nick is probably Doc Hunter's son too: Nick's mother Anna, the doctor's cleaning woman, invites her employer's sexual attentions after noticing the chilly state of affairs in his household. "Taking me in too, not just the two bedrooms but the two lives, watching it all with the pale straight eyes . . ." (135). Though Anna's husband is a sickly fellow--"poor skinny hollow-chested frightened little John . . ." (135)--the identity of Nick's father, in the tradition of "missing or false fathers," "dead, lost, or

obscured antecedents" (Harrison 189), remains uncertain: "Thin little man and always tired, . . . but sometimes they're the kind. Muscles and build and hair on your chest no index to fertility" (135). Anna, on the other hand, takes her place in Ross's pantheon of female centaurs: "Like a horse, a Doukhobor, you could have hitched her up and plowed. Even through her skirt the pump-pump power" (135; see Weis 60, Burns 210). She has symbolic power too: Anna is the "[m]ythical mother of the virgin Mary, from the Middle-Eastern Goddess Anna, or Hannah, or Di-Ana, mother of Mari" (Walker 1983, 38). This goddess, as "Anna Perenna," is "mother of the Aeons" (1983, 39)--titles given "any god annually sacrificed and reborn. . . ." (Walker 1983, 12)--and stands

> at the change of years, a two-headed Goddess of Time with two faces named Prorsa and Postverta, looking forward and backward from her heavenly gate among the stars, where one celestial cycle merged into the next. So she stood for both Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. Under the name of Carmenta she invented all the letters in between. (Walker 1983, 39)

Appropriately, *Sawbones Memorial* stands at a change of years too: while Doc Hunter celebrates his birthday, a newspaper reporter collects stories for his obituary (97); as McMullen points out, the anniversary of Doc's arrival in Upward is

also the day of his departure (119): "The internal structure of the novel is cyclic" (McMullen 119).[46] Ken Mitchell asserts that

> [t]hrough Doc, the theme of *Sawbones Memorial* is gradually revealed, and it is one that stands--often muted--behind much of Ross's writing: the eternal cycle of life and death. April 20, 1948, in Upward is one of those points in time--like the Easter-Spring motif which appears in many of the stories--where beginnings and endings merge. (70)[47]

As the doctor himself summarizes (and critics point out): "It's all over and it's all beginning, there's nothing more required of you. April and the smell of April, just as it was all beginning that day too . . ." (139; cf. McMullen 119, Comeau 183, Ken Mitchell 74).

What of the father god, then, in this cyclic cosmology? Doc Hunter discreetly looks out for his illegitimate son, providing Anna with money for Nick's clothing (137-8), taking the boy on medical rounds (139), putting in a good word for him at his school (138). These are the actions of a caring father (see Weis 36). The chauvinist appears to be associated, rather, with the role of doctor. In *Whir of Gold,* the anonymous young physician cements a male alliance with Sonny which effaces Madeleine largely by reducing her to a sexual object, a mere physical presence. "'A nice head

of hair and it looks natural,'" observes the doctor (173). "He clucked, tilted his head appreciatively and made a slight movement with his hands, as if he saw her spread before him on a table, waiting for an examination" (173). Sonny and the doctor are "[m]an to man now, members of the same fraternity, faintly and companionably competitive" (173; see Weis 32, 33). In *Sawbones Memorial* the physician assumes control over the female body, repugning its creative and destructive powers: "'You mean, Dan, have I often tried my hand at playing God?'" (112; cf. Ken Mitchell 70-74). Doc Hunter describes how he took "'it on myself to be judge . . . ,'" as well as doctor (115), over-dosing a dying woman with morphine, faking a molester's death certificate,[45] and, significantly, deciding whether or not to perform abortions (113-18; see Burns 206-8). He refuses once, because "'the lady riled me. Bossy, as if that was what I was there for'" (117). Doc is angered by the woman's refusal to listen to his admonishments: "'--just my professional services, please, no moralizing or advice. So I said Good Afternoon again. . . .'" (117). The doctor is "'sort of glad'" that the baby survives (118; cf. Ken Mitchell 70): the child grows up to be the musician Benny--another of Doc Hunter's surrogate sons. As Ken Mitchell notes, ". . . Doc is ambiguously pleased with his omnipotence, his 'creation' of Benny Fox" (70). Like Nick, Benny owes Doc his life: "'. . . we had a lot in common,'"

says Benny of the young physician (98). Both, as McMullen points out, are outcasts: the town scorns Nick's Doukhobor heritage and Benny's homosexuality (McMullen 122-23). Furthermore, Doc Hunter looks out for Benny too, advising him not to change his sexual preference, but to "'get out'" of narrow-minded Upward: "'[Y]ou've a right to live your own life, the way you want to live it'" (103).

This seems to be a purely masculine right, however: Benny's mother, as discussed above, was denied it. Doc Hunter's theological speculations reveal his disgust at female control over creation and destruction:

> 'I remember once long ago reading about a tribe somewhere that believed in a Great Sow that eats her own farrow. Nearly made me throw up, and yet maybe they were on to it. The Great Mother and the Evil Mother, maybe one and the same, creating life only to turn and destroy it. . . . As if the potter got his wheel going and then couldn't stop it--and not knowing what to do with all the jugs and bottles piling up, no storage space, no markets, had to rig up another machine to grind them into dust again.' (126; cf. Ken Mitchell 71; Weis 80; Burns 213, cf. 214, 215, 216)[47]

The doctor prefers the idea of a male "'Intelligence'" (124), one without "'purpose or plan'" perhaps (124)--one which, in the tradition of the disappearing father, may even

have "'[w]alked out'" (126). Doc Hunter speculates:

> 'Supposing that this Intelligence, instead of being an old Know-It-All Greybeard--Don't-You-Dare-Talk-Back-To-Me, one of those--supposing instead, just supposing, he was a Young Fellow, still learning. With a vision of some sort, a lot of bright ideas--some of them maybe half-baked--but not sure how to bring them off. Well then, wouldn't he experiment?' (126)

Doc Hunter, who, as Ken Mitchell notes, played God during his tenure as Upward's physician (70-4; cf. Burns 206-7), who is indeed "elevated to the status of God" in the novel (Mitchell 74), is himself a know-it-all Greybeard who refused his medical services because Benny's mother dared talk back to him. As Mitchell speculates,

> [p]erhaps it should not seem far-fetched . . . that Doc Hunter is intended to personify the Almighty. The self-contradiction of his very name implies the kind of Divine ambiguity he is describing, after all. Doc is a 'hunter' of life rather than an armed agent of death. And he is as impulsive and prone to error as the 'Intelligence' he imagines. (72)

However, the tone of Doc's reminiscences suggests he sees his medical career as the work of a Young Fellow, who, as he admits, makes some half-baked decisions, who sees that

things haven't always worked out in his patch of creation: "'Your lives are yours, it's all behind me now, but I can't help saying what a pity, what a waste. . . .'" (131; see Burns 215).[50] Nick Miller, the next Young Fellow on the horizon, will "'chalk up a few'" mistakes too (Ross 132; cf. Ken Mitchell 74), predicts Doc Hunter. Moreover, if the equation of doctor and sky-father holds up, Nick may also indulge in some Greybeard antics.

According to mythologist Walker, the goddess Anna, as "Nanna," is "an incarnation of Freya in the mother-bride of Balder. In Phrygia too, she was Nana, mother of the Savior" (Walker 1983, 39). Doc Hunter's healing arts, his retirement death and his resurrection in Nick qualify both him and his son as saviors (Nick is 33 years old--the reputed age of Christ at the time of his death):[51] Anna is bride to one, mother to the other. But Freya, whom we witnessed in operation in *The Well*, has a destructive side, too: "The white corpse-eating Sow-goddess represented the death aspect of the Great Mother in cults of Astarte, Demeter, the Celts' Cerridwen, and the Teutons' Freya. As a death goddess, Freya had the title of Sýr, 'Sow'" (Walker 1983, 956). Doc Hunter sickened at the story of the Great Sow, and he fears Anna's power. Noting that Anna could have "picked up" her husband "and hung him on a hook" except for what he speculates is her respect for male "authority," the doctor is reassured by patriarchy's restrictions: "Just as

it should be too, a woman never dares" (138).

The novel, however, dares to offer models of interaction between men and women which go beyond such constraints. There is Sarah Gillespie, for instance, who is frank about her sexual attraction to young Doc Hunter (59-60), and about the mutual attraction between her and her husband: "The same with Herb, I knew he was lazy and a lot of other things, but the look in his eyes, wanting not just it but me, not just so he could relax and get a good night's sleep but because I was the one--" (68). There is also the husband and wife team of Nellie and Dan Furby, newspaper reporters who collect data for a story on Doc Hunter. Each independently comes up with the idea of doing an article on Maisie Bell (20, 96), Upward's "'Scarlet Woman'" (19). Maisie is Doc Hunter's helpmate and nurse; the townspeople revile her sexual exploits,[52] but "'come running to be taken in'" to her sickbay when they need help (Ross 19; discussed by McMullen 124, 126). Nellie Furby sums up Maisie's career: "'All the years she's been serving the town and never a word of thanks'" (96). Nellie and Dan decide to offer that word: they vow to cooperate--"'We'll both interview her, different angles'" (96)--on a piece that will "'give Upward something to gossip and squabble about. We'll let them see the kind of paper we are'" (97). A very different paper indeed from the one which condemned Sylvia Larson: a female text, a woman's story is promised here,

the written version, perhaps, of Madeleine's memory-text. Moreover, its male/female co-authorship offers a new model for creation, one in which both men and women, rather than sky-fathers and earth mothers, participate equally: "'Now isn't that drama for you?'" (97).

Indeed, a larger drama of sacrifice and creation moves towards completion at the end of Ross's final novel. Paul Comeau, for one, suggests *Sawbones Memorial* brings "Ross's fiction . . . full circle . . ." (174).[5] Maisie Bell's promised newspaper story is not only the written text of Madeleine's experience as helpmeet and whore; it is also the dénouement of Mrs. Bentley's diary. It begins where Mrs. Bentley's diary wanes. Moreover, the article's joint male/female authorship replaces the male effort of Larson and Chris to create a text which excludes women: Maisie's story has a female protagonist. Hers is indeed Eve's story, Genesis held to the flame to see the magic writing underneath. It is a tale of female creativity still as controversial in mid-twentieth century Saskatchewan as in the biblical Near East: the Furbys predict "gossip" and a "squabble" (see Banting 33). As in Genesis, Maisie's story competes with an overriding male text--the Furbys are also doing a feature on Doc Hunter and the hoopla surrounding his retirement. Maisie, significantly, doesn't attend the retirement party: Doc gets all the praise. "[A]lthough her parlor has been for many years Upward's only nursing home,

the town does not invite Maisie to the present celebration . . ." (McMullen 132, cf. 126). The Furbys, however, recognize her contribution, and are determined to get the word out. Indeed, this male/female cooperation in creation moves, finally, out of the myths and ancient roles, beyond Genesis and its faint but unmistakable original writing, surpassing nature's containing cycle and the sky-father's realm. Froula's analysis of Virginia Woolf's *The Waves* is suggestive here (1988, 214-16).[24] The critic asserts that in the latter,

> . . . Woolf rewrites Genesis not by countering male authority with a symmetrically exclusive female authority but by, first, authorizing female creativity as well as male, and, second, including in her story of the world a self-reflexive skepticism toward all stories. (Froula 1988, 216)

Woolf, asserts Froula, refuses to mark creativity as an exclusively male or female activity: "In *The Waves*, sexual difference and cultural creativity are essentially independent, and neither sex claims privilege as creator, witness, or namer at the world's origins" (1988, 215). Similarly, Nellie and Dan's joint and equal effort becomes a new model for the future.

Notes

1. See Stephen Heath's translation of Barthes's article, included in *Modern Theory and Criticism: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. London: Longman, 1988. 167-172. "[A] tissue of quotations" is Heath's phrasing.

2. Ken Mitchell suggests the well is "a provocative sexual symbol" (53). Weis asserts the well is "a concrete representation of Larson's subconscious" (58): Larson looks in the well to see "his inner self" (59). Like the covered well, however, his perception is blocked (59).

3. Weis, in an interesting choice of words, suggests there is a "caldron of emotion" in the novel (31).

4. McMullen, similarly, asserts that "[n]ature becomes a "redemptive force for Chris" (88). The critic suggests the well symbolizes "the happiness of [Larson's] early struggling years with Cora. His care of the well, which is fenced in and covered to keep the water clean, underlines his determination to preserve this past. His return to the well with Chris indicates his desire to link Chris with this happier time, as he does even more directly in seeking to make Chris his lost son. It is fitting that, having clung so tenaciously to this symbol of past happiness, at his death Larson should return to it" (97). McMullen says that wells and death are linked in Ross's short story "No Other Way": "In both instances the association of the well with death is in itself ironic, since as a source of water it is traditionally linked with creativity and life" (97). Djwa compares the death of Larson to the death of Judith in *As For Me and My House:* it is "a somewhat similar deterministic situation . . ."; Chris ". . . appears to be swept along by the currents of destiny" (62). Burns suggests the novel tracks Chris's journey from destruction to creation (116), to "the renewal of the emotional and spiritual potential of Chris's personality" (117).

5. Jobes suggests "Cora" was "[a] name by which Persephone was called affectionately. Cora figures in British harvest ceremonies under the name Cornaby, Kirnababy, or the Maiden. A Peruvian maize goddess is called Mama Cora" (pt. 1, 370).

6. Larson "seems . . . a continuation of the *As For Me and My House* character of Lawson" (Weis 58).

7. Stouck suggests the losses of Steve and of the Bentleys' own son prefigure the death of the Lawsons' son in *As For Me and My House*. "The importance of such parallels is strongly urged by the appearance of the young son who dies in Ross's

other writings: two such boys are pivotal figures in *The Well* . . ." (147, note 7). Harrison says of a Margaret Laurence protagonist that the name "Chris" "suggests sacrifice" (193). Weis asserts that Chris is "a hoped-for reincarnation of the farmer's long-dead son" (23; see 31).

8. McMullen points out that Christian dies at the moment Chris is helping Fanny birth a colt. Chris too is reborn, and becomes Larson's "true heir" in the same moment (98; cf. Burns 129, 130). Chris's eventual "choice on the side of life" in the Larson murder is "prefigured" by his aid of Fanny; Sylvia's refusal to help in the birth prefigures her "deliberate and calculated planning and carrying out of the murder . . ." (98).

9. According to McMullen, taking this alias is "[a]n early indication of Chris's possible redemption . . ." (89).

10. Djwa points out Larson's sharing of the trainwatching habit with Philip, Judith and Mrs. Bentley (61). Weis also notes Larson and Philip partaking of this habit, and their shared propensity for "fantasy" (72; see 73).

11. Laurence Ricou sees a number of similarities between the two works: ". . . Larson's longing for a son, the mystique of the railroad, the domineering wife, and Chris's fascination with horses" (90; cf. McMullen 100).

12. Weis suggests Larson "has pledged undying devotion to a dead wife and son who now order and dictate his daily thoughts" (74).

13. Ken Mitchell links horses, the well and the bathroom together as "romantic attachment[s] with the past . . ." (53). Weis notes that Larson keeps the old homestead as a "shrine"; "[t]he same morbid faithfulness preserves a virtually unused, beautifully decorated bathroom . . . ," a "goad to Sylvia," and a wasted "resource" (74). Sylvia, says Weis, "is made to pay a demeaning homage to [Cora's] memory" (23).

14. Weis notes Sylvia's lack of success in preventing Larson from train-watching. "Evidently, Larson's first wife was able to keep his mind from the trains . . ." (74).

15. Weis quotes Ross: "'the day there's been a mare she [Sylvia] knows what *she's* in for'" (Ross 96; Weis 49). Larson, says the critic, "attempts to mold himself to" a male "ideal by comparing himself to a stud horse he owns . . ." (49). Female sexuality is constructed here as "an exotic . . . experience without" need of "a commitment in return" (49).

16. See Rosaleen MacFadden's thesis, *Icelandic Edda and Saga in Two Prairie Novels: An Analysis of* The Viking Heart *by Laura Goodman Salverson and* Wild Geese *by Martha Ostenso*. (M.A. Thesis, Concordia University, 1978), wherein MacFadden details the myth of Freya. Her application of the myth to Ostenso's work is particularly instructive.

17. McMullen attributes Chris's "contempt for women, his closeness to the Boyle Street gang, and especially his affection for Rickie, the street leader," to "homosexual tendencies" (94). See pp. 94-5 for this discussion. Chris seduces Elsie, McMullen suggests, "to reassert his masculine dominance" (95).

18. Furman cites: Gallop, Jane. *The Daughter's Seduction: Feminism and Psychoanalysis*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1982.

19. Indeed, as Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar note, discussing Joyce's *Ulysses*, paternity is "a story requiring imagination if not faith," "a tale" told by fathers "to explain the infant's existence" (5).

20. Burns suggests Chris's feeling of freedom is "reinforced" by the will. "Trust, acceptance and inheritance had eluded Chris throughout his pursuit of them on Boyle Street" (132).

21. McMullen suggests "entrapment is a major theme" of *The Well* (88); she notes Sylvia's attempt "to escape her dreary waitressing job" by marrying Larson, and the fact that "she finds herself just as trapped as she had been previously; she has escaped the past into an equally disagreeable present" (93).

22. McMullen suggests that "Larson achieves the reality he seeks only at the moment of death: when Chris refuses to shoot him, he has found his son and signifies this by willing the farm to him. Chris achieves his reality when he finally faces the future he fears, including imprisonment" (99-100).

23. See Froula (1983, 326), and note 1 of my Introduction. Weis notes Sylvia's portrayal "as a domineering, scheming creature plotting for the control of a man . . ." and suggests the indirect discussion in *As For Me and My House* of "agonized sexual relationships and antipathy between the sexes, become pivotal concerns in *The Well*," and in successive novels (31).

24. McMullen suggests Sonny's mother's influence is "pervasive and continuing" and also "ambivalent . . ." (104); her moral strictures inhibited Sonny's early musical

creativity (140). Madeleine, for her part, is "possessive" (107). Stouck also notes Sonny's "ambivalent response to the memory of his loved mother . . ." (149); he links Sonny's mother to the problematic Mrs. Bentley (149). Weis suggests that "the actions of the present cannot keep pace with the essentially moralistic dictums of [Sonny's] upbringing" (24).

25. McMullen suggests that "[s]tructurally, *Whir of Gold* reverses the situation in *The Well*. In the earlier novel the young urban criminal is redeemed by nature; here the young prairie boy is corrupted by the city. In *The Well* Larson and Sylvia struggle for Chris. In *Whir of Gold* Mad and Charlie struggle for Sonny, but this time the woman is on the side of generosity and kindness, the man the representative of evil" (101). McMullen also sees similarities between Sonny and Philip Bentley: both are struggling artists (105). Weis suggests Sonny seems "fated" to be "another Philip Bentley or Larson" (25).

26. Burns, in language which is suggestive here, asserts that Mad, like the horse Isabel, "is also a redeemer, a restorer of Sonny's spirit . . ." (140). Burns cites a lovemaking passage from the novel in which "revelation," "swan," "bull" and "shower of gold" figure (Ross 31): the critic explains the allusion to Perseus, and hence, to Pegasus (140).

27. McMullen suggests Mad's "generosity makes him feel guilty, her cooking and mothering lead him to feel trapped, and her joy in his sexual performance confirms his view of himself as a gigolo" (111). She notes women in Ross have "more initiative" than men, and are the sexual aggressors, citing Mrs. Bentley, Sylvia, and Mad (138). Burns sees a destructive side to Mad's "devotion," its cramping effect on Sonny's self-respect (137). She also notes, however, Madeleine's financial support, her encouragement of Sonny to practise, her assistance with his musical dream, her own determined and hence exemplary, in Burns's view, search for a "right one" (140).

28. Burns states baldly that Madeleine "reminds him [Sonny] of Isabel" (she then quotes the buttermilk passage) (139-40). Weis asserts that horses in Ross are associated with "an idealized version of intimacy" (48), and notes the sexual implications of this (48-50). Indeed, Isabel's "symbolic qualities" contrast the "disappointing sexuality" of Madeleine (50). He considers that in "The Outlaw" and *Whir of Gold* the horse can stand for "the perfect lover" and "the perfect friend" (51). Weis suggests of horses in Ross that their presence prompts "contemplation or action"; they may also catalyze "transcendent thought or experience,

including a sense of 'primal' sexuality," or act as confidants, "closely identified with consciousness or other identifications of inner awareness" (45-6). Burns suggests that Isabel is allied both with Madeleine, "who represents the good but complacent side of life and Charlie, the petty criminal . . ." (139). Sonny "takes what he needs from both" these characters "and chooses to pursue the creative spirit" (139). However, Charlie, she asserts, is more like Isabel (143), and the robbery ends up having some catalytic effect on Sonny's musical career (154). Sonny learns that life is "two-edged" (154), and that "elements of both sides of life" are essential to his "dream" (146).

29. Isabel is linked to "sexuality and imagination" and the young Sonny's "initiation into manhood" (McMullen 91). McMullen also identifies Sonny McAlpine with the boy Peter McAlpine of Ross's short story "The Outlaw" (101-2). Weis suggests Isabel "exemplifies . . . the breadth and power of the human imagination in its struggle to conceive a more ideal, more human state" (53).

30. Weis notes Isabel's "advisory role" and her "sensuality" (50). He also suggests Isabel "is the 'outlaw' side of his [Sonny's] subconscious, the side which strains against the strictly moral upbringing given him by his mother" (52).

31. McMullen quotes William Wordsworth, "My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold" (152, note 5). She lists a number of parallels between Sonny's childhood and his Montreal days: "His unthinking cruelty in trapping the flicker parallels the unthinking cruelty of his actions to Mad. His sexual initiation with Millie, whom he exploits, is similar to his interlude with Mad: in neither relationship is there any indication of genuine affection on his part. His rejection of Mad's warnings about Charlie recalls his disobedience of his parents' instructions about the race. Ironically, in both instances an unexpected benefit is a meeting with someone connected with a band" (105).

32. McMullen suggests a young Sonny's "disobedience of his parents' injunction" against entering Isabel in a race, "and his lies--about Isabel's previous racing experience and his parents' permission to race--indicate the strength of his determination to have a musical career, and foreshadow his adult rejection of moral values in the name of the same ambition" (103).

33. McMullen notes that the novel concentrates on the relationship of Sonny and Mad, but "the central tension is more directly concerned with the holdup . . ." (113). She considers this a "structural imbalance" (113).

34. McMullen hints that Sonny's sense of the unreality of the robbery parallels his perception and actions during the trapping of the flicker (109-10). Cf. McMullen on "Ross's dramatic method" which relies on the establishment of mood and character, and not mere furtherance of action (113).

35. Burns sees something akin to an underworld journey in Ross's short stories "One's a Heifer" and "September Snow." In the former, a boy "descends to a dark, hellish atmosphere which, nevertheless, accords him a new awareness" (52). Similarly, in "September Snow," there is entrance into "a cold, hostile world to learn about the destructive spirit of life" (71). She also describes the wounded Sonny as a "fallen Perseus" (152; cf. 153).

36. Barbara Mitchell discusses Paul's christening of Philip as a "'lover of horses'" and the implications therein of a "conversion to a new mode of perception" (54): perhaps such an anointing reinforces Philip's incarnation as a Christ figure.

37. The doctor puts Sonny "in touch with a bandleader . . . , and miraculously, gives Sonny his saxophone" (Burns 157). The suggestion of miracles is appropriate to the divine context here. Burns also notes that both the doctor and Charlie have offered new beginnings to Sonny (157)--reinforcing their roles, perhaps, as father figures to Sonny.

38. McMullen also notes Sonny's linkage of "his dreams of a musical career with three female figures from his past: his mother, his eccentric small-town music teacher, and an unpredictable, insolent thoroughbred mare" (105). This could be seen as a goddess trinity: cf. 76, 87 in the text (Ross) for the music teacher's rehearsal (76) of Mad's interest (87) in Sonny's music. In perhaps an oblique reference to rehearsals, Weis, noting flashbacks to "The Outlaw" during Sonny's flight from the scene of the crime, suggests the technique drives home "the repetition of life and circumstance" (80). Other practice sessions include Mad's rehearsal of departure after the couple's initial encounter: she says there's "'no sense trying to spin things out. When it's time it's time'" (Ross 30); similarly, at the end of the novel she concludes that "[i]t's over now--I just want to tell you'" (Ross 193).

39. Conversely, McMullen also suggests Sonny is ". . . Mad's 'whir of gold,' the transitory beauty, the dream that can never come true" (112). For further discussion of the role of the flicker and/or related hunting imagery, cf. McMullen (112, 115, 116). See also Weis (79, 80); Burns (149, 150, 152, 153, 157).

40. Mad's experience is similar to that of the Eve of *Paradise Lost*, as documented by Christine Froula (1983). Froula speaks of the "threat that Eve's desire for experienced rather than mediated knowledge poses to an authority which defines and proves itself chiefly in the successful prohibition of all other authorities" (329). Mad's knowledge is experienced, rather than mediated through prayer. Froula suggests that Eve is converted "from her own visible being in the world to invisible patriarchal authority . . . ," "from being in and for herself to serving a 'higher' power--from the authority of her own experience to the hidden authority symbolized in the prohibited Tree of Knowledge" (334; cf. 335). Mad has not yet been converted: she does resolve to try prayer again, but also relies on the text of her own experience.

41. Weis notes music "and musical instruments" are "symbolic of creativeness, and the shaping of dreams . . ." (41).

42. McMullen suggests of this passage that Sonny gains "an awareness of what he may have missed . . ." with Mad (113)--a hint at the efficacy of Mad's text.

43. McMullen also notes the refrain, suggesting the words "take the reader back to the beginning by repeating virtually the same words with which the novel began. . . . The reader finds himself drawn back from the present into the past, recalling the experiences and emotions just relived with Sonny, and the hauntingly reminiscent mood with which the novel began" (114). Cf. McMullen on Sonny's rootedness in the past (114-15), and on his role in charting Madeleine's future (116).

44. McMullen cites at this juncture the "Sonny and Mad" refrain which closes the work (113; Ross 195). Weis, like McMullen, suggests the novel "ends on a note of desperate realization of helplessness and anomie" for Sonny (80). Dreams "seem faded and forlorn" (80).

45. McMullen notes "dramatic monologue" (127), "dialogue" and "interior monologue" (129) in the novel. See also McMullen (130, 131). The critic suggests Ross weaves "the tragic with the comic" in this novel (133). She also obliquely hints at the Aristotelian unities: "Although the action of the novel takes place within a few hours, Ross, through the thoughts and memories of those present, skillfully manipulates time to reveal four generations. For the most part, setting is limited to the lounge of the new Hunter Memorial Hospital where the festivities are being held" (118). McMullen asserts that the townspeople act as "a chorus," commenting on the action (126). She also

suggests the novel's "techniques and principles of organization derive from cinema and music" (118). These include "flashback, closeup, cutting, and fadeout . . ." (118). Paul Comeau speaks of Ross's fiction in terms of the "modes" of "tragedy, irony, comedy," and classes *As For Me and My House* as irony, and *Sawbones Memorial* as comedy (178, 181). Liam Lacey points out that the novel "takes place in one evening, and is entirely in dialogue . . ." (C5). Weis makes note of time in *The Well*: Larson "attempts to straddle both the past and the present simultaneously" (23). In *Whir of Gold*, "the past does greatly affect the present . . ." (24).

46. McMullen also suggests the novel's structure "is that of a musical composition" (130), or a "musical cycle" (131). "The movement of the novel can be seen to be centrifugal, beginning at the center and circling outward, expanding to encompass the entire community, past, present, and future" (131). "Ross inextricably unites past and future . . ." (119). This connection with the past includes past novels: the vicious town matrons of *As For Me and My House* "are reincarnated" in *Sawbones Memorial* (135). Harrison suggests that in bringing Nick back to Upward, Doc is "hoping to force the town to accept its wider humanity. The old doctor is paradoxically attempting to free the town from its past" (197).

47. Comeau notes "the inescapable passing of time and its curiously cyclical nature" is "a persistent theme" in this and other works of Ross; "a corollary to this is Doc's idea that families also repeat themselves," an idea expressed in Mrs. Bentley's molding of Philip's son into "yet another Philip" and of Doc's passing of the medical mantle to his own son Nick (183).

48. Ken Mitchell suggests Doc puts "himself above the law" in this instance (72).

49. Wilfred Cude signals a passage in *As For Me and My House* concerning Mrs. Finley which is echoed here in *Sawbones Memorial*: "There is no question at all about the success the President of the Ladies Aid has enjoyed with her husband and twin boys, who 'bear witness to a potter's hand that never falters'; and her husband in particular shows the mark of her attention, since he is 'an appropriately meek little man'" (*As For Me and My House* 9; Cude 1979, 475). Perhaps Ross had the same divine potter in mind in both novels. Burns suggests the potter image "crystallizes his [Ross's] vision of the duality of life, in which creativity and destruction are inextricably linked" (215, see 223).

50. Ken Mitchell sees Doc during this speech "as an Old Testament Jehovah sitting in judgement on the obstinance and pettiness of his people" (73; cf. 69, 70). Cf. McMullen on the theme of communication in Ross's works (132, 137). For other subthemes of "universal human experience" in the novel cf. McMullen (132, 133).

51. Ken Mitchell speaks of Nick as Doc's "only begotten son," echoing the words of the church concerning Christ (74).

52. Conversely, Doc Hunter's sexual exploits are applauded (see Ross 9). McMullen includes Maisie, Benny and Benny's mother as victims of the community's double standand regarding sexuality, and notes the town's acceptance of pimp Harry Hubbs's profession (126, 132).

53. "Indeed, with *Sawbones Memorial* Ross's fiction comes full circle, as he returns to the Saskatchewan of his earlier writings to interpret the pioneer experience from another imaginative perspective and in yet another literary mode" (Comeau 174). Comeau suggests the novel is written in the comic mode (181; see 175); McMullen (127) and Burns (204) see the novel as positive or hopeful. Weis, in contrast, suggests that "this last novel is only the first part of the familiar cycle of hope and despair, and does not mark a departure from basic themes" (88; cf. 81). Weis suggests, interestingly, that *Whir of Gold* is "a culminating statement," summarizing "issues" from previous works (76); Burns sees such a culmination in *Sawbones Memorial* (4, 18; see 202-3), suggesting "[t]he characters involved are the survivors of the lives of hardship and sacrifice described in *As For Me and My House* and the adult reality stories . . ." (203). She matches the Bentleys with the Grimbles, the teacher Miss Carmichael with Paul Kirby (203). Doc's desire for a son is similar to that of Philip Bentley (209-10). Burns suggests an awareness on the part of the cast of *Sawbones Memorial* of "the cycle of continuing hope" (204). She concludes that "Ross's vision of the human condition is not only two-sided, but cyclical and therefore, ultimately hopeful as well" (223).

54. Froula's analysis of Isak Dinesen's "The Blank Page" is also pertinent here. Froula suggests the story points toward "active rereadings of the texts that have shaped our traditions alongside those that have been repressed and toward questioning and reimagining the structures of authority for a world in which authority need no longer be 'male' and coercive nor silence 'female' and subversive, in which, in other words, speech and silence are no longer tied to an archetypal--and arbitrary--hierarchy of gender" (1983, 343). Maisie is silent in the novel, but a male/female

alliance vows to speak her truth.

Chapter Three

In focussing on a symbolic interpretation of Ross, I have omitted discussion of the realistic and social aspects of his works. Roy Daniells, for instance, suggests in his 1957 introduction to *As For Me and My House* that the fictional town of Horizon is "a composite of, or rather an abstraction from, little towns he [Ross] had lived with and endured; not for nothing is it given the name Horizon, at once nowhere and everywhere" (vi). Daniells declares that the strongest reading of Ross's first novel is a "literal" one (vi), and he asserts the importance of its depiction of life in the Depression (ix). "The pages of Ross's story are bleached by sun and wind, drained of color and deprived of animation by struggle and poverty. The devices of his art are precisely congruous to the actuality from which he drew his materials" (ix-x).

Similarly, a reading of symbols in Denise Boucher's *Les fees ont soif* and Pol Pelletier's *La lumière blanche* will inevitably fail to take into account the tremendous social impact of these works and these authors on Quebec society. *Les fées ont soif* opened in Montreal in 1978 to a storm of controversy; denounced by the Catholic church for its representation of the Virgin Mary and abandoned by its funding body, the play provoked, as Lise Gauvin records, vigorous religious, cultural and theatrical debates (Gauvin 12-21). The church attempted to ban its publication; Simone

de Beauvoir, Philippe Sollers and Julia Kristeva were among signatories of a petition protesting the ban (Gauvin 14). As Gauvin notes in the 1989 edition of the play,

> [d]u manifeste, la pièce a encore et surtout l'aspect iconoclaste. . . . Elle s'attaque non seulement aux rôles sociaux, mais également aux images et aux symboles sur lesquels repose la civilisation occidentale. Les archétypes de la Vierge, de la mère et de la putain, plus qu'un système de représentation théâtrale efficace, sont les fondements mêmes sur lesquels on s'est appuyé pour évacuer la femme de sa propre histoire et de son corps. (Gauvin 10)

Claire Lejeune asserts, again, in the play's 1989 edition,

> *Les fées ont soif* n'est pas une oeuvre de fiction, c'est la mise en scène de la violente irruption de la vie réelle dans l'imaginaire de trois femmes confinées dans un rôle traditionnel dont elles sont irréversiblement excédées. Littéralement un coup de théâtre, un coup de foudre, un coup de coeur après quoi 'il n'y aura plus jamais rien de pareil,' en tous cas pour ceux qui furent irradiés par cette résurgence d'enthousiasme pythique. (28)

Pol Pelletier, founder of Montreal's Théâtre Expérimental des Femmes is herself a mythic figure:

> Even in the iconoclastic, unpredictable world of Quebec's alternative theatre, Pol Pelletier is a wild card. To some, the Montreal actress, director, playwright and pedagogue is an *enfant terrible*, the woman who in the late seventies shaved her head: 'because it was so revolting, so boring, being a traditional woman.' To others, in both English and French Canada, Pelletier is a visionary insufficiently honoured in her own land. (Bernstein C10)

Boucher's use of a collage technique "qu'on associe aujourd'hui au baroque postmoderne" (Gauvin 12) and Pelletier's determination to write "[l]a première tragédie peut-être qui soit spécifiquement fondée sur l'histoire et la réalité des femmes" (Pelletier 116), differ widely from novels written by a male author depicting prairie lives (I include Sonny of *Whir of Gold* here). What these disparate works do share, however, are symbols, a common use of myths and a concern with the production of female texts. These commonalities will be explored and summarized in this and the final two chapters.

Adrienne Munich, as I noted in the two previous chapters, remarks on Eve's "silence" (255): "Why doesn't Eve object to Adam's usurpation? Why does she accept the image of absence?" (256). In *Les Fées ont soif* that silence is broken--a Statue of the Virgin Mary confirms her

sisterhood with Eve[1] and gives her own version of events in Eden:

> Au nom de la queue et du père et du fils. Brrr! Le fond de l'air est cru. C'est humide dans ma statue. Je suis dans l'arbre. Avec les nids. Je me regarde me regarder avoir été Ève. Je me regarde le regarder avoir été Adam. Je me regarde regarder ce qui n'a jamais existé. Je me regarde regarder sa pomme d'Adam, qui monte et qui descend de plus en plus vite à mesure qu'il m'entend. (51)

There is self-knowledge here, but it is not a post-Fall consciousness of sin. The Statue watches herself watching herself having been Eve--having played a role in a drama of wrongdoing and punishment that was not of her own creation: "Je me regarde regarder ce qui n'a jamais existé." Desire, calibrated by the rise and fall of the other player's Adam's apple, is real here; it also blasphemes, breaks the spell, changes the formula. "Au nom de la queue et du père et du fils"--the feminine noun's entry into the patriarchal triad is Québécois and French sexual slang for penis (Bergeron 398; Hérail 255); street words challenge ecclesiastical language, flesh replaces spirit.

"Ils ont dit que la chair était un péché contre l'esprit. Et ils m'ont enfermée au coeur même de la chair de la pomme" (55). *Les fées ont soif* is indeed a play about

flesh, and about what "[i]ls ont dit"--about language. In Christian discourse, the two come together in the person of Jesus: "And the Word was made flesh . . ." (John 1:14).[3] As I noted in Chapter One, both flesh and language are integral to the "culture of folk carnival" (4) and its literary permutations in the work of such as François Rabelais. Bakhtin noted carnival's "genetic" links to pagan, agrarian festivals (8), its opposition to official order and its suspension of hierarchical strictures (6 and 10). Also key was the loosing of the "frank and free" speech of the marketplace (10), which included God in its humour: "[L]anguage which mocks and insults the deity . . . was part of the ancient comic cults" (16). Central too was an emphasis on the body (19), and, concomitantly, renewal through degradation: the lowering of the ideal to "the material level," to body and earth (20).[4] Hence, Boucher's revision of the traditional trifold homage to Father, Son and Holy Spirit--"[a]u nom de la queue et du père et du fils"--is not only "a sarcastic reference to phallocentric religious hierarchy . . ." (Hopkins 67), but an upending of that hierarchy through insult, and a degradation of the Holy Spirit, a materialization. Instead of the traditional sacred rulers, whose language has the power to deem flesh a sin against spirit, Boucher, as Elaine R. Hopkins notes, offers us a more earthly and earthy group, a "female trinity, composed of La Statue (the Blessed Virgin Mary);

Marie, the compliant wife and overworked mother; and Madeleine (Mary Magdalene), the penitent whore . . ." (Hopkins 66; cf. Gauvin 10-11).[4] "*Les fées ont soif* is a quest for the woman Mary," says the critic (64); Boucher, she suggests, finds "[t]he Virgin . . . entirely too pale and inhuman to represent all of womankind" (64).[5]

Fleshing out Mary reveals her pagan past. I began such a project in my examination of Ross, noting Minnie the mare's matriarchal origins in *As For Me and My House* and Madeleine's archaic connections in *Whir of Gold*. Certainly Hopkins asserts that over the course of *Les fées ont soif* ". . . La Statue, Marie and Madeleine find the god/dess within themselves and learn to love her and to rely on her strength" (70-1).[6] Campbell discusses the origin of Marian motifs in goddess worship (43). Walker, moreover, asserts that "[f]rom the earliest ages, the concept of the Great Goddess was a trinity and the model for all subsequent trinities, male, female, or mixed" (1983, 1018). Indeed, "there is some evidence that early Christians perceived Mary as a trinity. Like the Buddhists' Mara, she was sometimes a spirit of death" (Walker 1983, 605). Moreover, Mary has been

> identified . . . with the Fate-spinner, whom the Greeks called Clotho, youngest of the trinity of Moerae. The Coptic *Discourse on Mary*, attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem, represented Mary as the

> same triple Goddess of Fate, incarnate in the three Marys who stood at the foot of Jesus's cross. (Walker 1983, 605)

The play's title encourages such a reading of Boucher's use of the trinity. As Hopkins notes, Boucher prefaces the work with an excerpt from Jules Michelet's *La sorcière*, in which he describes fairies as "reines des Gaules" who spurned Christ and his apostles, an evocation on Boucher's part, suggests Hopkins, "of female revolt against the patriarchal religious hierarchy . . ." (66; Michelet is cited in Boucher 37, and Hopkins 66; cf. Gauvin 12). Perhaps the Gallic queens also disdained giving up control over destiny--over their own and others'--because the fairies of French folklore

> ne soient autres, à l'origine, que les Parques romaines, elles-mêmes transposition latine des Moires grecques . . . .
>
> Assemblées généralement par trois, les fées tirent du fuseau le fil de la destinée humaine, l'enroulent sur le rouet et le coupent, l'heure venue, de leurs ciseaux. (Chevalier 430)

Originally "des expressions de la Terre-Mère" (Chevalier 431), fairies are linked to the moon and the serpent (Chevalier 431). Chevalier and Gheerbrant explain that fairies

> sont associées au rythme ternaire, mais, en y regardant de plus près, elles relèvent aussi du quaternaire: en musique, on dirait que leur mesure est à trois-quatre: trois temps marqués et un temps de silence. Ce qui représente en effet et le rythme lunaire et celui des saisons. (431)

Chevalier and Gheerbrant relate the story of the beautiful Mélusine, who leaves her human spouse, demanding that she not be sought, that her secret be respected (431; see 621). "Il lui faut en effet, en cette phase quatrième, quitter l'apparence humaine pour prendre celle d'un serpent, épiphanie animale, comme on le sait, de la vie éternelle" (431). According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, Mélusine is alternately woman and serpent, "de la même façon que le serpent change de peau pour se renouveler indéfiniment. C'est le moment qui, chez les humains, correspond au temps de silence, à la mort" (431).

The opening scene of Boucher's play similarly concerns itself with time, but a curious stasis reigns. The Statue identifies herself as a kind of eternal hourglass in an ironic take on the role of the Moera "Lachesis the Measurer" (Walker 1983, 302): "Je suis le désert qui se récite grain par grain" (41). She adds to the refrain later in the play: "Je suis le désert qui se récite grain par grain. Jour après jour" (43). According to Hopkins,

> [t]his metaphor suggests sterility, eternity, and monotonous prayer, such as the recitation with rosary beads of the Hail Mary. . . . Indeed, La Statue has a rosary about her waist, rather than the sash which usually appears in Marian iconography. This is ironic, as Mary's sash has long been a symbol of fertility. The rosary resembles a chain, with its obvious implications. (66)

Sterility and eternity are certainly the desert's symbolic associations. Cirlot notes that

> the Biblical prophets, in order to counter the agrarian religions based on fertility rites . . . , never ceased to describe theirs as the purest religion of the Israelites 'when they were in the wilderness.' This confirms the specific symbolism of the desert as the most propitious place for divine revelation, for which reason it has been said that 'monotheism is the religion of the desert.' This is because the desert, in so far as it is in a way a negative landscape, is the 'realm of abstraction' located outside the sphere of existence susceptible only to things transcendent. (79)

In Catholic tradition, the Virgin Mary proves susceptible only to the transcendent Holy Spirit: it is an article of

faith that Jesus Christ "by the power of the Holy Spirit . . . was born of the Virgin Mary . . ." (*Living with Christ* 7). As the Statue complains in Boucher's play,

> [o]n m'a donné un oiseau comme mari. On m'a dérobé mon fils de siècle en siècle. On lui a donné un père célibataire, jaloux et éternel. On m'a taillée dans le marbre et fait peser de tout mon poids sur le serpent. Je suis le grand alibi des manques de désirs. (50; see Hopkins 67)

Because water connotes "birth and physical fertility, it is also opposed to the concept of the everlasting spirit . . . ," notes Cirlot; in contrast, "burning drought is the climate *par excellence* of pure, ascetic spirituality--of the consuming of the body for the salvation of the soul" (79). The Statue, a product of monotheism, measures everlasting spirit "[j]our après jour" (43), but the action consumes her, "grain par grain."

"Nearly always," says Walker, the Fates "were weavers" (1983, 302). Marie takes up the mantle of "Clotho the Spinner" (Walker 1983, 302): "Je file un bien mauvais coton" (41).[8] The expression, which means to be in "une situation dangereuse" (*MicroRobert* 234), alludes portentously to the fates and their weaving of destiny. Marie is in danger from her violent husband and is later beaten by him: "Est-ce que je vais attendre qu'il me tue?" (72). In the play's introductory scene Marie asks for a new

identity: "Est-ce que je pourrais changer de peau? Est-ce que je pourrais me chercher ailleurs?" (41). "Changer de peau" evokes Mélusine's transformation into the skin-shucking serpent, the serpent which the statue ironically tramples "de tout mon poids" (see above). Marie can, of course, as a member of a trinity, find herself in the lives of her two cohorts--mention of the serpent already identifies her with the statue." Like the Statue, Marie resides in the eternal desert: "J'me demande ce que j'ai fait pour vivre aussi longtemps avec lui. Huit ans c'est long! J'ai une petite idée de ce que c'est l'éternité" (82). Moreover, she is immaculate Marie: "Ma maison est propre, propre, propre. Je m'appelle Marie. Je fais des commissions" (46). Sterile drudgery--housework, shopping--takes precedence over her own identity.

Sterility governs other areas of Marie's life too. One of the shops in her round sells

> [d]es petits bikinis. (*Silence.*) Je ne pourrai jamais être seule au bord de la mer. J'ai trop peur. Les vagues roulent vers moi. Elles veulent me parler. Je ne voudrais jamais être seule au bord de la mer. J'ai trop peur. Les vagues pourraient me ramasser dans leurs plis et m'amener là où je ne voudrais jamais aller. Je suis une femme de peine. (47)

Water, as noted above, signals birth and fertility; here, the waves connote female sexual pleasure. The "petits bikinis" are not only swimming, but sexual garb, and Marie, significantly, switches from mention of them to her fear, not simply of water, but of the sea, whose symbolic connections include sexual references. "Mother Sea was a universal emblem of birth and rebirth . . ." (Walker 1988, 351), of the very skin-changing Marie seeks. "Les Anciens, Grecs et Romains, offraient à la mer des sacrifices de chevaux et de taureaux, symboles eux-mêmes de fécondité" (Chevalier 623). The aliases of "the maternal Deep" include ". . . Aphrodite Marina, and her variations Mari, Mara, Marga, and Mary of the blue robe and pearl necklace" (Walker 1988, 351). Moreover, in a creation story borrowed, says Walker, by the Bible, the Babylonian sea goddess Tiamat unites with "a heaven god, Apsu":

> 'The original text makes it clear that the creative act is a sexual union.' Elohim (God) impregnates the waters with *ruach*, a Hebrew word meaning spirit, wind, or the verb 'to hover'; it also means sexual intercourse, in the sense of moving back and forth. (Walker 1988, 351; Walker cites Beltz; see Chevalier 623)[12]

Marie, however, insists she is a woman of pain, not of pleasure. "J'ai eu deux enfants et c'est comme si ma chair n'avait jamais été traversée. Où est-ce que je dois

retourner en moi pour jouir?" (55). She chooses, for the moment, to remain in the desert.

Marie spins a "mauvais coton": she is in crisis. According to Bakhtin, feasts, which were "always related to time, either to the recurrence of an event in the natural (cosmic) cycle, or to biological or historic timeliness," were also

> linked to moments of crisis, of breaking points in the cycle of nature or in the life of society and man. . . . Moments of death and revival, of change and renewal always led to a festive perception of the world. (9)

In the play's introductory scene, the prostitute Madeleine is far from a turning point--she seems, rather, afflicted with the same stasis which governs the Statue: "Je pigrasse sur place. La vie me fait cailler" (41). In Québécois slang, pigrasser means "salir" and "patauger dans la boue" (Bergeron 369-70); "cailler" means both to be sleepy, and to masturbate (Bergeron 106; cf. Gauvin on "latence" 11 and note 4, above).[11] Madeleine is mired in place, anesthetized by life: like an Adam awaiting God's infusion of breath, she is created, not creating. Indeed, Madeleine's mud recalls God's curse:

> By the sweat of your face
> shall you get bread to eat,
> Until you return to the ground,

> from which you were taken;
> For you are dirt,
> and to dirt you shall return. (Genesis 3:19)

However, as noted above, the Bible often conceals an older text. Campbell comments:

> [T]he ground, the dust, out of which the punished couple had been taken, was, of course, the goddess Earth, deprived of her anthropomorphic features, yet retaining in her elemental aspect her function of furnishing the substance into which the new spouse, Yahweh, had breathed the breath of her children's life. And they were to return to her, not the father, in death. Out of her they had been taken, and to her they would return. (29)

This parallels Bakhtin's description of degradation:

> Earth is an element that devours, swallows up (the grave, the womb) and at the same time an element of birth, of renascence (the maternal breasts). . . . To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better. (21)

The signs point to change. Madeleine's marketplace language gives us mud, sleep and spilled seed: the latter is implicit in "cailler's" reference to masturbation. As Madeleine remarks later in the play: "Je jette les spermatozoïdes par les fenêtres" (46). These items comprise

a bodily grave awaiting, perhaps, a new birth. A crisis certainly awaits Madeleine near the end of the play: buoyed by Marie's eventual decision to leave her husband, Madeleine decides to give up prostitution, and is then raped by a former client (cf. Hopkins 69). Her aggressor is acquitted, and anger at the event becomes the labour pains of the Statue's birth--the latter bursts from her plaster shell, incarnate (cf. Hopkins 70):

> Je ne veux plus de ce sarcophage. Je ne veux plus que l'on me salue dans une statue pendant que l'on me dénigre, que l'on me méprise dans chaque femme. Je ne suis plus un alibi. (95; cf. Hopkins 70)

The statue's metamorphosis recalls the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ at the end of Mass.[12] Compare the priest's preparation for Communion with the Statue's post-plaster declaration of identity:

> Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, by the will of the Father and the work of the Holy Spirit your death brought life to the world. By your holy body and blood free me from all my sins and from every evil. (*Living with Christ* 34)

The living Christ's flesh and blood deliver from sin and from evil; the Statue stands living in front of us, banishing iniquity: ". . . d'où / me voici debout / et vivante devant toi / pour rompre toutes les iniquités . . .

(Boucher 99). The Statue, however, breaks with the very idea of sin, or at least redefines it: "Tu ne me dicteras plus aucun devoir" (97) she declares after her escape. Indeed, as Lejeune notes,

> [t]oucher au dogme de l'Immaculée Conception, c'est toucher au dogme du péché originel, c'est donc attenter au fondement même de la civilisation monothéiste. Briser spectaculairement la statue de l'Immaculée, comme on briserait un corset de plâtre ou une chrysalide fossilisée, c'est rendre la parole à la 'postérité du serpent' maudite par le Dieu de la Bible, c'est délivrer le verbe d'une poésie métamorphique que des siècles d'exil et d'inquisition ont rendue majeure. (27)

Nonetheless, the Statue's incarnation does recall a Catholic Communion with Christ's flesh and blood. Lejeune, echoing clerical language, sees in the play a "résurrection de la chair après des siècles d'encryptement" (28). The carnivalesque and the ecclesiastic spar, as Bakhtin might predict, throughout the work. The Church's institutions help structure the activities of Madeleine, Marie and the Statue, just as the women redefine its values. Immediately following the trio's opening introductions, for instance, the play, "*sur un air de chant grégorien*" (41), takes issue with the Mass's Amen, its expression of eternal agreement, "[a]insi soit-il" (cf. Hommage aux Abonnés 5).

Ain ain ain ain

Ain ain ain ain

Ainsi sont-elles

Ain ain ain ain

Ain ain ain ain

Ainsi sont-elles (41)

In Boucher's formulation, a descriptive indicative replaces the church's subjunctive expression of affirmation. The women may indeed be stuck, mired in prostitution, in domestic drudgery, in sterile adulation, but it is not how they want to be, and not, necessarily, how they will be in the future. Something is, indeed, cooking, and the ingredients are, again, supplied in equal measure by church and carnival:

> [Madeleine:] Sur le poêle, le café fait des bruits d'entrailles.
>
> [Marie:] Entendez-vous la musique des vieilles casseroles trouées?
>
> [La Statue:] Les voiles du temple claquent comme de vieux drapeaux mouillés. (42)

The casserole and the pot on the stove both evoke the cauldron,

> [t]he symbol commonly opposed to the cross, as the witches' object of worship; in pagan tradition, the Great Mother's cosmic womb. As the 'pot of blood in the hand of Kali,' the cauldron signified

> cyclic recurrence, as opposed to the patriarchal view of linear time. (Walker 1983, 150)

The cauldron is a place of transformation, "the same as the womb that churned out rebirths . . ." (150). "[T]he Cauldron of Regeneration" is also a symbol of the sea (Walker 1988, 351), Marie's emblem. The image offers the same premonition of cyclic change as the mud surrounding Madeleine in her introductory remarks; like the revision of "[a]insi soit il," it also resists stasis. Moreover, "entrailles" are both guts and, as in the prayer "Je vous salue, Marie," womb: "Vous êtes bénie entre toutes les femmes, et le fruit de vos entrailles est béni . . ." (*MicroRobert* 373). Madeleine's reference incorporates allusions both to Mary and to her pagan predecessors: ecclesiastical language again receives a new spin, if the pun can be forgiven.

While regeneration is in the spotlight, the Statue's reference to temple veils alludes, appropriately, to the primary event of Christian transformation:

> It was now around midday, and darkness came over the whole land until midafternoon with an eclipse of the sun. The curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two. Jesus uttered a loud cry and said, 'Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit.' After he said this, he expired. (Luke 23:44-6)

Again, a subtext shows up. Walker records the symbolic association of the lifting of the bridal veil and "a first sexual intercourse. . . . Sometimes, Hymen represented the veil of the temple, another term for the womb, which was the 'temple' of the female body" (1988, 317). The veils are compared in the play to wet flags--the moisture, again, connotes fertility, desire. Moreover, ". . . Hymen was also a Goddess who personified marriage," and an etymological precursor of the word "hymn" (Walker 1988, 317): "the original *hymnos* was a wedding song, probably in celebration of the physical beauties of the bride after the manner of the erotic wedding songs of the Middle East" (Walker 1988, 317-8). The image leads us back to church, to the songs sung throughout the play like the hymns interspersing a Mass: "Parlons, parlons. Parlons. Paroles. Hymnes. Chants. Danses. Rires. Larmes. Tirons sur les murs du silence" (64). In the "Chanson d'Errance" (44-6), for example, the play's first song (its title puns on the Mass's opening "Chant d'Entrée" [*Prions en Église* 3]), Boucher alters a refrain found in the Mass's penitential and communion rites (*Prions en Église* 4, 23); in the "Gloire à Dieu"; and, in slightly different form, in the "Litanies de la Sainte Vierge" ("ayez pitié de nous": *Guide de la Jeune Fille* 206-9): "[P]rends pitié de nous" (*Prions en Église* 4).

Si cette chanson vous semble

Paroles tristes et amères
Voix de grandes désillusions
Mots de pertes et de défaites
Prenez pitié de nous
Prenons pitié de vous. (44)

In a carnivalesque tumbling of hierarchy, the women ask for pity, but they also offer it. Other portions of the Virgin's litanies also come in for levelling (see Hopkins 66-7): "Miroir de justice" (*Guide de la Jeune Fille* 207) becomes "le miroir de l'injustice" (49); "Porte du ciel" (*Guide* 207) turns into "la porte sur le vide" (49); "Vase d'honneur" (*Guide* 207) converts to "le vase sacré introuvable" (50); "Secours des chrétiens" (*Guide* 208) appears as "le secours des imbéciles" (50). Similarly, the Statue declares her disillusionment with the series of thrice-daily prayers dedicated to the Virgin: "Il était une fois, un jour. C'est aujourd'hui et je commence à déchanter tout l'Angélus" (46). Juxtaposed with the traditional fairy tale opening "[i]l était une fois," the Angelus turns into a conte de fée from a distant past; the Virgin, however, declares her intention to live in the present, "aujourd'hui."

The play's songs, among them the "Chanson du Conditionnel" (59; cf. 60, 61) and the "Chanson du père Noël" (65-7), and its already-mentioned references to fairy tales ("père Noël," the play's title, the transformation of

the Angelus), emphasize the work's concern with language. This concern extends not simply to the phraseology of the Mass, but also to Cinderella ("Un jour, mon prince viendra" [47]); Red Riding Hood ("Oh, grand-maman, comme vous avez une grande bouche!" [65]); Alice in Wonderland ("Un jour, le lapin dit à Alice: 'Arrête de pleurer, sinon tu vas te noyer dans tes larmes'" [79]); and Snow White ("Blanche-Neige est insatiable" [92]). Movie discourse appears too: the text includes a reference to Marilyn Monroe (56). Not only do these references carnivalize the play's essential concern with ecclesiastical forms--fairy tales juxtapose references to the Mass--but they are themselves scrutinized. Père Noël is a molester:

> *Quand tu descends*
> *Dans ma longue*
> *Cheminée*
> *Sans sonner*
> *À la porte*
> *Mon père Noël*
> *Y a pas d'cadeaux*
> *Pour moi qui sort*
> *De ta grand-poche* . . . . (65-6; cf. Hopkins 68)

Marie sings this "Chanson du père Noël" before recounting her beating at the hands of her husband, a husband "given" her by her father, as she asserts in another song: "Mon père m'a donné un mari," she sings, "Spiritum sanctum

eliminum boum ba . . ." (48). Marie's father and husband parallel God and the spouse allotted the Virgin Mary, the Holy Spirit. Coupled with the Chanson du père Noël's hint at molestation, such an allotment becomes abuse, and patriarchal discourses of all kinds, sacred or secular, are called into question. Hence, "*un gros ciseau*"--Québécois slang for penis[13] and, as dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit (Cirlot 85; Lejeune 27)--"*s'étend brutalement sur Madeleine*" (88, stage directions) during her assault; the wolf responds to Red Riding Hood "*avec une grosse voix en rire de père Noël*" (65, stage directions); and Snow White's sexuality turns into a taunt of the rape victim Madeleine. Language carries sexual freight here. Indeed, according to Nelly Furman, language constructs sexuality:

> While sex is an anatomical fact, sexuality is culturally devised; it is the manner in which society fictionalizes its relationship to sex and creates gender roles. Sexuality, as Serge Leclaire points out, 'is a fact of discourse which takes into account anatomical determination' (Leclaire 1979, p. 44). (73)[14]

Furman suggests that "[t]raditional forms of discourse . . . are necessarily modulated and codified by our patriarchal cultural values" (66), while ". . . post-structuralist feminism challenges representation itself as already a patriarchal paradigm, thus positing the existence of a

different discursive practice" (76). Gayle Greene and Coppélia Kahn note that French theorist "Luce Irigaray emphasizes *différence*, a totality of women's characteristics defined positively against masculine norms, and imagines a specifically feminine language, a *parler femme*" (80), much, perhaps, as Marie searches for a mother tongue:

> Comment se parle, maman, la langue maternelle? Ils ont dit qu'elle était une langue maternelle. C'était leur langue à eux. Ils l'ont structurée de façon à ce qu'elle ne transmette que leurs volontés à eux, leurs philosophies à eux. (77)[15]

Or, as the Statue puts it, "[j]e suis l'Immaculée dans toutes leurs conceptions" (71).

Nelly Furman notes that feminist critics have "collect[ed] and stud[ied] the works of women authors in order to recover 'a female tradition'" (62). For feminists Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, she says, "women authors are individuals who react in a collective, sisterly manner to a common social reality" (62). Certainly Hopkins emphasizes "the importance of solidarity and communication between women . . ." (69) in the play. She suggests that the Statue "lead[s] the fight for the liberation of the body . . ." (67), a fight sparked "by her own personal observations of society . . . ," whereas "the other members of Boucher's trinity begin to question their lives only after a dialogue has been initiated between them"

(67). Hopkins notes that "Marie finally decides to leave her husband" (69).

> . . . . Soon thereafter, Madeleine decides she has had enough misery, as well. She demonstrates once again the importance of solidarity and communication between women:
>
> 'Depuis que je te connais, Marie, j'arrête pas d'penser.' (Hopkins 69; quote is from Boucher 84)

The Mass offers salutary selections from Scripture; the women read their lives, seeking paths of change: "J'aurais envie d'm'ouvrir un p'tit commerce," says Madeleine. 'Un p'tit magasin de coupons. J'aime ça, les beaux tissus. D'la soie. Du velours. Pis du beau coton . . . Eille! . . . on pourrait p't'être s'ouvrir ça ensemble" (84). A fabric shop is an appropriate venture for two weavers of destiny: "*Est-ce qu'on peut changer une destinée*?" (45). The quality of the fateful cotton changes from "mauvais" to "beau."

However, both sets of readings culminate in sacrifice: the church's, with a commemoration of Jesus's death; and the play's, with Madeleine's rape, and the subsequent acquittal of her aggressor. "Il y eut la fin du procès. Le violeur fut innocenté. Ce fut comme la fin d'un grand été. Dans le transept, les hommes de loi fiers d'eux se congratulaient. Dans la Cour, tout le monde se levait en même temps" (94).

A transept is the "transverse part of [a] cruciform church . . ." (*OED* v. 18, 395): Madeleine, like Christ, is put on the cross by men of the law, by men who inhabit courts and churches. And by Boucher? The author, says Hopkins, "wants to make this physical rape a metaphor for the political and social rape that women have endured for centuries" (70). Indeed, the court's resemblance to a church puts Mass and trial on an equal footing, but the play, like the Mass, also relies on the trappings of sacrifice and redemption. Madeleine's rape, like Christ's death, effects a deliverance. As noted above, rage at the event allows the Statue to burst from her shell, in a transubstantiation of plaster to flesh which matches the Mass's communion celebration. The Statue even couches her rejection of patriarchal discourse at the end of the play in the terms of that discourse: "Alors, ouvre les oreilles!" (97), she begins. Campbell recalls the legend that the Virgin was impregnated by the Holy Spirit "through the ear" (27): the Statue's demand is disquietingly similar to the rapist's "[e]nvoueille, ouvre les jambes" (88).

The issue is perhaps only sidestepped by remembering that Madeleine is still alive at the end of the play to heed the call to rebellion against old forms: "Déserteurs demandés. Iconoclastes demandés" (98). Madeleine herself asserts that "[i]l n'y a pas de recettes pour celles qui cherchent ce que personne n'a jamais vu" (96). In

Madeleine's sacrifice and the Statue's incarnation there is also something of the carnival grotesque's concern with death and birth:

> The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) . . . is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements. It is an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave and bosom, as a field which has been sown and in which new shoots are preparing to sprout. (Bakhtin 26-7)[16]

Seed spilled in the mud surrounding Madeleine in the play's opening scene finally bears fruit. Also, the role of the bird in the rape scene recalls the ourobouros, a symbol which "has also been explained as the union between the chthonian principle as represented by the serpent and the celestial principle as signified by the *bird* . . ." (Cirlot 247, emphasis added). Moreover, the serpent, an ancient goddess symbol associated, as already noted, with the Statue and Marie, and by trinitarian extension with Madeleine, escapes from beneath the Statue's feet during her liberation: "Va, serpent! Je ne t'écraserai plus. Va ramper. Assume la terre. Elle est bonne. Quand j'étais petite, je jouais pieds nus dans la boue" (95). The statue

appears to invite the creature to take up the earth in the posture of ourobouros, of "the great World Serpent, who was supposed to encircle the earth . . . or else to embrace the mystic World Egg" (Walker 1988, 268).

In my discussion of *As For Me and My House*, I noted *Campbell's linkage of the ourobouros* with earth-embracing waters (10). We return to water, to fertility, to the waves of sexual desire which Marie feared, to the mud in which Madeleine found herself mired, and in which the statue played in as a child, the grave and womb of earth. And we return to one of the play's central concerns--language. The serpent encircling the world egg cradles "the universe in embryo" (Walker 1983, 270).

> It used to be a common idea that the primeval universe--or the Great Mother who created it--took the form of an egg. . . .
>
> The Cosmic Egg of mystical iconography carried all arabic numerals and alphabetical letters combined within an ellipse, to show that everything that can be numbered or named is contained within one form at the beginning. The Cosmic Egg thus becomes a substitute for the Logos, and an expression of the Primum Mobile where deities are created by human symbols. (Walker 1988, 5)

Logos is "divine essence concentrated in a Word and made manifest, as Jesus was called 'the Word made flesh'" (Walker 1983, 545). The Angelus mentions it: "And the Word was made flesh. And dwelled among us" (*Marian Pilgrimmage Prayer Book* 33). As noted above, however, the Statue rejects the prayer. She chooses, instead, an egg:

> Alors, j'essayais de me cacher de la soleil. Je cherchais une oeuf pour me cacher. Et il n'y en avait nulle part. Et je me disais: Pour que ça change, il faut trouver une oeuf. Une oeuf rouge. Y a-t-elle quelqu'une qui a vu une oeuf? Une oeuf rouge? Et pas d'oiseaux à l'horizon. (82)

Cirlot notes that Egyptian hieroglyphs depicted the egg as "potentiality, the seed of generation, the mystery of life"; alchemists saw it as a "container for matter and for thought"; the Greeks envisioned the egg as a seven-layered "vault of space"; the Chinese maintained "that the first man had sprung from an egg dropped by Tien from heaven to float upon the primordial waters. The Easter egg is an emblem of immortality which conveys the essence of these beliefs" (Cirlot 94). Moreover, Easter eggs are often "colored red in allusion to the blood shed for man's salvation" (Jobes pt. 1, 492). When a bird does appear on the play's horizon, it is in a scene of paschal sacrifice, from which the Statue hatches,

> . . . charnelle

> et pleine de têtes
>
> . . . . . .
>
> j'inscris chacun de mes signes sur toi . . . .
>
> (99)

She emerges as Kali, ". . . Hindu Triple Goddess of creation, preservation, and destruction . . ." (Walker 1983, 488), inventor of "the magic letters of the Sanskrit alphabet . . ." which she

> inscribed . . . on the rosary of skulls around her neck. The letters were magic because they stood for primordial creative energy expressed in sound--Kali's *mantras* brought into being the very things whose names she spoke for the first time, in her holy language. In short, Kali's worshippers originated the doctrine of the Logos or creative Word. . . .
>
> Though called "the One," Kali was always a trinity: the same Virgin-Mother-Crone triad established perhaps nine or ten millenia ago, giving the Celts their triple Morrigan; the Greeks their triple Moerae and all other manifestations of the Threefold Goddess. . . . (Walker 1983, 491)[37]

The Statue's metamorphosis describes a new, or perhaps more accurately, a much older Genesis: language and creation are restored to Eve. As if to underscore this point, Boucher

feminizes sun and egg in the passage above: "*la* soleil" and "*une* oeuf" (82; it. added) replace their masculine forms.

Hélène Cixous, like Boucher, mingles sound, creative energy and Logos in her evocation of a feminine language:

> Dans la parole féminine comme dans l'écriture ne cesse jamais de résonner ce qui de nous avoir jadis traversé, touché imperceptiblement, profondément, garde le pouvoir de nous affecter, le *chant*, la première musique, celle de la première voix d'amour, que toute femme préserve vivante. . . . Même si la mystification phallique a contaminé généralement les bons rapports, la femme n'est jamais loin de la 'mère' (que j'entends hors-rôle, la 'mère' comme non-nom, et comme source des biens). Toujours en elle subsiste au moins un peu du bon lait-de-mère. Elle écrit à l'encre blanche. (Cixous 44; see Gauvin 11)

Cixous, writes Ann Rosalind Jones, "calls for an assertion of the female body as plenitude, as a positive force, the source simultaneously of multiple physical capacities (gestation, birth, lactation) and of liberatory texts" (88). As Cixous declares: "Je suis Chair spacieuse chantante, sur laquelle s'ente nul sait quel (le) je plus ou moins humain mais d'abord vivant puisqu'en transformation" (50-1).[18] The statement provides an apt summary of *Les fées ont soif*.

Its call to flesh echoes the Statue's incarnation--"d'où / me voici debout / et vivante devant toi" (99); its "nul sait quel (le) je" suggests the members of the fateful trinity who transform themselves constantly into and out of each other's lives, and--the play would make such a "spacieuse" claim--the lives of all women. Its singing is "India's Goddess Vac, 'Voice,' . . . a manifestation of Kali as Mother of Creation" (Walker 1988, 212), who "spoke the first word Om to Bring forth the universe . . ." (Walker 1988, 212). After all, "[t]he meaning of Om," says Walker, "was something like 'pregnant belly' . . ." (1988, 99). As Gauvin notes, quoting Boucher's play and echoing Cixous's equation of song, creation and language, "[t]irer sur 'les murs du silence' et 'ouvrir les battants des mots' sont les prémices d'un chant d'amour dont le mot clé et le leitmotiv généreux s'appelle 'imagine'" (Gauvin 11; she cites Boucher 64; "'imagine'" is found on 95, 96, 100, 101). Indeed, *Les fées ont soif* ends, appropriately, with a trifold call to a conception which is not immaculate: "[Marie:] Imagine. [Madeleine:] Imagine. [La Statue:] Imagine" (101; cf. Hopkins 70, Gauvin 11).[19] As Lejeune writes of this exhortation in a preface to the work, "[u]n projet de communauté des hommes, des femmes et des enfants se met à prendre corps sous nos yeux, dont nous nous reconnaissons peu à peu non seulement actrices et acteurs mais coautrices et coauteurs" (30).[20] The *MicroRobert* defines "imaginer"

as "[c]oncevoir" (543): no longer is flesh pitted against spirit; mind and body mesh here in a symbol of unity worthy of the ourobouros. Indeed, shortly before the rape scene the Statue expresses an "angoisse excessive de jeter en même temps un enfant dans la lumière et en même temps dans le noir. Puisque je lui avais donné la vie, on me disait aussi responsable de sa mort" (83). The ourobouros knits light and dark together, in an image of wholeness and balance:

> In some versions of the Ouroboros, the body is half light and half dark, alluding in this way to the successive counterbalancing of opposing principles as illustrated in the Chinese *Yang-Yin* symbol for instance. (Cirlot 247)

Birth and desire thus lose their fearful aspect: "je ne serai plus jamais nulle part en toi / en exil de moi" asserts the Statue,

> parce que la chair de l'enfant m'érotise et
> me flambe seins et cuisses
> d'où me voici debout devant toi
> ne me pornographise plus quand tu
> trembles devant ta propre naissance. (99-100)

Les fées ont soif invites us, says Hopkins, "to reconstruct the world according to new principles" (70). The play discards "Amen"--"Ainsi soit il"--for "Imagine." Mrs. Bentley, and, to a large extent, Sylvia Larson, took the opposite tack, separating imaginative work from physical

creation and favoring the latter. "That's right, Philip. I want it so" (216): so be it. *Whir of Gold*'s prostitute Madeleine, a counterpart of the Madeleine of Boucher's play, returned to memory, to imagination, to look for a saving text. Maisie Bell's news story promised to deliver that text. Does Boucher's play? *As For Me and My House* opened under fecund, rain-soaked skies, and ended in a dusty windstorm: "It's blowing tonight, and there's dust again, and the room sways slowly in a yellow smoky haze. The bare, rain-stained walls remind" Mrs. Bentley of her "first Sunday here . . ." (215), and, perhaps, of writerly creativity lost. *Les fées ont soif*, in contrast, moves from the desert to the fertile ground of the imagination, to the primordial mud of a new creation. This is not an uncompromised or uncomplicated shift, however. I noted above the disturbing use of Madeleine's rape as a tool of transformation, a step not unlike the Mass's reenactment of the sacrifice of Christ in order to achieve salvation. I also pointed out in the thesis's introductory chapter the imperative implicit in the triple "Imagine" which closes the play. This is perhaps not an invitation but a command; there is a hint here of a move away from carnivalesque creation towards the establishment of new hierarchies.

Nonetheless, in *La lumière blanche*, the final work to be examined in this thesis, Pol Pelletier successfully both heeds and deconstructs that command. The opening scene of

Pelletier's play asks its audience and yet another trinity of female characters to imagine themselves in a desert; they are at the same time, however, reminded that they remain in a theatre. The scene becomes a desert of limits where, paradoxically, the limitless--the carnivalesque--is attempted: authority and, indeed, authorship itself are questioned, opposites are conjoined and boundaries between male and female breached.

Notes

1. Campbell noted their common goddess origins: see Campbell (9, 27-8, 42-5, 334) and Chapter One of this thesis.

2. In her preface to *Les fées ont soif*, Lejeune puns, in my opinion, on the Mass's trinitarian invocation, "[p]ar lui, avec lui et en lui, à toi, Dieu le Père tout-puissant, dans l'unité du Saint-Esprit . . ." (*Prions en Église* 17). According to Lejeune, Boucher's "parole" "se mettait à se dire là, devant nous, entre nous, à se faire publiquement, scandaleusement chair, c'est le verbe de la vraie vie, la voix retrouvée du 'nu perdu' dont nous avons été, garçons et filles, sevrés au nom de l'Histoire, quelque part entre l'enfance et l'adolescence" (25-6). Jean-Luc Bastien, perhaps evoking the Mass, calls the play at one point a "rituel" (34).

3. André Belleau has written a number of articles on "carnavalisation" in Quebec literature. See "Carnavalesque pas mort?" (*Études françaises* 20.1 (1984): 37-44); "Carnavalisation et roman québécois: mise au point sur l'usage d'un concept de Bakhtine (*Études françaises* 19.3 (1983-4): 51-64). I wish to thank Claudine Potvin for signalling Belleau's work to me. Also, cf. Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed, "The Unique, Its Double and the Multiple: The Carnivalesque Hero in the Québécois Novel" (*Yale French Studies* 65 (1983): 139-153), pp. 140, 147-53. The critic takes up carnival, sorcery, logos, writing, identity, textual space. Hajdukowski-Ahmed suggests "[t]he Carnival reenacts the original sin and rehabilitates both Eve and the serpent, desire and transgression of the Word" (1983, 140). A similar rehabilitation takes place in *Les fées ont soif*. In her examination of the presence of carnival in several Quebec novels, Hajdukowski-Ahmed asserts that a "descent into hell becomes the new quest" of the more thoroughly carnivalesque of these works (145; see 146): I am reminded of Sonny's trip to the underworld in *Whir of Gold*.

4. Gauvin touches on a number of the themes I discuss: the idea of a female trinity, a certain "latence" evident in the lives of the women (see in the chapter's text a discussion of Madeleine stuck in the mud), and the importance of language, of opening up discourse (10-11). "À la violence des actes et des modèles les *Fées* opposent la machine désirante du *je* se constituant comme sujet. Et ce au risque de l'anarchie libertaire" notes Gauvin (11), conjuring up a carnivalesque destruction of norms. Her declaration of the work as manifesto/antimanifesto perhaps heralds Pelletier's *La lumière blanche* and its simultaneous demonstration and

deconstruction of authorship (cf. Gauvin 11). (See Gauvin [12-23] on the public scandal Boucher's play provoked during its first run in Montreal.) Also, cf. Gauvin (20), Lejeune (27), Bastien (33), Jane Moss (1984, 621-2; 1985, 249), Boyer (62), Hajdukowski-Ahmed (1984, 264), and Louise Cotnoir (309) on clichés and archetypes of womanhood examined in the play. Jane Moss discusses the theme of madness in the work (1984), and examines the importance of monologue, not only in Boucher's play, but in Quebec women's theatre (1985, 246-50). Cotnoir notes the play's examination of the problem of "how to give birth to oneself as a woman . . ." (309, cf. 310). Hajdukowski-Ahmed includes the play in her discussion of the image of the witch (and its mythic antecedents, including Diana, Artemis and Medea) in a number of Quebec texts (cf. 1984, 260-1, 264, 267-8). She comments on the play's characters as types (1984, 267).

5. Lejeune finds the cult of the Virgin Mary "la clé de voûte de l'empire monothéiste . . ." (26-7).

6. Hopkins notes connections between Eve, Mary and Mary Magdalene in church lore (65) and asserts Boucher's "merging of Mary Magdalene the 'holy harlot' with Mary the Virgin and mother. These three women constitute a female trinity, resembling the biblical Trinity in that they, too, are one in essence--unable to take pleasure in their own sexuality, Boucher considers them virgins. The play dramatizes their collective metamorphosis, through solidarity and sisterhood, into modern Eves who reject the confining image society has imposed on them and seek to rebuild the garden and begin again" (65).

7. In a Charles Perrault tale of thirsty fairies called "Les fées," one of the creatures disguises herself and demands a drink of two young women who arrive, separately, to draw water from a fountain. Fates lie in the balance: the first girl obliges generously, and is rewarded with riches; the other young woman's selfish reply lands her a curse (Perrault 65-70). Lejeune, in language which echoes this tale (she doesn't cite it), notes the three women of the play come together "à la fontaine de leurs larmes, à la source commune de leur malheur" (28).

8. There is a connection with Freya here too: "The Swedes called the constellation of Orion the distaff of the virgin Mary, because it was formerly the distaff used by Freya to spin the destinies of men" (Walker 1983, 605).

9. Cixous anticipates the statue's liberation and the merging of identities of the three women in this play (and, indeed, in Pelletier's--see Chapter Four): "Parce que de

toujours, elle arrive, vivante, nous sommes au commencement d'une nouvelle histoire, ou plutôt d'un devenir à plusieurs histoires se traversant les unes les autres. En tant que sujet à l'histoire, la femme se passe toujours simultanément en plusieurs lieux" (45). Lejeune cites the outrage of those who saw the play as "une sorte de sabbat diabolique où se perd publiquement le sens du péché en même temps que la sacro-sainte distance sociale entre la mère et la putain, l'une se mettant dans la peau de l'autre" (28). She suggests the play's figuring of "le principe de réciprocité de *je* et de *l'autre* . . ." succeeding a static order guaranteed "par le principe de raison duelle" (28). Cf. Lejeune (27-30) for discussion of the play's anti-patriarchal quest to, as the critic puts it, resurrect the flesh, to restore female sexuality as well as female language. Bastien states that "chaque femme y est en même temps toutes les femmes . . ." (34).

10. See Froula's analysis of Woolf's *The Waves*, and her inclusion of a reference to Tiamat (1988, 214-16; 220, note 31).

11. Gould notes, without citing a passage from the text, that ". . . Boucher also translates the boredom and repetition of woman's place in the consumer-oriented city in her theatrical bombshell *Les fées ont soif*" (1982, 3).

12. Lejeune notes of the play that "[i]l nous est alors donné d'assister, ou plutôt de participer à l'éveil d'une lucidité partagée qui . . . cherche et trouve sa langue, celle de la résurrection de la chair après des siècles d'encryptement" (28).

13. Bergeron reports that "petit oiseau" is the term for a child's penis (342). Lejeune equates the bird with the Holy Spirit and notes "[i]l fallait oser faire de ce phallus ailé un accessoire de théâtre!" (27).

14. Furman cites Leclaire, Serge. "Sexuality: "A Fact of Discourse." Interview by Helene Klibbe. In George Stambolian and Elaine Marks, eds., *Homosexualities and French Literature: Cultural Contexts/Critical Texts.* Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell UP, 1979. Furman notes further that our knowledge and experience of the world is shaped by language (69-70).

15. Cf. the work of a number of Canadian feminists on the question of, as Louise Dupré puts it, "an essentially feminine writing" (355). Two sources of such discussion are *A Mazing Space: Writing Canadian Women Writing* (Eds. Shirley Neuman and Smaro Kamboureli. Edmonton: Longspoon/Newest, 1986) and *La théorie, un dimanche* (Louky Bersianik, Nicole

Brossard, Louise Cotnoir, Louise Dupré, Gail Scott, France Théoret. Montréal: Les éditions du remue-ménage, 1988). Also, cf. Hélène Cixous, "Le Rire de la Méduse" (39-54), cited in part in the chapter's text, and elsewhere in this thesis. The mixing of genres in new Quebec writing (Dupré 358), the importance of diary and autobiography (Théoret 363), and as France Théoret suggests, "a writing of memory, indeed of archaeology" (364), are perhaps reminiscent of Ross's mixing of drama and novel, his foregrounding of the diary form, and Madeleine's memory text in *Whir of Gold*.

16. Hopkins hints that the Statue's break-out is a birth: "Significantly, she breaks through the belly of the statue . . ." (70). I, however, can find no reference in the 1989 edition to the statue emerging through the cast's belly.

17. Kali's cauldron was examined above. In Chapter Two I noted Walker's association of the goddess Anna with Alpha and Omega, and with the goddess Carmenta, who "invented all the letters in between" (1983, 39).

18. "Sa langue ne contient pas, elle porte, elle ne retient pas, elle rend possible. Ou ça s'énonce trouble, merveille d'être plusieurs, elle ne se défend pas contre ses inconnues qu'elle se surprend à se percevoir être, jouissant de son don d'altérabilité" (Cixous 50). Again, the multiple identities and voices of the three women receive expression in Cixous.

19. Echoing Cixous, Gauvin states that "[à] la violence des actes et des modèles les *Fées* opposent la machine désirante du *je* se constituant comme sujet" (11).

20. Lejeune continues: "Le miracle qui se produit au terme de ce jeu de massacre, c'est que la distance entre auteur, acteur et spectateur se transmue en commune passion de la vie par laquelle on se laisse soulever et emporter, à moins d'être de ces esprits chagrins allergiques à l'enthousiasme" (30). This seems evocative of Pelletier's collapsing of the distance between audience and players, her scripted acknowledgement of the audience's presence, in *La lumière blanche* (see next chapter). Karen Gould's article, "The Censored Word and the Body Politic: Reconsidering the Fiction of Marie-Claire Blais," links the female body and language in a discussion which is relevant to the works under discussion in this thesis. Another Gould article on the works of Louky Bersianik, Madeleine Gagnon and Nicole Brossard is also instructive, and, in its discussion of Bersianik's emphasis on the importance of memory in women's writing, evocative of Madeleine in Ross's *Whir of Gold* (cf. Gould 1983, 80-82).

Chapter Four

All of the works studied thus far have concerned themselves in some way with texts: *As For Me and My House* foregrounded a diary; the outcome of *The Well* hinged on a will; Madeleine's memory text proved salutary in *Whir of Gold*; *Sawbones Memorial* offered a model of joint male/female authorship; *Les fées ont soif* searched for "la langue maternelle" (Boucher 77). Pol Pelletier's play *La lumière blanche* also concerns itself with letters. It connects them with skulls, as did Boucher's play, and with vulvas; it traces "hiéroglyphes anciens," and "signes tronqués" (56). It begins with one, read "*à haute voix*" (11) by a member of its trinity of female protagonists, Torregrossa, whose profession is, appropriately, "[t]raductrice. Et féministe professionelle" (84):

> 'Vous êtes invitée au Désert de la Grande Limite. . . . Venez seule. Vous y rencontrerez des femmes que vous ne connaissez pas, pour des raisons que vous ignorez. Vous avez été choisie pour votre pouvoir absurde et grandiose. Servez-vous-en. On ne sort pas du Désert de la Grande Limite.' (11)

Reading, the first action in the play, is foregrounded. Wolfgang Iser treats reading as a creative process, an "interaction of text and reader" (213) wherein the reader establishes connections between his or her own experience

and the text's "raw material" (215), and fills in the text's "inevitable omissions," its "gaps" (216). For his part, as I noted in my discussion of *As For Me and My House*, Roland Barthes kills off the author altogether:

> Donner un Auteur à un texte, c'est imposer à ce texte un cran d'arrêt, c'est le pourvoir d'un signifié dernier, c'est fermer l'écriture. . . . [L]a littérature . . . , en refusant d'assigner au texte (et au monde comme texte) un 'secret', c'est-à-dire un sens ultime, libère une activité que l'on pourrait appeler contre-théologique, proprement révolutionnaire, car refuser d'arrêter le sens, c'est finalement refuser Dieu et ses hypostases, la raison, la science, la loi. (65-6)

Indeed, continues Barthes,

> un texte est fait d'écritures multiples, issues de plusieurs cultures et qui entrent les unes avec les autres en dialogue, en parodie, en contestation; mais il y a un lieu où cette multiplicité se rassemble, et ce lieu, ce n'est pas l'auteur, comme on l'a dit jusqu'à présent, c'est le lecteur: le lecteur est l'espace même où s'inscrivent, sans qu'aucune ne se perde, toutes les citations dont est faite une écriture. . . . (66)

"[L]a naissance du lecteur," he adds, "doit se payer de la

mort de l'Auteur" (67). On a similarly ominous note, a postscript to the letter Torregrossa reads declares its author missing:

> 'P.-S.: Il est inutile de chercher la personne qui a écrit cette lettre. Elle ne sera pas au rendez-vous. Vous remarquerez par ailleurs qu'il y aura dans ce lieu un certain nombre de personnes, assises, qui vous observeront en silence. Ne vous en occupez pas. Ces personnes feront comme si elles n'étaient pas vraiment là et ne devraient donc aucunement nuire au déroulement des événements.' (11)

Voicing the letter aloud includes the play's spectators in its reading. And though audience members are not supposed to interfere with the unfolding of events onstage, they occupy its margin, they sit in the very gaps and spaces Iser and Barthes signal as a text's creative sites: "[O]ne text is potentially capable of several different realizations, and no reading can ever exhaust the full potential, for each individual reader will fill in the gaps in his own way . . ." (Iser 216). Interaction between text and reader produces what Iser calls "the virtual dimension of the text. . . . This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination" (215). As I noted in the concluding section of Chapter Three, *Les fées ont soif* ended

with a call to imagination; *La lumière blanche* begins with one, inviting participation in the reading, in the creation of its text.

Les fées ont soif opened in the desert of monotheism; *La lumière blanche* trains the same light on its trio of characters, Torregrossa, Leude and B.C. Magruge. It is set, as the letter indicated, in

> [u]n désert, à interpréter plastiquement comme on veut. Sauf qu'en même temps, il faut sentir qu'on est dans un théâtre. Pas de mystification. Mais en même temps, de nombreux niveaux métaphoriques. Cette pièce se veut un agrégat de jeux dans des jeux dans des jeux. (7)

The games have already begun. Where Ross's works and Boucher's play (mostly) did away with linear plot lines in favour of stories of cyclic regeneration, time is also curved here: one can be, in Pelletier's play, in two places, theatre and desert, "en même temps." Moreover, this particular locale also exists as two deserts at the same time: in contrast to the desert's expansive associations with transcendence and "everlasting spirit" (Cirlot 79), this is the "Désert de la Grande Limite." Monotheism, as represented by the desert, might seek to be a closed text with uncontrovertible meaning, but such finality is, according to the play, a great limitation. Torregrossa and B.C. Magruge illustrate the idea while riding

> Griselle la chamelle, notre mère à toutes, . . . la mère du désert. En six jours et six nuits, elle créa ce lieu, . . . ce néant blanc où ses filles pourraient enfin s'insérer, retrouvant le sens de la présence et de l'épaisseur, de la forme. (55-6)

The two women ride for six days and nights, "refaisant le trajet de leur mère, retrouvant chaque creux, chaque vide, chaque absence . . ." (56) until they run into "[l]e mur des Lamentations" (56). The Wailing Wall, a fragment of the temple destroyed by the Romans (*New American Desk Encyclopedia* 1309), evokes Jerusalem, a key site for the three major monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. "Elles se heurtèrent, se frottèrent à ce mur qui était rempli de hiéroglyphes anciens, de signes tronqués, de phrases illisibles, tout ça effacé, balayé, concassé" (56). On the seventh day of their parodic creation story, the women do not rest: "elles s'écroulèrent" (56). They look at the wall: "Je comprends rien," says B.C. Magruge. "Moi non plus," says Torregrossa (56).

The writing on the wall is incomprehensible: are the signs and sentences monotheistic texts or prisoners' graffiti? Are they religious tracts dictated by a patriarchal church, against which the women fling themselves, attempting to understand? Or, as the pun implies, are the signs a warning of an impending fate,

written by those who have come up against the wall before? Perhaps what the women do not comprehend is Griselle's collaboration with patriarchy, her role in creating the monotheistic desert. Griselda is the "[l]egendary model for proper wifely behavior in the Christian era" (Walker 1983, 355). She put up with her husband's abuse "humbly," until he relented and "rewarded her with his true love, saying she had passed all his 'tests'" (Walker 1983, 355). The camel Griselda's six day journey is an anti-creation myth; where Genesis filled voids with light and earth and water, Griselda creates a "néant blanc" (55). B.C. Magruge has after all understood the nature of Griselda's project: "Je comprends rien."

Nonetheless, as noted above, gaps and blanks are also creative opportunities: in retracing "chaque creux, chaque vide, chaque absence" in their mother's trajectory, the women are able to read its emptiness and find new meaning. Indeed, creation soon takes place: Torregrossa begins to make "*des sons-chants-cris du genre flamenco*" (56).[2] She returns to sound, to voice. In Chapter Three I noted Cixous's connection of voice, creativity and desire, her affirmation of the presence in "la parole féminine" of "le *chant*, la première musique, celle de la première voix d'amour . . ." (Cixous 44). *La lumière blanche* confirms this linkage. After Torregrossa finishes her own song, B.C. begins to recite

> *une espèce de chanson-litanie bizarre. Au début, elle chantonne un peu, distraitement, sans regarder Torregrossa, puis peu à peu elle se met à la toucher, discrètement, doucement, à l'épaule, aux bras, et la chanson devient une chanson d'amour.* (56-7)

The caress between B.C. and Torregrossa is a communication between women which subverts patriarchal strictures.[3] Even Griselda is obliquely included in this rebellion: the camel, says Cirlot, is "[t]raditionally considered in curious relation with the dragon and with winged serpents, for, according to Zohar, the serpent in the Garden of Eden was a kind of 'flying camel'" (Cirlot 37). Pelletier sexes the serpent;[4] Cixous provides, again, an apt summary:

> *Femme pour femmes*: en la femme toujours se maintient la force productive de l'autre, en particulier de l'autre femme. *En* elle, matricielle, berceuse-donneuse, elle-même sa mère et son enfant, elle-même sa fille soeur. . . . Texte, mon corps: traversée de coulées chantantes; entends-moi, ce n'est pas une 'mère' collante, attachante; c'est, te touchant, l'équivoix qui t'affecte, te pousse depuis ton sein à venir au langage, qui lance *ta* force; . . . la partie de toi qui entre en toi t'espace et te pousse à inscrire dans la langue ton style de femme. (44)

As Cixous would predict, B.C.'s love song is also, berceuse-donneuse, a lullaby: "Deux p'tits pois, un nid . . . dodu, des grandes raquettes, des . . . bras . . . de blé d'Inde, des ailes . . . d'oiseau . . ." (57; ellipsis in original). And the lullaby, appropriately, leads into a creation myth. Breaking into English, Torregrossa asks: "Perhaps we shall die in the tree?" (57). "Come along, Lady T," replies B.C. "We shall not die in the tree. We shall stroll by the sea" (57). Mother Sea's cauldron of regeneration replaces the cross of redemption.

Like the works previously studied, *La lumière blanche* alludes to a pre-Edenic, goddess-centered mythology, complete with trinity. As the back cover of Les Herbes Rouges edition of the play indicates, there is "Torregrossa, femme de tête et de changement," "B.C. Magruge, la femme-objet" and "Leude, la femme-faite-mère." Such a description encourages a view of the characters as three manifestations of a single being: "la femme." Walker, as cited earlier, suggests that the female deity was perceived as a triad of "Virgin-Mother-Crone" (1983, 1018), or "Creator, Preserver, and Destroyer" (1983, 1018). Torregrossa immediately nominates herself for the Crone position of the trio: she introduces herself as "laide comme un péché mortel, mais . . . très intelligente" (12). Torregrossa has had an "éducation de gars, les neurones de gars qu'on a plantés dans mon cerveau qui a compris si jeune le pouvoir du monde

des mâles et qui veut y accéder, être comme eux, triomphante et innocente" (93). She links femininity with stupidity, describing B.C. Magruge as "très féminine," and at the same time "[p]lutôt idiote" (15). She is capable of quoting theorists Evelyn Reed, Elaine Morgan and Shulamith Firestone on the oppression of women (90-1), and offers a brief "cours d'histoire" (33) to Leude and B.C. Magruge, juxtaposing the role of pregnant women in tribal society with the freedom of warrior Amazons (32-33): "Les femmes enceintes ne portent pas de hache à double tranchant à la ceinture. . . . La femme enceinte ne fait pas la guerre!. . . . La femme enceinte est un fardeau . . ." (32-3).[5] According to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, the Amazon symbolizes "la situation de la femme qui, se conduisant en homme, ne réussit à vivre elle-même ni en femme, ni en homme" (28). Torregrossa, appropriately, proposes wrestling as a means of "réchauffement" (25):

> Étant personnellement et totalement frustrée d'avoir été privée, en raison de ma condition de femelle, de cette rencontre absolue et charnelle entre deux corps qui s'opposent et se composent et trouvent forme précisément dans leur opposition, . . . je propose qu'une à une, une face à l'autre, on s'avance sur la toundra moelleuse . . . pour voir qui fera tomber qui, . . . au sol. (25)

Torregrossa elaborates:

> Mais . . . gagner ou perdre, là n'est pas la question. La question est. . . . L'a-gres-si-vi-té' La pulsion et le déploiement agressif si tenacement enfoui au coeur de la moitié de l'humanité! Ça, c'est nous autres, ça. Saviez-vous que 'agresser' signifie étymologiquement 'tendre vers'? Tendre vers! La définition même de la vie. De la SURvie. (26)[5]

When the wrestling matches are over, Torregrossa advocates "[l]es aveux. Se libérer de son passé' (42). The stakes are high: "Je suggère d'emprunter la formule du procès. Chacune mettra sa vie et son être en accusation devant les deux autres" (42-3).

Wisdom and aggression combine to make Torregrossa a likely candidate for the Crone/Destroyer position in the trinity. Leude's pregnancy would seem to equate her with its Mother aspect. Moreover, Leude is associated with Demeter, "la déesse grecque de la fertilité, de la terre nourricière" (Pelletier 51). When Leude wins her wrestling match with B.C. Magruge, Torregrossa comments: "Déméter a gagné. Artémis a perdu. Comme d'habitude" (41). B.C., as Artemis, is "la déesse de la chasse, l'éternelle adolescente, la vierge sauvage" (52). At several reprises, she shows herself to be not simply virginal, but infantile, "prenant une voix de petite fille" (67), for example, in scenes 12 and 13: "Je suis capable, tu sais, maman" (63);

"C'est quoi ça, maman, coupable?" (67).

But "les femmes sont parfois deux dans leur peau . . ." (19), or even three, as Marie, Madeleine and the Statue proved in *Les fées ont soif*. Here, Demeter, "la grande Déesse-Mère de tout ce qui existe" (51), divides into "*meter*," "'mother'" and "*[d]e*," which signifies

> the delta, or triangle, a female-genital sign known as the 'letter of the vulva' in the Greek sacred alphabet, as in India it was the Yoni Yantra, or yantra of the vulva. Corresponding letters--Sanskrit *dwr*, Celtic *duir*, Hebrew *daleth*--meant the Door of birth, death, or the sexual paradise. Thus, Demeter was what Asia called 'the Doorway of the Mysterious Feminine . . . the root from which Heaven and Earth sprang.' (Walker 1983, 218)

The "triangle-door-yoni" indicates Demeter's trinitarian form, notes Walker (1983, 218). "Like all the oldest forms of the basic Asiatic Goddess she appeared as Virgin, Mother, and Crone, or Creator, Preserver, Destroyer, like Kali-Cunti who was the same yoni-mother" (1983, 218). Demeter is thus a goddess of death, as well as of birth: ". . . Déméter se révèle la déesse des **alternances de vie et de mort**, qui rythment le cycle de la végétation et de toute existence" (Chevalier 347; emphasis in original). Indeed, "[l]ike the devouring death-goddess everywhere, she was once a cannibal"

(1983, 219), and was known by such names as "the Black One," "the Subterranean One" and "The Avenger" (1983, 219). In a connection with the horse-goddesses of Ross's works, Demeter was associated with a "mare-headed idol" (Walker 1983, 219);[7] she was also, like the Freya of *Sawbones Memorial*, a "Sow-goddess" (Walker 1983, 956). Demeter was known as "Persephone-the-Destroyer" in her "Crone phase" (Walker 1983, 218); as destroyer, she "ate the flesh of Pelops, then restored him to life in her cauldron" (Walker 1983, 219). B.C. Magruge notes that Leude's pregnant belly is "dur comme une grosse casserole" (38).[8] Moreover, in one of the three versions of the play's final scene, after "la formule de procès" (43) has culminated in Torregrossa's death, the death goddess Leude orders the corpse's dismemberment: "Qu'on lui coupe les seins et les mains et les cheveux et les chevilles" (102).

Leude declares that she likes "les défis" (22); she also proves to be an effective wrestler. Despite her pregnancy--and over Torregrossa's objections (31-34)--she enters and wins her match with B.C. Magruge (41), hurting B.C. in the process: "Arrête, c'est trop dur, tu me fais mal" (39). With a French pronunciation, "Leude" approximates "laide," the trait of Torregrossa, deemed till now the play's personification of the Crone. Moreover, among Demeter's symbolic associations is "une phase capitale dans l'organisation de la terre: le passage de la nature à

la culture, du sauvage au civilisé" (Chevalier 347). Culture might be said to be Torregrossa's province: the latter is a translator and etymologist (note her explication of "aggresser," above), who speaks three languages "[e]t demie" (52). Besides French, there are traces in the text of English: "Shoot for the moon my son!" (21) (also, see the encounter between Torregrossa and B.C. Magruge, above); Spanish: "Quieres una copita, niña?" (53); and a "demie" of Italian in the bilingual Italian/Spanish sentence: "Corragio Lorrenzaccio y arriba nosotros" (44). The profusion of languages and etymological concern in the play model critical practice for the reader and reward a trans-lingual search for meaning: in Spanish, "leude" means "mercenary." Torregrossa envies the Amazons; Leude, pregnancy and all, incarnates them.

Indeed, in spite of her warrior pretensions and disdain of femininity, Torregrossa displays some of the traits she professes to despise. Peevishly complaining that "[l]es femmes enceintes se ba tent pas" (31), Torregrossa opposes pregnant Leude's entry into combat, and becomes "toute molle" in her own match with the "féminine" B.C. (28): B.C. wins the fight. Torregrossa's name betrays her too. "Torre" means tower in both Italian and Spanish; Italian yields "grossa" or "big." Together they become "Grosse Tour," as Torregrossa herself indicates (15). According to Cirlot, the tower has numerous symbolic applications,

including "height or the act of rising above the common level in life or society," and "ascent" (344). The tower's "verticality," as opposed to "the horizontal forms of animals," makes it analogous to the human being: tower windows are "the eyes and the mind of man" (345). Torregrossa's intellectual achievements perhaps find a rough match among these attributes, but the symbol has motherly and virginal connotations too. Just as "material height implies spiritual elevation . . . ," the tower "link[s] earth and heaven" (345). Demeter, "la grande Déesse-Mère," provided her own link between these two spheres: as the Doorway to the Mysterious Feminine, she was the root of earth and heaven. Moreover, "[t]he tower-symbol, given that it is enclosed and walled-in, is emblematic of the Virgin Mary . . ." (345).

The Virgin Mary, as discussed in previous chapters, is but another incarnation of the goddess, "the mother-bride of the dead and resurrected god . . ." (Campbell 43). Campbell offers a comparison with Persephone:[9]

> [W]hile the maiden goddess sat there, peacefully weaving a mantle of wool . . . , her mother contrived that Zeus should learn of her presence; he approached in the form of an immense snake. And the virgin conceived the ever-dying, ever-living god of bread and wine, Dionysus, who was born and nurtured in that cave, torn to death as a

babe, and resurrected.

> Comparably, in the Christian legend, derived from the same archaic background, God the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove approached the Virgin Mary and she--through the ear--conceived God the Son, who was born in a cave, died and was resurrected, and is present hypostatically in the bread and wine of the Mass. For the dove, no less than the serpent, was an attribute and companion of the Great Goddess of the pre-Homeric, pre-Mosaic East. . . . (Campbell 27-8)

Dove and serpent companion the Great Goddess in *La lumière blanche* too. Torregrossa declares her love for

> l'espace et la lumière blanche qui enfonce le regard dans le fond du crâne, et la barre de métal qui vibre à l'horizon, et les serpentes à plumes, les serpentes à plumes à l'horizon, métal, metzcal, quetzal, Quetzalcoatl!, tss, tss. . . . (21)

According to Walker, Quetzalcoatl was a Christ-like "Aztec savior-god" (1983, 836) whose virgin mother "was a trinity, one of 'three divine sisters.' Like the Semitic Mary, she was a birth-giver, mother, and death-bringer all at once . . ." (1983, 1018). Her son

> represented the corn. His death and resurrection were linked with planting, growth, harvest. Like

> the serpent-and-dove deities of Mesopotamia, he combined avian and reptilian attributes; he was called the Feathered Serpent.
>
> . . . . He was sacrificed; he descended into hell; he rose again from the dead. His Second Coming was expected. (Walker 1983, 836)

Cirlot comments further:

> Since all struggle is a form of 'conjunction' and therefore of love, it is hardly surprising that man should have created a synthesis of opposing powers--heaven and earth--in the image of the 'plumed serpent', the most notable symbol of pre-Columbian America. This serpent has feathers on its head, in its tail and sometimes on its body. Quetzalcoatl is another androgynous symbol of this kind (Oritz cited in Cirlot). (289)

Demeter was the root of heaven and earth; the tower and the feathered serpent similarly conjoin these two 'opposing powers.' Struggle, according to Cirlot, is also a means of conjunction ("aggresser," according to Torregrossa, means "tendre vers" [26]): "luttes" are proposed in the play as a means of "réchauffement" (25) and also of finding form--synthesis--through opposition (cf. 25, and above). Quetzalcoatl and the tower, symbols associated with Torregrossa, become emblems of struggle--Torregrossa's chosen activity--and, following Cirlot, of love. Enter B.C.

Magruge:

> Je sais très bien pourquoi je suis ici. Et c'est pas pour donner la réplique. À vous deux. C'est pour découvrir ma dignité à moi. Et aussi parce que je peux pas m'en aller, parce que je t'aime, toi, toi la noire, toi la grosse, je t'aime, toi ma montagne qui comble mon trou infini, j'ai plus de trou depuis que tu es là, je te regarde et j'ai plus de trou, mais ne me méprise pas, parce que je t'ai déjà tout donné et, si tu me tues, you are dead, Lady T. (89)

In B.C.'s "réplique," excerpted from Torregrossa's "procès," there is struggle ("ne me méprise pas"), conjunction ("toi ma montagne qui comble mon trou infini"), and love ("je t'aime, toi, toi la noire, toi la grosse, je t'aime"). Struggle and an appeal for love contend in her name too: "B.C." yields "baisser"; "gruger" means both "[r]éduire en grains; [b]riser avec les dents" and "[d]uper qqn en affaires; le dépouiller [the serpent's action] de son bien." Betrayal and loss--crushing loss--are connoted here, as well as a call to diminish that pain. In Québécois slang, "se gruger le shaft" also means to masturbate (*Dictionnaire de la langue québécoise* 262)--shades of Madeleine's mud--which evokes solitary satisfaction of desire, an appeal for intimacy. As B.C. herself admits, "je sais pas vivre. Ça fait sept ans que je suis en thérapie

pis j'ai toujours mal dans mon creux. J'ai le goût de rencontrer du monde. J'ai vraiment le goût" (14). B.C. associates herself with holes and hollows--"mon trou infini"; "mon creux"--and her taste for relationships translates into physical hunger, internal emptiness.[10] B.C. continues:

> Quand je suis toute seule--je suis toujours toute seule--et que c'est la nuit, je me mets à la fenêtre de ma chambre et je pique des lunes. Je pique des lunes et je me mange la peau des pieds, et tout mon vide interieur devient comme un édredon plein qui recouvre la terre. (21)

B.C.'s association with holes links her with Leude/Demeter, the Doorway to the Mysterious Feminine. Cirlot suggests that hole symbolism has "two main aspects: on the biological level, it has fertilizing power and is related to fertility rites; on the spiritual plane, it stands for the 'opening' of this world on to the other world" (149). Demeter, similarly, is both the Doorway to the Mysterious Feminine, and the root of heaven and earth. Certainly the fertilizing power of holes is evident in B.C.'s description of a particular pink window with vaginal connotations: "Mais moi, évidemment, j'ai peur de tout. . . . J'ai peur des fenêtres et des portes aussi. Chez nous, c'est un trou rose dans un mur rose, entouré de rideaux de dentelle" (14). The source of B.C.'s fear can be found in the holes in the

word "coupable": "C'est quoi maman, coupable?" asks B.C. in a little girl's voice (67). "Cou . . . pa, cou . . . pa . . . pa . . . pa, pa, cou . . . coucou! Pa, pa, pa, pa, pa, papa, papa! Cououou . . . Ton cou est papa, ton cou est papable, ton cou est. . . . 'palpable, malléable, déchirable'. . . . Ton cou est en pablum!" (67).[11] Holes also link B.C. to texts; the gaps and fragments here produce a story of child abuse. In the father's hands, the child is dismembered, grugée: she is "'palpable, malléable, déchirable.'" As B.C. later confirms, "[m]a mère me touchait jamais. Mon père pis mon mononcle i me touchaient beaucoup, par exemple" (98). The syllables "cou" and "pa" in B.C.'s text of abuse also suggest the word "couper": B.C.'s fragmentation is connected, therefore, to Torregrossa's mutilation.

Torregrossa, moreover, has also been raped: "Raconte-nous ton viol" (87), demands B.C. during the translator's trial (87). This trial-inspired aggression on the lonely B.C.'s part is in fact in character. B.C. was dubbed "Artémis," "la déesse de la chasse" (52), and despite past trauma and present fear she is "forte" (28): as noted above, she wins the wrestling match with Torregrossa. Indeed, Artemis is Aphrodite's mythic opposite (Chevalier 77): "Elle se montre surtout impitoyable aux femmes qui cèdent à l'attrait de l'amour" (Chevalier 77). In spite of Torregrossa's characterization of her as "[p]lutôt idiote,"

B.C. is intelligent and incisive, hunting ruthlessly for the truth during Torregrossa's trial: "Pourquoi t'as écrit la lettre?" (85). "Comment tu sais?" asks Torregrossa, "*interloquée*" (85). "C'est évident," responds B.C. (85). Moreover, at Sparta Artemis was called the "'Butcher'" (Walker 1983, 58) and B.C., along with Leude, participates in the figurative dismemberment of Torregrossa at the end of the play. Leude calls for the cutting of breasts and hands, hair and ankles: "Et la fesse. Et la hanche," returns B.C. (102). However, like Leude, who is both mother and mercenary, B.C. has a maternal side: "'Many-breasted' Artemis was always a patroness of nurture, fertility, and birth" (Walker 1983, 60). B.C. the nurturer carries "*un gros sac, rempli de fichus, d'objets de toilette, de nourriture . . .*" (13), and offers to share her lunch with Torregrossa: "Veux-tu un peu de fromage cottage? . . . . J'ai du Seven-up Diète aussi, si tu veux. Pis des petits poudings à la vanille. Sans sucre" (15). B.C. also wants a family: "Je veux un bébé" (77), she declares to Torregrossa; Torregrossa herself becomes that child. After the latter's trial, B.C. covers the accused with "*un des grands fichus qui se trouvent dans son sac*" (98), embraces her, sings her a lullaby, and, finally, suckles her (98):

> J'ai pris la demi-lune
> Pour en faire un manteau
> Léger comme la plume

Sur notre dos

Rêvez, bébé lune, rêvez, bébé (98)

Artemis is a moon goddess; Torregrossa, despite her incarnation above as "bébé lune," has heretofore been associated with "la lumière blanche qui enfonce le regard dans le fond du crâne . . ." (21). The struggle, the conjunction, the love between B.C. and Torregrossa are aptly summarized by Cirlot's description of "[t]he *hieros gamos*, generally understood as the marriage of heaven and earth," and which "may also be taken as the union of the sun and the moon" (215). Indeed,

> totality is in fact uniquely symbolized by the 'conjunction' of the Sun and the Moon, as king and queen, brother and sister. In some folklore-traditions, the urge to allude in some way to the supreme good, which, by definition, is incapable of definition, is met by the saying 'to join the Sun and the Moon.' (319-20)

According to Cirlot, the sun, associated with the hero who is "armed with the sword . . ." (317), is

> the cosmic *reductio* of the masculine force, and the Moon of the feminine. This implies that the active faculties (of reflexion, good judgement or will power) are solar, while the passive qualities (imagination, sentiment and perception) are feminine. . . . (319; see Chevalier and

Gheerbrant 892)

Torregrossa, who despises men--"Certainement que j'haïs les hommes!" (80)--but wishes to penetrate the "monde des mâles" (93); Torregrossa, with her "neurones de gars qu'on a plantés dans mon cerveau" (93); Torregrossa, who detests femininity as much as she hates men--"Et comme les femmes sont rien" (21); Torregrossa, indeed, would seem to be the play's reductio of the masculine force, its solar hero. She is even armed--with a knife "*qu'elle porte à la ceinture*" (94). But things are not always as they seem in this play; identities are mutable. The knife in fact represents an

> inversion of sword-symbolism. It is associated with vengeance and death, but also with sacrifice. The short blade of the knife represents, by analogy, the primacy of the instinctive forces in the man wielding it, whereas the long blade of the sword illustrates the spiritual height of the swordsman. (Cirlot 169)

Symbolism veers off the hero's linear path. Indeed Torregrossa, the mountain who filled B.C's "trou infini," would be better served by a double-bladed axe, the weapon which, as she asserted above, pregnant women do not use. Cirlot records that the double-headed axe, when "located over the head of an ox, just between its horns," symbolizes "the function of sacrifice in the relation between the valley-symbol and the mountain-symbol (that is, between

earth and heaven)" (22).[12] Walker notes the double-bladed axe was "wielded as a scepter by the ancient Amazonian Goddess under her various names of Gaea, Rhea, Demeter, or Artemis" (1983, 523). Leude/Demeter, B.C./Artemis, and Torregrossa the Amazon are all implicated here: Walker suggests that the weapon may indeed have been associated with hieros gamos (1983, 523), and "[i]n modern times the *labrys* has been adopted by lesbians as a symbol of reminiscence . . . of the all-female community of Lesbos and its founding mothers . . ." (1983, 523).

Torregrossa also has a bottle and a skull tied to her belt (12). The bottle "is one of the symbols of salvation, probably because of the analogy (of function rather than of shape) with the ark and the boat" (Cirlot 31). The ark, in turn, "symbolizes the power to preserve all things and to ensure their rebirth . . ." (Cirlot 19). The skull "is an emblem of the mortality of man . . ." (Cirlot 299), but because "it is in truth 'what survives' of the living being once its body has been destroyed" (Cirlot 299), the skull

> therefore comes to acquire significance as a receptacle for life and for thought, [and] it is with this symbolic meaning that it figures in books on alchemy, where it is represented as the receptacle used in the processes of transmutation. A great many forms of superstition, ritual and--indeed--of cannibalism, are derived from this

idea. (Cirlot 299)

Symbols in this play certainly have life beyond their ossified forms; meanings transmute. As Pelletier declares in a "Note de l'auteure" that follows the work: "J'aime le multiforme et les contradictions" (117). The skull as a receptacle for thought is perhaps a solar emblem (Torregrossa associates "la lumière blanche" with the "crâne") and also a goddess symbol, a reminder of Kali and her necklace of skulls inscribed with the creative letters of Sanskrit. Such a necklace is an appropriate accessory for the woman who finally admits to writing the letter which, its disclaimer notwithstanding, convoked the group (95). The ark-like bottle Torregrossa carries at her waist is, moreover, related to Artemis's symbol:

> 'The crescent moon worn by Diana and used in the worship of other Goddesses is said to be the Ark or vessel of boat-like shape, symbol of fertility or the Container of the Germ of all life.' The same Ark carried gods, like Osiris, into death. . . . (Avalon cited in Walker 1983, 671)

B.C./Artemis certainly associates herself with bottles: "Je fais des commerciaux de savon, je te l'ai jamais dit, je vends ma face, je suis une belle bouteille de shampooing ou de crème à main" (98). But B.C., like Torregrossa, also displays solar attributes. The action of covering Torregrossa with a scarf recalls the eiderdown B.C.

confessed to producing when she ate the skin of her feet "et tout mon vide intérieur devient comme un édredron plein qui recouvre la terre" (21). The eiderdown itself, stuffed with feathers, covering the earth, evokes the junction of the aerial and the earthly found in the figure of Quetzalcoatl; indeed the coat B.C. sings of in her lullaby is "[l]éger comme la plume / Sur notre dos . . ." (98). B.C. and Torregrossa are transformed into feather-backed figures, Quetzalcoatls: i.e. sacrificed saviors. As Cirlot explains,

> [t]he idea of the invincible character of the sun is reinforced by the belief that whereas the Moon must suffer fragmentation (since it wanes) before it can reach its monthly stage of three-day disappearance, the Sun does not need to die in order to descend into hell; it can reach the ocean or the lake of the Lower Waters and cross it without being dissolved. Hence, the death of the Sun necessarily implies the idea of resurrection and actually comes to be regarded as a death which is not a true death. (219; see Chevalier and Gheerbrant 893)[17]

Appropriately, in each of the three versions of the final scene, following Torregrossa's death, "[t]ss, tss, tss. . . . La serpente à plumes est arrivée" (106; see also 109, 112)--Quetzalcoatl, the resurrected savior, returns.

Chevalier and Gheerbrant record Quetzalcoatl's association in ancient Mexico with the sun (893); they note separately that many peoples see the sun as God, a manifestation of divinity, or, indeed, as the son of God (891). Indeed, all of the women in the play, like the Young Fellow Nick in *Sawbones Memorial*, are 33 years old (7), the age of Christ--Quetzalcoatl's counterpart--at the time of his crucifixion: all share in Torregrossa's fate, in the death of the savior which is not a true death.

Yet it *is* a true death, for Torregrossa's is also a lunar fate. "Qu'on lui tranche la tête"; "Et les pieds"; "Et les jambes" (102): her body is dismembered much as the moon fragments into phases. Leude, whose Amazon connections associate her with severed breasts, is mutilated in the play too. She leaves the stage to give birth, and returns "échevelée, maganée, traquée" (59): "C'est une fille. On me l'a arrachée du ventre avec un grand couteau" (60). B.C., the lunar goddess, was broken open, molested, as a child; she also dismembers herself, picking at the moons on her hands and feet, tearing and eating the skin of her feet. Moon transmutes into sun; sun becomes moon.

Moon becomes sun. The feathered serpent is also made up of fragments: "[M]étal, metzcal, quetzal, Quetzalcoatl!" (21). Words become his flesh. Cixous and Boucher note the connection between body and language; both are also closely linked in *La lumière blanche*. B.C.'s association with holes

connects her with the gaps Iser and Barthes identify in texts. Moreover, just as Torregrossa speaks three and a half languages (52), there are "trois personnes . . . et demie" present onstage. (Stage directions indicate Torregrossa's "*[r]egard vers Leude*" at this juncture [24].) Words make flesh in the Catholic rite of communion: B.C., who picks at the moons of her hands and feet and eats her own flesh, cannibalizes (Demeter's province thus far) the lunar goddess, communes with the deity. The union and communion which go on among the characters extend to their words too. At the beginning of the play, Torregrossa asserts: "Personne ne meurt ici. C'est trop facile" (24); at Torregrossa's trial, Leude reiterates: "Personne ne meurt ici. C'est trop facile" (93). "Mais . . . gagner ou perdre, là n'est pas la question. La question est . . . L'a-gres-si-vi-té!" says Torregrossa, explaining the wrestling matches (26); "Gagner ou perdre, là n'est pas la question," echoes Leude (41). Asked by Torregrossa for the question, Leude confirms that it is "[l]'aggressivité" (42). Torregrossa greets B.C.: "Mon nom est Torregrossa. Ou Grosse Tour, si vous préférez" (15). Upon Leude's entrance, Torregrossa gives her own name, and B.C. translates: "Ou Grosse Tour, si vous préférez" (17). In one of the versions of the final scene, Leude notes that a "charrette à boeufs" will carry Torregrossa "partout sur la terre pour que tout le monde puisse voir son immense obscénité" (103). B.C.

takes the obscenity on herself: "Je suis obscène. Je suis obscène sur la glace" (104).

Writing is included in this communion. "C'est quoi une mère?" asks B.C. (63). Leude replies: "De longs bras tendres et chauds reliés à une inépuisable poitrine sans voix, sans parole, sans cordes vocales?. . . . Une ombre?" (63). "Bullshit!" responds Torregrossa: "Une goinfre de chair femelle, une grande mangeuse de petites filles, une grande dévoreuse de petites filles, celle qui les rend passives et perfides et idiotes. Et sans glotte pour crier. Pour crier" (63). B.C. contradicts Torregrossa's statement with an "*immense hurlement d'enfant rebelle*" (63, stage directions). But Leude--dévoreuse--reprimands her: "Il est interdit d'interrompre la plaidoirie" (63). B.C. replies: "Coupe-moi la vulve. Tranche-la en petits morceaux pour faire plaisir à ton ego" (63). This is exactly what happens to Torregrossa at the end of the play: "On fera de son pubis un triangle blanc et transparent et derrière le triangle apparaîtra un grand oeil brûlant" (103). Body and language connect; vulva, voice, and the letter of the vulva--the delta--unite.[14] Destruction is, ironically, the unifying force; however, death is always followed by rebirth here, and even dismemberment produces results. Indeed, an eye in a triangle is also known as the "Eye of Horus," which

> originally represented the god enclosed, during his 'dead' period, awaiting rebirth. He was

> entombed in the underworld, thus becoming Seker, the Hidden One, Lord of Death: Osiris as the mummy, the Black Sun, the Still-Heart. Nevertheless, his soul remained alive and watchful, as indicated by the open eye. (Walker 1988, 201)

Cirlot notes that the sun has a dark side: "on the one hand it is 'resplendent' and on the other it is 'black' or invisible, in which case it is associated with chthonian and funereal animals such as the horse and the serpent" (320). Torregrossa, "la noire" (89)--her totem is the feathered serpent--is the black sun, awaiting rebirth.[15]

Torregrossa's resuscitation, fittingly, is linked to language. *Les fées ont soif* began in the desert and ended in the imagination. *La lumière blanche* is set in the desert; it has three possible endings, one of which lands its characters in the fertile depths of a manure pile. Pelletier declares her intent to write a feminist tragedy: "Pourquoi une tragédie efficace doit-elle se terminer par la mort du 'héros' suivie de quelques répliques où l'ami du heros le porte en terre?" (117). Earth is certainly--and satirically--involved here: "Je me roule dans le fumier" says B.C., during Torregrossa's mutilation: "Mais ça me dérange pas, parce que dans le fumier, y a des vers. Et dans les vers, y a de la terre et dans la terre, y a . . . Torregrossa!" (104).[16] "Vers," worms, are serpentine

animals which work the earth, replenishing it; earthworms, appropriately, survive mutilation, indeed are able to multiply through it. The word "vers" is also a homonym of "vers"--verses, poetry: language becomes the instrument of rebirth. Nor is Torregrossa alone in this bodily and linguistic compost: B.C., "l'emmerdeuse en chef" (34), avec son "gros ventre . . . qui est plein de merde" (38) is figuratively there, along with Leude, "enterrée vivante sous cinq tonnes de couches Pampers" (68).

The regenerative dunghill appears in only one of the three versions of the play's ending. But in all three, as noted above, Quetzalcoatl, the resurrected savior, returns. And in all three final scenes, B.C. shoulders Torregrossa's body and strikes out, with Leude, for the Wailing Wall (106, 110, 113). The women thus embark on a pilgrimage:

> The concept of man as a pilgrim and of life as a pilgrimage . . . accords with the great myth of the celestial origin of man, of his 'fall' and his hopes of being restored to the celestial realm. . . . The idea is cognate with that of the labyrinth: to go on a pilgrimage is to come to understand the nature of the labyrinth, and to move towards the mastery of it as a means to the 'Centre'. (Cirlot 255)

Indeed, "[t]o trace through the labyrinthic path of a mosaic patterned on the ground was once considered a symbolic

substitute for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land" (Cirlot 174). The labyrinth, moreover, is the "'House of the Double Ax,' from *labrys*, the ceremonial ax used to sacrifice bulls to the Cretan Moon-goddess" (Walker 1983, 523).

> The word was originally applied to the Minoan palace at Knossos, home of the fabled Minotaur ('Moon-bull'), who guarded the central underground chamber as his Asian counterpart, bull-masked Yama, guarded his underworld. The journey into this central chamber seems to have been a death-rebirth ritual, although the classical myth of Theseus makes it a hero's ordeal. (Walker 1988, 96)

Heroes' ordeals are compromised in *La lumière blanche*, transmuted to cyclical endeavours and lunar exploits, as are, perhaps, pilgrimages. Indeed, Barthes called for the death of the author--a murder with deicidal consequences. The play executes Torregrossa, author of the letter which assembles the three women in the "Désert de la Grande Limite." It also notes the passing of a poet: "J'écris plus des poèmes," admits Leude (62).

> Ma vie, en fait, c'est ma vie sentimentale. À partir du moment où je quittai la maison de mes parents à l'âge de vingt ans, donc pendant toute ma vie adulte, j'ai vécu avec des hommes. . . . Y a-t-il autre chose dans la vie que l'exaltation de

> la séduction qui mène à l'exaltation de l'amour? (62)

Mrs. Bentley, Sylvia, and *Whir of Gold*'s Madeleine might answer no. But Leude, at the end of the play, leaves her baby with its father to return to the desert and the enterprise she has undertaken with B.C. and Torregrossa: "Oui, j'y tenais beaucoup" (100). Authors may be dead, the 'Centre' gone, but something remains. Cirlot described the pilgrimage as a search for that "'Centre'" (255); the labyrinth is a "symbolic expression" of the loss and retrieval of "spirit," of the "paradisiac state" (249):

> the terrestrial maze, as a structure or a pattern, is capable of reproducing the celestial, and . . . both allude to the same basic idea--the loss of the spirit in the process of creation--that is, the 'fall' in the neoplatonic sense--and the consequent need to seek out the way through the 'Centre,' back to the spirit. (173; see Chevalier and Gheerbrant 555-6)

Torregrossa, similarly disdaining creation, asserted that pregnant women do not carry the double-bladed axe: Leude proved her wrong. The labrys became a symbol of the love shared by Torregrossa and B.C. (mountain and valley), and indeed of the connection among all three women: the play fills the desert, that "negative landscape" (Cirlot 79), with the waters of birth and desire. The 'something'

remaining is indeed creation. Nor is spirit left out: "Ça coule. Ça coule. Est-ce que c'est ça? Les eaux . . . ?" asks Leude when describing girlhood conversations with her "meilleure amie," conversations "d'une spiritualité et d'un désir tels que je n'ai plus les mots" (49). The waters of desire become the signs of an impending birth: "Je pense que je vais accoucher" signals Leude at the end of this discussion of childhood intimacy (49). Birth, spirit, and desire conjoin; body and language and creation connect. The pilgrimage to the Wailing Wall[17] becomes a quest for spiritual and bodily and linguistic rebirth, for creation unsupervised by "l'Auteur-Dieu" (Barthes 65).

Madeleine Gagnon, in an image which aptly combines both physical and writerly aspects of creativity, evokes the ourobouros, the 'eaux' which surround and, as above, signal creation: "Dedans, ailleurs - ors, avec cela, il faut toujours recommencer: l'infir e lettre ou l'O infini ne se ferment jamais et j'y entre pour en sortir" (Gagnon 9). The half-light, half-dark serpent, "counterbalancing . . . opposing principles" (Cirlot 247), would indeed be an appropriate symbol for a play which takes oppositions and conjoins them in ever-changing ways. This is a lunar operation, finally, as opposed to the workings of 'la lumière blanche' of the monotheistic desert:

> The patriarchal point of view is distinguished from the earlier archaic view by its setting apart

> of all pairs-of-opposites--male and female, life and death, true and false, good and evil--as though they were absolutes in themselves and not merely aspects of the larger entity of life. This we may liken to a solar, as opposed to a lunar, mythic view, since darkness flees from the sun as its opposite, but in the moon dark and light interact in the one sphere. (Campbell 26-7)

In *La lumière blanche* femininity merges with masculinity, murder and mutilation turn out to be the work of mothers as well as Amazons, and the death of an author becomes the life of a text.[18] The work orders words, symbols and verses to be cut apart, torn open, but, as Barthes and Iser would predict, they survive the mutilation, indeed thrive and multiply.[19] Leude, B.C. and Torregrossa may set off at the end of the play on a search for a mislaid mystic Centre, but only, perhaps, "pour en sortir.'

Notes

1. Cf. Annette Kolodny's article, "A Map for Rereading: Or, Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts," and its discussion of gender-encoded strategies of reading, the meaning of texts (459), women as texts (459; cf. 460-4), and, from Iser, readerly participation in texts (460). Karen Gould's discussion of Madeleine Gagnon's *Lueur* is pertinent here: "[T]he author explores the expanding boundaries of the blank page, and the reader's eye is encouraged to linger in the silent spaces between each utterance" (1983, 83). Gould suggests Gagnon's experiment with syntax and punctuation produces "a vision of textual space that is expressly female" (1983, 83). Belleau notes the role of a novel's narrator as regulator of the "langages" of the work (1983-4, 59), a position shaken by the novel's "intense interaction dialogique" (1983-4, 61): surely Torregrossa's position as group leader, writer of the letter which convokes the group, and feminist authority echoes that of the narrative authority of a novel, a position which is certainly toppled in the course of the play? Cf. Belleau (1988, 14) on multiplicity and diversity of discourse in the novel. Belleau summarizes Bakhtin's notion of carnival as "'le peuple riant sur la place publique'" (from Bakhtin, *l'Oeuvre de Fr. Rabelais* 12; Belleau 1983-4, 53). He notes the importance of the presence in medieval culture of "le '*monde-déjà-là*'" (1984, 40) and describes the solitude of post-industrial society "où les individus sont désormais des unités discrètes isolées" (1984, 41; cf. 42 on the writings of the women's movement and the carnivalesque; and on Quebec popular culture). Pelletier establishes "le monde-déjà-là" by explicitly noting the presence of the audience; she also, in playing with the notion of the theatrical space, diminishes the boundaries between spectators and actors, another carnivalesque feature, as Maroussia Hajdukowski-Ahmed points out in her discussion of the carnivalesque in Quebec novels: "During Carnival the people participate in collective celebrations in which they play the roles of author, actor and spectator" (1983, 140; cf. 150). As Bakhtin notes, "carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (Bakhtin 7; cf. Belleau 1983-4, 54). Pelletier acknowledges the presence of footlights, but in so doing, discounts their presence.

2. I am grateful to Claudine Potvin for her comments on the carnivalesque nature of the play, which includes its cries, its songs and its flamenco dancing, and the dismemberment which occurs in one of the final scenes (class discussion, French 599, Winter 1991).

3. Nelly Furman, summarizing Derrida, asserts that "Derrida's dream of a plural sexuality beyond the gender principle would, of course, explode the fabric of our society which we now conceive within the terms of the restricted economy of exchange provided by heterosexual marriage and the family unit" (76).

4. Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel painting "The Fall of Man and the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden," "[f]ollowing a tradition already fairly old . . . ," depicts the serpent with the torso and head of a woman (Sindona 25). As Edmund R. Leach notes, "the Serpent grasps Eve's hand with a gesture which is related to that of God in the Creation of Adam as its converse. Where Adam is separated from God, Eve is merged with the Serpent" (312).

5. See Gould (1983) on Nicole Brossard's "stripping [of] the mother figure of breasts and womb, . . . thereby transforming her into a powerful and effective symbol of resistance to male impregnation . . ." (87). This stripping not only echoes Torregrossa's fascination with Amazons, but has implications for the mutilation which takes place at the end of the play. See Cixous on the "tabou de la femme enceinte . . . ; c'est qu'on soupçonne depuis toujours qu'enceinte, la femme non seulement double sa valeur marchande, mais surtout *se* valorise en tant que *femme* à ses propres yeux, et prend corps et sexe indéniablement" (52).

6. Cixous on aggression: "L'opposition, l'échange hiérarchisant, la lutte pour la maîtrise qui ne se termine que par au moins une mort (un maître - un esclave, ou deux non-maîtres = deux morts) tout ça relève d'un temps gouverné par les valeurs phallocentriques: qu'il ait encore un présent n'empêche pas que la femme commence ailleurs l'histoire de la vie" (54).

7. "The legendary medieval Night-Mare--an equine Fury who tormented sinners in their sleep--was based on ancient images of Mare-headed Demeter" (Walker 1983, 219).

8. I equated the "casserole" and the cauldron in my analysis of *Les fées ont soif*: "I fait noir dans ma casserole," asserts Leude, "i fait chaud, ça bouillonne doucement" (38).

9. Campbell calls the maiden goddess Persephone (28). Walker (1983, 902) and Grant (241) equate her with Semele.

10. Elizabeth Wright summarizes Lacan on the "'Desire of the Mother'" and its tale of want, "lack" and "fantasy of completion" (108). B.C. enacts a child-like desire for completion which is itself, as I (and E.D. Blodgett) point out, fragmentary. As Blodgett suggests, even B.C.'s sense of 'complete' satiety, below, is ironic, broken by her pronunciation into gap-framed syllables: "Je mange, je mange, je mange, pis j'ai même pas mal au ventre; ça rentre tout seul, ça rentre, ça rentre, jusqu'à temps que mon grand trou se remplisse com-plè-te-ment" (19; Blodgett, personal communication).

11. Louky Bersianik, in "Le portique des noms propres," demonstrates the flexibility of words and their constituent parts (107-115). Thanks again to Claudine Potvin and my classmates in French 599 for introducing me to, and explicating, Bersianik's work.

12. Cirlot records that the double-bladed axe, in this position, also symbolizes the mandorla (22). The "union" of heaven and earth, "or the zone of intersection and interpenetration (the world of appearances), is represented by the mandorla, an almond-shaped figure formed by two intersecting circles" (203). "The zone of existence symbolized by the mandorla . . . embraces the opposing poles of all dualism. Hence it is a symbol also of the perpetual sacrifice that regenerates creative force through the dual streams of ascent and descent (appearance and disappearance, life and death, evolution and involution). Morphologically, it is cognate with the spindle of the *Magna Mater* and with the magical spinners of thread" (204-5). There are connections here to the fate-spinners of *Les fées ont soif*, as well as to all the goddess figures discussed in this thesis, and their dramas of regeneration.

13. Perhaps taken together knife and bottle--sacrifice and salvation--also produce the resurrected savior-god, Quetzalcoatl.

14. See Cixous on bisexuality and writing (46). She asserts: "Admettre qu'écrire c'est justement travailler (dans) l'entre, interroger le procès du même *et* de l'autre sans lequel rien ne vit, défaire le travail de la mort, c'est d'abord vouloir le deux, et les deux, l'ensemble de l'un et l'autre non pas figés dans des séquences de lutte et d'expulsion ou autre mise à mort, mais dynamisés à l'infini par un incessant échangement de l'un entre l'autre sujet différent, ne se connaissant et se recommençant qu'à partir du bord vivant de l'autre: parcours multiple et inépuisable

à milliers de rencontres et transformations du même dans l'autre et dans l'entre, d'où la femme prend ses formes (et l'homme, de son côté; mais c'est son autre histoire)" (46). Furthermore, "[b]isexualité, c'est-à-dire repérage en soi, individuellement, de la présence, diversement manifeste et insistante selon chaque un ou une, des deux sexes, non-exclusion de la différence ni d'un sexe, et à partir de cette 'permission' que l'on se donne, multiplication des effets d'inscription du désir, sur toutes les parties de mon corps et de l'autre corps" (46). This traversing of sexual boundaries is reminiscent of Pelletier's breaking down of binaries, and her inclusion of body and desire in writing.

15. Cirlot notes that Saturn is associated with "ambiguity of gender and sex, and is related to the earth, the sarcophagus and putrefaction, as well as to the colour black" (279). Saturn is also connected with the ouroboros (278). "Other attributes of his are the oar (standing for navigation and progress in things temporal), the hour-glass and the scythe" (278). I noted the image of the ark (oars) in the text, and the fact that Torregrossa carries a knife (related, perhaps, to the scythe). Cirlot sees "a double meaning" in the scythe: cutting, hence "devouring," plus "the feminine principle" inherent in "its curved shape" (278-9).

16. Blodgett notes a pun on "terre" and the "torre" of "Torregrossa" (personal communication).

17. Blodgett notes the connection here of wailing, tears and, hence, water (personal communication).

18. Belleau discusses binary oppositions in carnival and the dialogic interaction between them (1983-4, 54, 58). Cf. Woodcock on the absence of absolutes in *As For Me and My House* (1990, 20; cf. New 27, 30). France Nazair Garant's examination of the image of the horse in the works of Anne Hébert is perhaps pertinent here: Nazair Garant's emphasis on androgyny, on the creation of a new, united world, on the breaking of old myths and the recuperation of Eve, is reminiscent of themes found in Pelletier (cf. 158, 162). [The critic also notes the words of the Mass, their evocation of body and blood, in this discussion of symbol and myth in Hébert (162).]

19. Barthes on authorial deaths: "[D]ès qu'un fait est *raconté*, à des fins intransitives, et non plus pour agir directement sur le réel, c'est-à-dire finalement hors de toute fonction autre que l'exercice même du symbole, ce décrochage se produit, la voix perd son origine, l'auteur entre dans sa propre mort, l'écriture commence" (61). Barthes speaks of the burial of the Author by the modern

"scripteur" (64): "pour lui, . . . sa main, détachée de toute voix, portée par un pur geste d'inscription (et non d'expression), trace un champ sans origine--ou qui, du moins, n'a d'autre origine que le langage lui-même, c'est-à-dire cela même qui sans cesse remet en cause toute origine (64-5). This is reminiscent of Gagnon's ouroboros "O."

Conclusion

My intent in this thesis has been to examine sacrifice in works by Sinclair Ross, Denise Boucher and Pol Pelletier. My interest was specifically in sacrifice as it is mythically encoded in cyclic tales of gods and goddesses, in the ancient lore of renewal. I estimated that a comparison of novels and plays would be apt, considering the abundance of dramatic references in all of the Ross novels, and the inherently dramatic structure of the myths enclosed in them. Following Cirlot, I posed creation--sacrifice's mythic aim - as an appropriate measure of the success of these cyclic projects of rejuvenation; I chose the creation of female texts within the texts studied as a calibrator of that renewal.

The myths, as predicted, exist in all of the novels and in both plays. In *As For Me and My House*, Mrs. Bentley directs a drama of sacrifice in which her husband is plotted as scapegoat; *The Well*'s Sylvia Larson also disposes, rather more literally than Mrs. Bentley, of a spouse. In *Whir of Gold*, Madeleine takes up Mary Magdalene's mantle, with its Christian and pagan associations; her consort Sonny plays Christ's role. The last of Ross's novels, *Sawbones Memorial*, sees Anna, mother of the Aeons, hovering in memory over a celebration of beginnings and endings--over, significantly, the replacement of a father by a son.

An absence of men in the plays shifts attention away

from sons and consorts, the traditional male victims of the cyclic myths of renewal. Sacrifice, nonetheless, still takes place. *Les fées ont soif* replays Mary Magdalene's role but includes an assault in the script; *La lumière blanche* dispatches one of its trio of goddesses. This shift, however, is not unanticipated by Ross: paralleling the tales of fathers and sons in his novels are stories of the suffocation of women in patriarchally inscribed roles, and accounts of the abandonment of female creativity in the service of sons and husbands. Texts within the novels detail these stories: Mrs. Bentley's diary ends with the arrival of a son; Sylvia is fettered by a marriage contract, and banished, ultimately, by her husband's last will and testament. On a more hopeful note, Ross's Madeleine begins a rejuvenating autobiography at the moment of her sacrifice. Finally, and most positively, a male/female writing team proposes the biography of *Sawbones Memorial*'s outcast Maisie Bell.

The plays also emphasize the production of female texts. The sacrifice of Boucher's Madeleine effects a transubstantiation of flesh to word: a call to "[i]magine" new texts of female experience results from her assault. A similar communion of flesh occurs in *La lumière blanche*: Torregrossa's mutilation produces "vers"--worms and words. Paradoxically, however, it is the death of an author which achieves such authorship: Torregrossa has written the

letter which catalyzes the play's action; she is, certainly, chief orchestrator of that action. Indeed, Torregrossa is an authority figure--a professional feminist, an expert on mythology, a translator. Gilbert and Gubar cite Edward Said on the connection of "authority" and "author" (4), a link comprised of patriarchal imagery. Literary convention, suggests Said, sees "'the unity or integrity of the text . . . maintained by a series of genealogical connections: author--text, beginning-middle-end, text--meaning, reader--interpretation, and so on. *Underneath all these is the imagery of succession, of paternity, or hierarchy*'" (Said 162 in Gilbert and Gubar 5; italics added by Gilbert and Gubar).[1] Pelletier, however, ignores these rules of literary inheritance and tumbles the hierarchy: Torregrossa's authority is challenged--fatally--in *La lumière blanche*, as are a number of societally authorized concepts and categories. Male/female boundaries are blurred, mothers and Amazons find common ground, heroes and goddesses share exploits. Authors are brought literally down to earth, to the manure pile, in a carnivalesque image of renewal. Authorship loses its authority, but writing is returned to the community.

Les fées ont soif also ends with such a community building exercise, calling, like Torregrossa's letter, for imaginative iconoclasts to create a new world.[2] William New (27, 30) insists on an absence of absolutes and the

presence of ambivalence in *As For Me and My House*; Karen Burns, similarly, sees dualities in Ross's work--poles of creation and destruction energizing a cyclic world view (see 223). Certainly *As For Me and My House* authorizes a female creator; however, she eventually revokes her text-making powers in order to slip back into an old, patriarchal version of creation. *The Well* shores up that old text, loosing a murderess; a will, authoring paternity and male succession, ensures her destruction. In *Whir of Gold*, the divine Author is unreachable; distracted in her attempts to pray, Madeleine produces a text of her own design, but hopes to succeed in reaching both God and a male "'right one,'" soon.

Of Ross's novels, *Sawbones Memorial*, with its model of joint male/female authorship, comes closest to Pelletier's carnivalesque project of renewal. Nellie and Dan Furby vow to challenge the town's social strictures by bringing the life story of an outcast to the fore; their cooperation in this venture goes some way towards restoring creativity to both sexes, and, hence, towards leaving the old myths behind. Like *La lumière blanche*'s mixing and matching of the exploits of goddesses and heroes, the male/female writing project in Ross's last novel questions the creative monopolies of both sky fathers and earth mothers, and offers both figures a job at, and coverage in, the local newspaper. Cyclic tales of goddesses and linear patriarchal plots--each

restrictive in their own way--may not have been exhausted, but they will, at least, have been made public, their mutual connections and deceptions aired. Borrowing (from all three endings of *La lumière blanche*) the words of Leude--Amazon, mother, mercenary; combiner of contradictions, collapser of binaries--I would indicate that "[l]e chemin, c'est par là" (Pelletier 106, 110, 113).

Notes

1. Said looks at the "notions" which ground the various meanings tied to "authority" and "author": "(1) that of the power of an individual to initiate, institute, establish--in short, to begin; (2) that this power and its product are an increase over what had been there previously; (3) that the individual wielding this power controls its issue and what is derived therefrom; (4) that authority maintains the continuity of its course" (Gilbert and Gubar 4; they cite Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. NY: Basic Books, 1975, p. 83). These notions, suggest Gilbert and Gubar, could "describe both the author and the authority of any literary text . . ." (5). They certainly describe Torregrossa's initiative in *La lumière blanche*, and her direction of activities--"le réchauffement" (25), [l]es aveux" (42)--in the Désert de la Grande Limite. However, Torregrossa soon loses control of the action.

2. *La lumière blanche*, however, goes even further, questioning the authority behind such a call.

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