

Sleepers Joining Hands
Robert Bly

(1973)

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II

*All around me men are working,
but I am stubborn, and take no part.
The main difference is this:
I prize the breasts of the Mother.*

TAO TE CHING

*I came out of the Mother naked,
and I will be naked when I return.
The Mother gave, and the Mother takes away,
I love the Mother.*

OLD TESTAMENT, restored

I Came Out of the Mother Naked

1

I know the poet is not supposed to talk to the reader in the middle of his book. We're supposed to communicate only through the dream-voice of the poem. But I often long for some prose when I'm reading a book of poems. So I'm going to set down here some ideas about Great Mother culture, and drop a poem in now and then.

When the *Tao Te Ching* talks of the growth of ecstatic life as "the Return," the implication is that each man was once with the Mother—having gone out into masculine consciousness, a man's job is to return.

The Swiss scholar Bachofen suggested for the first time in his book *Mother Right*, published in 1861, the idea, embarrassing to the Swiss, that in every past society known a matriarchy has preceded the present patriarchy. His evidence, drawn from Mediterranean sources, was massive. Just as every adult was once inside the mother, every society was once inside the Great Mother. In Greece this mother absorption lasted until maybe 2000 B.C. What we call masculine consciousness is a very recent creation.

Men prefer to remember back only to that point in culture when they took over. Freud could only imagine a great father running the primal horde. But archaeologists have found hundreds of statues in caves and settlement ruins during the last thirty years going back many

centuries, and they have never found a statue of the Great Father—the statues found, all over the world, are statues of the Mother.

Because men prefer not to remember the thousands and thousands of years in which the Great Mother had total power, almost no one has discussed what we could call “the Change.” If it is true that mother consciousness preceded father consciousness, then two further things follow: women at some time must have had immense power, running all areas of life: law, agriculture, division of wealth, social custom, and especially religion. There must have been a war, probably dramatic and long-drawn-out. Surely the Great Mother did not give in to men willingly: she must have fought against the growth of masculine consciousness and father gods, and the men in turn must have fought for centuries against the Great Mother, burning her temples and killing her priests, while shamans dressed as women struggled hard to absorb her magical power, castrated priests to absorb her religious power, wigged judges to absorb her judicial power.

Beowulf I think describes the destruction of Great Mother culture in northern Europe; it is a historical poem, and perhaps three thousand years of fighting are summed up in it. Grendel, “the son,” stands for all the priests of the Mother; and when they are killed, the hero has to face the Mother herself. Jung (so far as I know) did not comment on *Beowulf*, but he unraveled the Andromeda dragon fight, and from it deduced that the hero mythology of ancient Greece describes a centuries-long fight against the Mothers. At one time, all men were within “the Great Mother circle” and could not get out. To attempt and win the dragon fight is the same thing as to achieve masculine consciousness, and get out of the circle. The dragon in inner life is man’s fear of women, and in public life, it is the matriarchy’s conservative energy. Perseus, “the Destroyer,” defeated both Medusa and a dragon; Theseus attacked a mother-monster at the center of the labyrinth and, with the help of a thread given to him by a woman hostile to the Great Mother, got back out. Hansel is a hero; with the help of Gretel, he put the Great Mother into her own oven. A “hero” is a man who succeeded in achieving even a slight amount of masculine consciousness. All men remembered it.

Intuitive gifts are being given. We can now understand stories that

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readers of classical literature have wanted to understand for centuries and could not. Mysteriously, knowledge denied to the conscious mind for several thousand years seeps up, it wells from the ground, beginning in the nineteenth century as men felt a curious longing to dig down, first into the earth around the Mediterranean, then into the earth of the psyche.

When reading many old stories, we have to learn to change pronouns. For example, it is not a male giant but a woman who says, "I smell a man!" When men took over, they did their best to suppress all memories of the hostile mothers, and the long age of woman power: the change of pronouns was more a wish than an act. But evidently much of the literature written under the Mother has been destroyed. The Sanskrit and Chinese civilizations certainly destroyed, rather than rewrote: there are reports of the ancient Chinese burning a hundred thousand books in a day. Only what was in memory remained: astrology, the great intellectual triumph of the Mother civilization, is left, the Tarot psychology, the *I Ching*, and fairy tales all over the world. In some cultures, the men rewrote literature instead of destroying it. There is Mother literature visible behind many stories and poems in the Old Testament. For example, here is a lovely quatrain in the King James *Job*:

*I came out of the mother naked,
and I will be naked when I return.
The Lord gave, and the Lord takes away,
Blessed be the name of the Lord.*

But the disunity of the images makes it clear that the poem once went this way:

*I came out of the Mother naked,
and I will be naked when I return.
The Mother gave, and the Mother takes away,
I love the Mother.*

2

We have then inside us two worlds of consciousness: one world associated with the dark, and one world with the light. Surely this

double consciousness is precisely what the yin-yang circle of the Chinese describes. The dark half corresponds to the consciousness developed in the matriarchies, the white to the consciousness developed in the patriarchies that followed. The Chinese had passed out of the Mother phase perhaps two thousand years before the Jews and Greeks made their way out (supposing that the Greek's dragon fight took place around 2000 B.C.). The yin-yang circle is the hope of a balanced consciousness. What they called "yin," I will call here mother consciousness or feminine consciousness; yang, father or masculine consciousness.

Mother consciousness was in the world first, and embodied itself century after century in its favorite images: the night, the sea, animals with curving horns and cleft hooves, the moon, bundles of grain. Four favorite creatures of the Mother were the turtle, the owl, the dove, and the oyster—all womb-shaped, night, or ancient round sea creatures. Matriarchy thinking is intuitive and moves by associative leaps. Bachofen discovered that it favored the left side (the feeling side) of the body. When the Nicene Creed says Christ sits on the right hand of God, you know you are in a patriarchy.

When masculine consciousness became aware of itself, it took for its main image the bright blue sky surrounding the sun—its metal then was gold: Apollo had gold sun rays around his head. The right hand became favored over the left, mountaintops over valleys, one and three over two and four, the square over the circle. It creates straight roads. Matriarchies are interested primarily in what is inside walls, but the patriarchies become aware of the space between walls; empires grow from patriarchies. The patriarchs plot out the ground in huge squares. In thinking, Socrates sounds the note: avoid myths—which are always stories of the Mother anyway—and think logically, in a straight line. Patriarchies develop the thinking power of the newest part of the brain, the neo-cortex; the Great Mother may be considered the goddess of the cortex, or mammal brain. The mother goddesses of Crete were always sculpted with their breasts bare, as if to say: I have breasts, therefore I am. Father consciousness tries to control mammal nature through rules, morality, commandments, and tries to reach the spirit through asceticism. The Chinese describe it as the cold, the clear, the south side

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of the mountain (on which the light always falls), the north side of the river (always in sunlight), the rational, the spirit, the hard.

In mother consciousness there is affection for nature, compassion, love of water, grief and care for the dead, love of whatever is hidden, intuition, ecstasy. The Chinese describe it as the north side of the mountain (always in shadow) and the south side of the river (always in shadow); also as the valley of the world.

3

Before the white people came, Drinks Water, an old Dakota holy man, dreamed that the Indians would be defeated, and warned that when that happened, they would have to live in square houses. Black Elk mentions this in *Black Elk Speaks*, taken down in 1931. He was living then in a square house, and said, "It is a bad way to live, for there can be no power in a square. You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation. . . . Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. . . . The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. . . . Our teepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle. . . . But the Wasichus have put us in these square houses. Our power is gone and we are dying. . . ."

The American ethnologist Lewis Henry Morgan understood that the Iroquois nation was a matriarchy, and described it as such in 1851. This description of a living matriarchy surprised Bachofen, and pleased him. The American ground, with so much mother consciousness in it, had been invaded by Puritans, fanatic father types. They painted all their churches white, inside and out, and lived in a square. They cared nothing for mammals; steamboats floated down the Missouri carrying nothing but buffalo tongues.

Father consciousness at its highest, when it does not reject the spiritual mother, is intense, spiritual, glowing. When it is crude, it sounds like this (a passage written by two white men in 1864):

Again we come to the great law of right. The white race stood upon this undeveloped continent ready and willing to execute the Divine injunction, to replenish the earth and *subdue* it. The savage races in possession, either refused or imperfectly obeyed the first law of the Creator. On the one side stood the white race in the command of God, armed with his law; on the other, the savage, resisting the execution of that law. The result could not be evaded by any human device. God's law will ever triumph, even through the imperfect instrumentality of human agency. In the case before us, the Indian races were in the wrongful possession of a continent required by the superior right of the white man. This right, founded in the wisdom of God, eliminated by the ever-operative law of progress, will continue to assert its dominion, with varying success, contingent on the use of means employed, until all opposition is hushed in the perfect reign of the superior aggressive principle.

—*A History of the Great Massacre, by the Sioux Indians in Minnesota*, by Charles S. Bryant and Abel Much (Cincinnati: Rickey and Carroll, 1864)

4

The earliest sculptures unearthed in Ice Age caves (Venus of Willendorf, for example) are statues of a Great Mother, breasts and hips immense to suggest her abundance. This mother, who brings to birth and nourishes what is born, we could call the Good Mother. She loves children, rams, rabbits, fish, bulls, all infant things, all things capable of giving birth. All the vegetation mothers, the Demeter and Isis mothers, share in this energy. The oven is her womb inside the house; in matriarchies, only women are allowed to use it. Her image is the joyful spiral, the cornucopia on the Thanksgiving table full of pumpkins (though the Puritans did not understand that); she is the seashell, old men hear the sea in her. The ancients usually sculpted her sitting, holding a child in her lap, in her thirties. Her colors are russet and brown; hearths, ovens, and water jars are statues of her. She likes men, though she treats them as children. She threatens no one. She is called "good" because she wants everything now alive to remain alive.

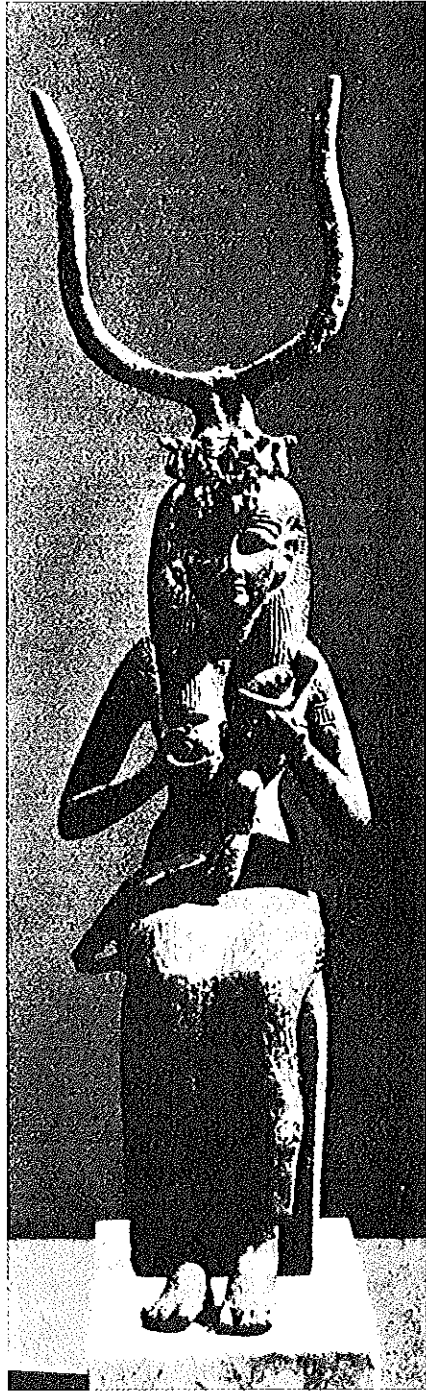
The trouble is that a society cannot have one of the Mothers without having all of them. When a culture begins to return to the Mother, each person in the culture begins to descend, layer after layer, into his

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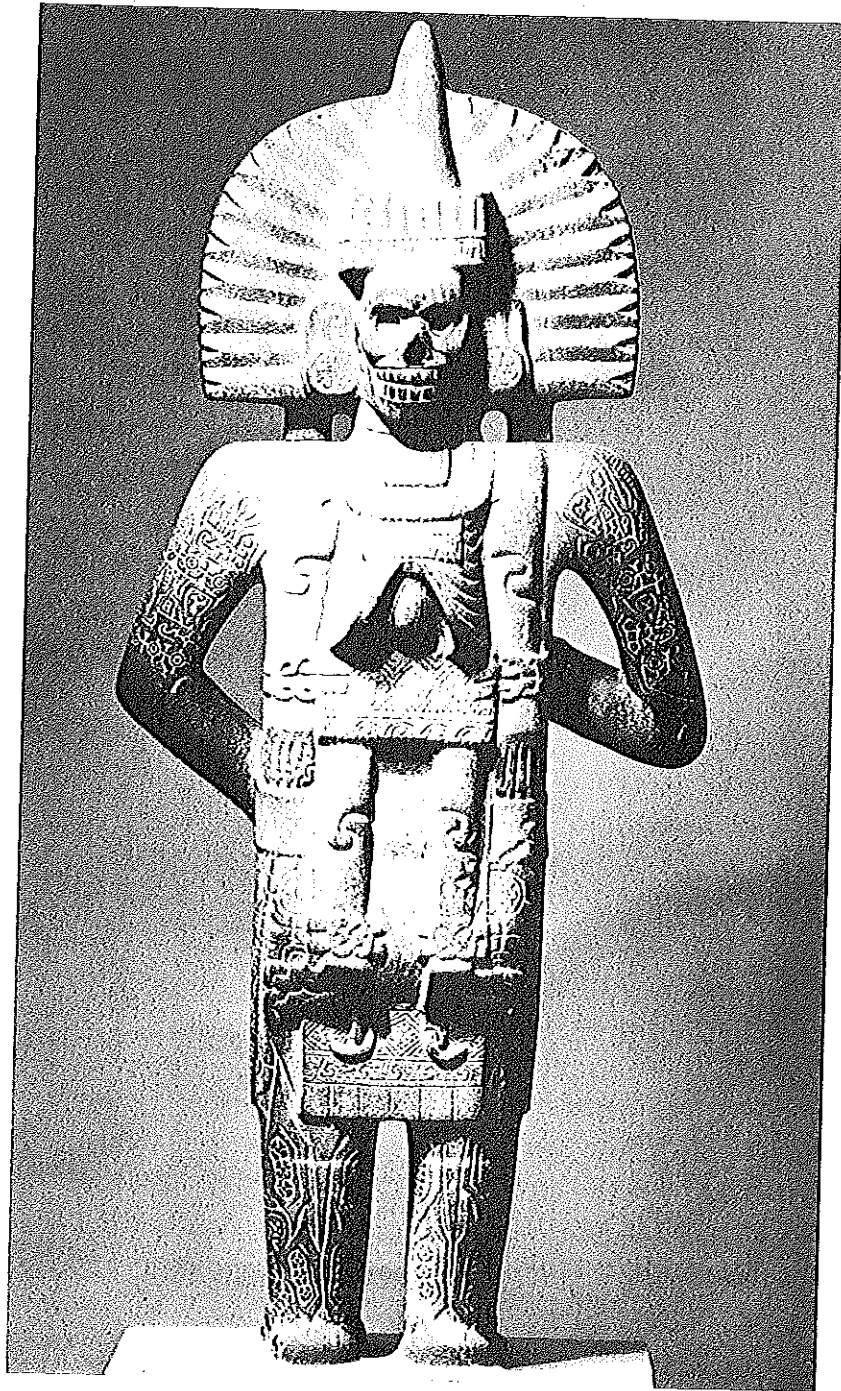
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A Good Mother (Egyptian)



A Death Mother (Huastec)—worked into the back of a Quetzalcoatl statue

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own psyche. When he starts to go down, the dead are grateful, and the trees and plants stir as if waking. As he sinks away from the Father's house, he may see, even before he sees the Good Mother, the Death Mother, and become aware that people die for other reasons than that they grow old. When the motion was going the other way, when men were moving away from the Mother, the first mother they stopped drawing or painting was the Death Mother. She never appears in Christian iconography: the Christians kept only a merciful Mother. Lilith appears seldom in the Old Testament. Hecuba was the last reminder of the Death Mother in Demeter civilization. The Indian subcontinent, by contrast, never left the Mother, and their Death Mother, Kali, still has active temples in India. Lorca's work resonates with the tremendous energy of the Death Mother; he distinguished between certain works of imagination by whether she was present or not. He noticed her presence particularly in flamenco dancing, and *cante hondo* guitar, and when she was there, he said the imagination had *duende*, and he loved that. The Death Mother is usually portrayed with her tongue stiff and poking out, to indicate that she has absorbed masculine power as well as all chthonic feminine power. She is not feeble like "Father Time." Kali is often sculpted dancing on a dead man, skulls like love beads around her neck. The Mexican Death Mother Coatlicue wears a skirt made of Mother Goddess snakes. The Death Mother in Scandinavia, visible worked into silver on the outside of the Gundestrup Cauldron, wore a band across the forehead, with hair falling away to each side—and no doubt robes with sickle moons on them and owls. She is remembered in fairy tales as "the evil witch." And she stands for black magic, just as the Good Mother stands for white magic.

If we draw a vertical line on a page, to represent the life-death line, we can then draw in an immense circle at the top for the Good Mother, and at the bottom another circle for the Death Mother. The Death Mother's job is to end everything the Good Mother has brought to birth.

Keats came close to her:

*I met a lady in the meads
Full beautiful, a fairy's child;
Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild. . . .*

*She took me to her elfin grot,
And there she gaz'd and sighed full sore,
And there I shut her wild wild eyes
With kisses four.*

*And there she lulled me asleep,
And there I dream'd, ah woe betide,
The latest dream I ever dream'd
On the cold hill side.*

*I saw pale kings, and princes too,
Pale warriors, death pale were they all;
They cry'd, "La belle dame sans merci
Hath thee in thrall!"*

*I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam
With horrid warning gapèd wide,
And I awoke, and found me here
On the cold hill side.*

*And this is why I sojourn here
Alone and palely loitering,
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
And no birds sing.*

Keats turned back to the Mother (there were no "Romantic" poets in "classical" Greece, because they were moving away from the Mother), and he went far back alone, very close to her. To his surprise, the Mother he found turned out to be a Death Mother. Yet he was content. It is father consciousness that is terrified of death, not being sure that the white spark will survive. Mother consciousness is more confident that the thread of sparks will remain unbroken.

5

Most students of the matriarchies accept the idea that we can distinguish in the Great Mother a Good Mother and a Death Mother.

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Graves accepts it. But Erich Neumann in his marvelous book *The Great Mother* makes an astonishing suggestion. He suggests that there is another arm, that there is actually a four-armed mother cross, that if we want to imagine Mother Energy as the ancients did, we must add another arm crossing the life-death line.

On this line, the plane of mental and spiritual life, we find an abundant mother also, whom we can call the Dancing Mother or the Ecstatic Mother. We can draw a circle for her on the "east" side of the cross. We can imagine each Mother as a magnetic force field. The Ecstatic Mother tends to intensify mental and spiritual life until it reaches ecstasy. She was sculpted almost always dancing, and in her teens or twenties, to distinguish her from the Good Mother. She is associated with the out-of-doors, with fields not yet domesticated, just as the Good Mother is associated with the fireplace. When a man has been alone for many hours or days outdoors, he can sometimes feel the Ecstatic Mother enter—or rather, he accepts her radiation at last. One of her oldest names in Greece was the Muse, and both men and women know that without her energy, their poems will be flat and thick-kneed. Most dancers are on the Ecstatic Mother's plane. Isadora Duncan sometimes stunned audiences—evidently when she danced, they had the impression they were seeing the Ecstatic Mother. Artemis and all the dancing mothers, all the virgin mothers, and all the visionary mothers, Diotima and Sophia, share the energy of this field. She was often called "Virgin," not because she avoided sexual joy, but because her main job was not to bring children into the world, but to bring ecstasy into the world.

When a man or woman is joyful alone, the Ecstatic Mother is there. If a person is "alienated," like Beckett, or cannot bear to be alone, one of the other Mothers is there. But if a man has no money or friends, and the Ecstatic Mother comes, then, as Thoreau said, he needs nothing more. He can never have too much of that solitude. Leonardo had almost no relationship with his own parents, nor evidently with other people, but he had a constant relationship with a spiritual parent, the Ecstatic Mother. She visited him always, and he did several paintings of her, showing over her shoulder the wild rocks where she lived. Several years ago, before I had read of the Ecstatic Mother, I wrote a prose

poem on one of his paintings of her, *The Virgin and St. Anne* in the Louvre:

Leonardo's Secret

The Virgin is thinking of a child—who will drive the rioters out of the temple—and her face is smiling. Her smile is full, it reminds you of a cow's side, or a stubble field with water standing in it.

Behind her head, jagged blue rocks. The jagged rocks slope up quietly, and fall back, washed by a blue light, like the light in an octopus's eyes. The rocks, though no one is there, are not empty of people.

The rocks have not been forgotten by the sea either. They are the old brains of the sea. They glow for several seconds every morning as the old man who lives in a hut on the shore drinks down his glass of salt water.

All of my poems come from the Ecstatic Mother; everyone's poems do. Men in patriarchies try to deny the truth that all creativity lies in feminine consciousness; it is part of the fight with the Mother. But if the Mothers are immense force fields, then men are receiving magnets, who fly about in inner space. The masculine soul in a woman is pulled in a similar way.

We have talked of the poles of the Mother as if they could be drawn on a page; we must try to imagine those poles in three-dimensional space. Powerful force fields walk all around us. A woman radiates her energy whether she wants to or not; she has it from birth. But a man's spiritual life, as we know, is full of curious accidents. If he meets an Ecstatic Mother either in the eternal world or in this one, he will be pulled toward poetry and ecstasy. Dante met an Ecstatic Mother, whom he called Beatrice, when he was nine and she was nine; he describes it in *La Vita Nuova* (The New Life).

All men's poems are written by men already flying toward the Ecstatic Mother. It's possible for a poem to talk about the Death Mother, but I think the energy that brings the words alive belongs to the Ecstatic Mother. The father poets, like Pope, try to find a substitute for the Ecstatic Mother inside male consciousness; their poems have excitement but no ecstasy. However, they live a long time.

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The Ecstatic Mother, then, is the abundant mother on the spiritual plane. What shall we call her opposite, the force field waiting at the other end of that arm? For this Mother the Greek matriarchies always used the mask of Medusa. Living snakes, rose from her head, to suggest the fantastic concentration of Great Mother energy she contained; and it was said that if a man looked into her eyes he turned to stone. In other words, the concentration of Great Mother energy was so great that it stopped the developing masculine consciousness in its tracks. The male ends either as stone, or as a mirror-personality like Narcissus.

Any concentration of Great Mother consciousness is dangerous. It is possible that "angels" mask in a patriarchy memories of such mother intensities. Rilke in the marvelous opening of his *Duino Elegies* asks what would happen today if a man met an "angel." He would "fade in the strength of his (her) stronger existence." "Every angel is terrifying."

The Stone Mother perhaps represents in history the Mother culture during the time it was implacably hostile to masculine consciousness.

Whenever a man enters the force field of a Mother, he feels himself being pulled toward mothers and childhood, back toward the womb, but this time he feels himself being pulled *through* the womb, into the black nothing before life, into a countryside of black plants where he will lose all consciousness, both mother and father. The teeth in the vagina strip him as he goes through. He is dismembered while still alive. The job of this Mother is to end the intensification of mental life that the Ecstatic Mother began, to end ecstasy and spiritual growth. The alcoholic has seen the Stone Mother, and he drinks to dull the fear that his inner rivers will turn to stone. He avoids looking at the Mother, and the alcohol turns him to stone. The Stone Mother stands for numbness, paralysis, catatonia, being totally spaced out, the psyche torn to bits, arms and legs thrown all over. America's fate is to face this Mother before other industrial nations; Poe's "Descent into the Maelstrom" suggests the horror of the descent. My Lai is partway down; hard drugs that leave the boy-man permanently "stoned" are among the weapons of this Mother.

The idea of the Stone Mother helps to understand Holderlin's life. He grasped from reading ancient poetry that the Ecstatic Mother was

actually alive, and not just a literary invention. Then he met a partial embodiment of her in Susette Gontard, whom he called, strangely, "Diotima." He started to move along that plane, and moved closer and closer to her, so close that he actually started writing in the ecstatic meters of the dancing Greek poets, unused for centuries. But he was only a European, part of a culture that had not taken the Ecstatic Mother seriously for a thousand years. The road toward her is glassy. He lost his footing, and was pulled in a fraction of a second into the Stone Mother's house. He became "insane," and lived quietly there, above a carpenter's shop, with the Stone Mother, for the last thirty-six years of his life.

In some cultures she is called the Teeth Mother. The intent is the same—to suggest the end of psychic life, the dismembering of the psyche. The South Asian cultures imagined the teeth on the face, but the American Indian culture and the Roman culture preferred to put the teeth in the vagina. *Sun Chief*, the Hopi autobiography, has a good Teeth Mother story. Jarrold Ramsey recently worked into English some wonderful vagina teeth poems belonging to the Paiutes; his poem is in *Alcheringa I*. Putting the teeth on the face is more accurate in some ways, since the Teeth Mother is dangerous to women as well as to men. "Little Red Riding Hood" describes a young girl being eaten by a Teeth Mother, presumably her own mother.

This teeth imagery began to surface in America about two decades ago. I first noticed the Teeth Mother in American art in de Koonings' portraits of women he did in the fifties. He saw her clearly, and did a series of portraits of her, as clear as Leonardo's in their way. A number of Vietnam veterans have come home in the last few years with tales of Vietnamese women who are said to have had razor blades inserted "surgically" into their vaginas. This is a good Teeth Mother story, adapted to medical advances.

Certain men in Europe in the early nineteenth century began to move back toward the Mother, alone. In the United States the return to the Mother as a mass movement began in the late fifties. The movement assumed, in the usual way of patriarchies, that the only Mothers in the universe were the Good Mother and the Ecstatic Mother, and that only the fathers were "evil." Half the population still show their

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nearness to these Mothers by their beads and long hair and ecstasy, by loving rock music, swaying back and forth half the afternoon. Woodstock was a Good Mother gathering. But the Stone and Death Mothers are standing right next to the Ecstatic Mothers. There was a hint of that at Altamont, where the Stones found themselves playing death and catatonia music. The picture we have of "Consciousness III" is patriarchal, with the dangerous mothers, as usual, invisible. But the Vietnam war has helped everyone to see how much of the Teeth Mother there is in the United States. The culture of affluence opens the psyche to the Teeth Mother and the Death Mother in ways that no one understands. Ed Sanders writes about some of that terror in his book on Charles Manson. Americans don't "believe" in the Death Mother or the Teeth Mother, but are just beginning to experience the terror of them.

6

I have brought two separate ideas into this prose: the theory that power was first held by women, that matriarchies only gradually gave way to patriarchies, is Bachofen's idea, not accepted by all anthropologists, but supported by an amazing number of recent archaeological finds, and by experiences like Malinowski's among living ancient cultures. The second idea—that the Great Mother can best be understood as a union of four "force fields"—is a completely separate concept, and in modern thinking very young. I may have mistaken the nature of the fields, or their relation to each other. And yet some sort of division was clearly made in ancient times, and insisted on.

Men's fear of women seems to be a fundamental emotion on this planet. It is rarely talked about, and in the U.S. it is getting worse. It is possible that when a culture refuses to visualize the dangerous mothers, men then become vaguely afraid of all women, and finally of the entire feminine side of their own personalities. That is a disaster.

Ancient civilizations visualized the dangerous mothers precisely to save human beings from disaster. Ancient poems spoke freely of fear of the Mothers and of women. In Rilke's powerful poem on the fear of women—set down here in my own translation—he goes back to an old Egyptian saying:

"We Must Die Because We Have Known Them"

Papyrus Prisse. From the sayings
of Ptah-hotep, manuscript from 2000 B.C.

*"We must die because we have known them." Die
of the unbelievable flower of their smile. Die
of their delicate hands. Die
of women.*

*Let the boy praise the death-givers
when they float magnificently through his
heart-halls. From his blossoming body
he cries to them:
impossible to reach. Oh, how strange they are.
They go swiftly over
the peaks of his feelings and pour down the night
marvelously altered into his deserted
arm-valley. The wind that rises
in their dawn makes his body leaves rustle. His brooks
glisten away.*

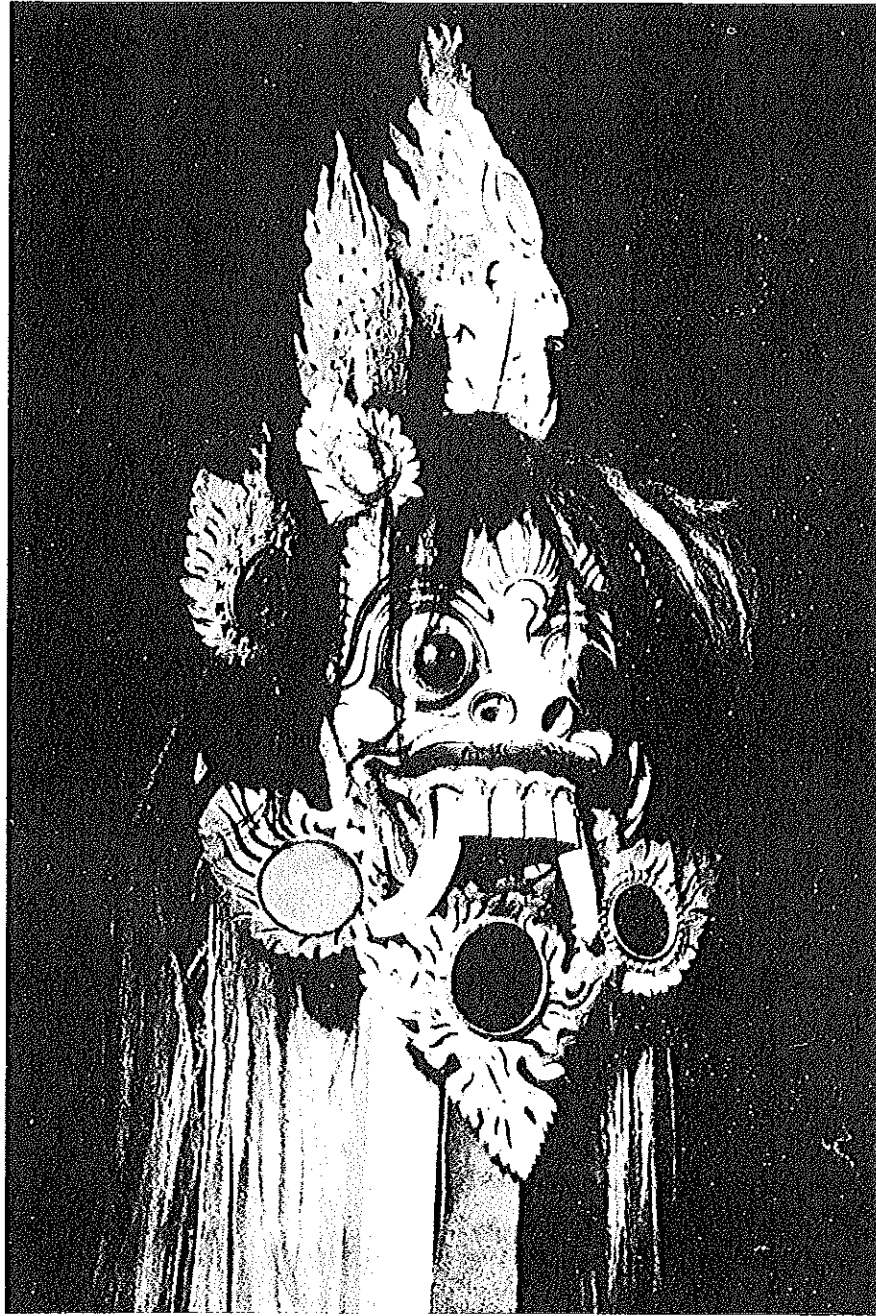
*And it's right that the grown man
shivers and remains silent. The man
who has blundered around all night
on the mountains of his feelings
remains silent.
As the old sailor remains silent
and the terrors
he's experienced leap about in him as if in rocking cages.*

The ancients also took the force field of the Mothers and stretched them out into narratives—myths or fairy tales we call them; also they put on robes and pretended to be the Mothers themselves. A tragedy after all is a play in which the secret principles of the dangerous mothers take hold of the actors. The sight of the Death Mother and the Stone Mother walking around on stage was so terrifying to men that Aristotle described its chief effect as "catharsis," "purgation"—it cleaned a man out for days. It also increased the desire to "know." And if a man wished to know more of the Mothers, he could always join one of the Mysteries, invariably linked with a Great Mother shrine, such





An Ecstatic Mother (Mycenaean)



A Teeth Mother (Balinese)—Mask

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as the shrine of Diana at Ephesus. What was taught in the Mysteries about the Mother is lost.

The more one studies ancient cultures of the Mediterranean the greater the admiration one has for their fantastic powers of visualization. The psychic rulers of Mycenae and Crete evidently used architecture to teach inward things—that is, they built a labyrinth, with vagina-like passages, and a wild bull at the center, pawing the ground, to represent the Mother, torn-off arms and legs scattered about. Apparently boys and girls during “initiation ceremonies” would be conducted inside.

The visualizations surely helped women to understand the sense of power that they feel in themselves, but which no modern metaphors explain. And it helped women to understand the risks of their development. If we return to the four-leaved mother cross—the same shape as the Celtic cross—we see it’s possible that a woman’s psyche grows by moving out along one of the two arms—in both directions perhaps, but on only one of the arms: a woman like a man apparently lives primarily either on the life-death line or the spiritual line. I’ve mentioned that dancers often live on the Ecstatic Mother’s plane, and Scorpios have links with the Death Mother, etc.

The farther a woman goes out on the end of an arm, the more power she has. That power is for good and power for evil. It is also power over weather, over plant growth, and power to cause transformations. Girls in the Middle West often decide to stay at the center of the cross, where they will be safe. That strange passive quality in so many American women comes from that decision. A woman’s problem is that if she does leave the center, and go farther out, which Mother will she find there? Whichever she finds she will become, for she is that one already. Many women in a patriarchal society then elect to remain near the center; but if they do that, their spiritual growth stops, and they die, spiritually. If a Scorpio, for example, forbids her radiation to go out, the rays will turn back on her, and turn her to stone.

Western literature since Socrates basically describes men’s escape from the Mother, and women get little help from it, as Anaïs Nin mentions in her diaries. Most of the literature written in the last two thousand years has been written by men about their growth, which is excit-

ing precisely because it is so late coming. Neumann believes that a few tales have survived, among them "Amor and Psyche" from *The Golden Ass*, embodying ideas of women's growth, but there are few. Men cannot easily visualize woman's "road" of growth, and women have for centuries stopped trying to do so themselves. Doris Lessing, though, along with a handful of others, is returning to this interrupted labor.

The increasing strength of poetry, defense of earth, and mother consciousness, implies that after hundreds of years of being motionless, the Great Mother is moving again in the psyche. Every day her face becomes clearer. We are becoming more sensitive, more open to her influence. She is returning, or we are returning to her; everyone who looks down into his own psyche sees her, just as in leaves floating on a pond you can sometimes make out faces. The pendulum is just now turning away from the high point of father consciousness and starting to sweep down. The pendulum rushes down, the Mothers rush toward us, we can all feel the motion downward, the speed increasing.

7

I don't expect these ideas to help writers write better poems, nor should anyone examine my own poems for evidence of them, for most of my poems were written without benefit of them. As for women, this essay will not tell women much about themselves that they don't know. The division of the Mothers was evidently made by women themselves during the matriarchies, when they had all religious and myth-making power, so I don't expect it will be news to them.

The reader will not get a genuine sense of mother consciousness from reading my prose either, because I write of mother consciousness using a great deal of father consciousness. But there is no other possibility for a man. A man's father consciousness cannot be eradicated. If he tries that, he will lose everything. All he can hope to do is to join his father consciousness and his mother consciousness so as to experience what is beyond the father veil.

Right now we long to say that father consciousness is bad, and mother consciousness is good. But we know it is father consciousness saying that; it insists on putting labels on things. They are both good.

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The Greeks and the Jews were right to pull away from the Mother and drive on into father consciousness; and their forward movement gave both cultures a marvelous luminosity. But now the turn has come. Women want more masculine consciousness, and men want more mother consciousness; they want a balanced consciousness. Women were not satisfied with Great Mother consciousness; if they had been, Theseus' "sister" and Hansel's "sister" would never have helped the "heroes" to destroy Mother culture.

In Mother culture, I am a student. I believe Blake when he warns us how much more we need to see:

*Now I a fourfold vision see,
And a fourfold vision is given to me;
'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
And threefold in soft Beulah's night
And twofold always. May God us keep
From Single vision & Newton's sleep!*

8

What all this speculation by Neumann and Esther Harding and so many contemporary poets amounts to is a revaluation of the anima, the feminine soul, following centuries of depreciation of it. All my clumsy prose amounts to is praise of the feminine soul, whether that soul appears in men or in women. The masculine soul, which in its middle range is logic and fairness, and at its highest vibrations hurries toward the spirit, also needs praise, but I am not doing that here. Here I want to do something else. We know that the despising of the feminine soul has been the cause of some of our greatest errors and disasters.

I think the reason this psychic archaeology means so much to me is that I come from Norwegian immigrants, here only three generations; in other words I come from the patriarchal and Protestant heritage of northern Europe, which is spiritually an empty ruin. Jung, whose father was a Protestant minister, said: "The intellect has achieved the most tremendous things, but all that time our spiritual house has been falling to pieces. . . . Meaning has left most religious images. . . . And I am convinced that this growing impoverishment of symbols has a

meaning. . . . And if we hide our nakedness, as the Theosophists do, by putting on the gorgeous robes and trappings of the East, we are essentially lying about our own history. It would be far better simply to admit our spiritual poverty. . . . The spirit has come down from its fiery high places . . . but when spirit becomes heavy, it turns to water. . . . Therefore the way of the soul in search of its lost father . . . leads to the water, to the dark mirror that lies at the bottom. Whoever has decided to move toward the state of spiritual poverty . . . goes the way of the soul that leads to the water."

I see in my own poems and the poems of so many other poets alive now fundamental attempts to right our own spiritual balance, by encouraging those parts in us that are linked with music, with solitude, water, and trees, the parts that grow when we are far from the centers of ambition.