

THE ARCHETYPAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE AMERICAN WOMAN THROUGH LITERATURE

by

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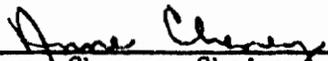
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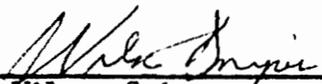
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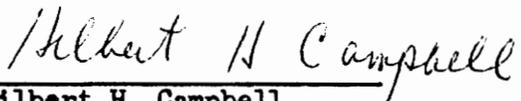
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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

During recent years, especially since the 1950's, there has been a conspicuous increase in the number of fictional works of literature concerning women. Part of the reason for this increase is sociological change, which has caused a re-examination of woman's role in society. Literature, because it does, in part, reflect movement in society, has naturally been affected. But to claim that social development is the only reason for this increase, or even that it is the main reason, is a mistake. Both literature and human life are complex, and, just as society inevitably affects the individual, so the psychological is invariably a part of the social. Few social modifications occur without corresponding psychological growth or transformations, a truism overlooked by many "feminist" critics.

What is currently called "feminist" criticism is, like Marxist or Black criticism, a branch of the broad category of sociological criticism, which stresses the movement of society's attitudes towards certain social groups, in this case, women.<sup>1</sup> There has been little work on a view of literature by and about women from a psychological

<sup>1</sup>Although feminist criticism is still too new for absolute definition, an overview can be obtained from two recent issues of College English--May, 1971, and October, 1972--devoted to female studies. Especially interesting here is an article by Annis Pratt entitled, "The New Feminist Criticism," in the May, 1971, issue. Here Mrs. Pratt suggests that the feminist critic should "consider literature as it reveals men and women in relationship to each other within a socio-economic context, that web of role expectations in which women are enmeshed" (p. 873).

perspective. In fact, so much time has been spent looking for groups to blame for the unhappy social situation of women that an examination of woman as woman and woman as human being (rather than merely as a working unit of society) has virtually been ignored. Such rare, but important works as Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex have made some advances in the study of woman's internal, as well as external, development, but such efforts have been all too infrequent.

The problem is that too much of a dichotomy exists in feminist criticism between the social and the psychological. Feminist critics forget or ignore that the two are interdependent. As critic Annis Pratt says in her article, "Archetypal Approaches to the New Feminist Criticism," to be accurate and complete, the critics need to recognize that literature traces the psychological development of the woman as well as the social. The psychological viewpoint that Pratt favors is the archetypal:

I think we are posing a false dichotomy here, between attention to the individual or society, text or context. It seems evident that there is an interior landscape of the individual human psyche, and an external or social landscape impinging upon the individual. Woman heroes pursue their interior journeys at the same time as they battle forces which strip them from birth of autonomy and turn them into passive objects. Since the material which New Feminist Critics are considering--in my case, fiction of the past two hundred years--manifests both internal and external phenomena, it seems necessary to develop both contextual and archetypal modes of literary analysis.<sup>2</sup>

The type of archetypal criticism Pratt discusses is Jungian, based on

<sup>2</sup> Annis Pratt, "Archetypal Approaches to the New Feminist Criticism," Bucknell Review, 21 (1973), 10.

the idea of the collective unconscious, a theory that will be examined in the second chapter of this thesis. As Pratt explains, many feminist critics have avoided the use of archetypal criticism because of their claim that psychologist Carl Jung concentrates more fully on the psychological development of the male than on that of the female. However, Jung's theories can also be valuable in illuminating what Pratt calls the "interior" landscape of the female psyche. The purpose of this study will be to apply Jung's concepts to much of the same literature explored by feminist critics on the social level. Because little work has been done in this area, such a study must provide a very broad overview as a foundation for other works or take only smaller, more specific aspects of women's literature to examine in depth. This thesis intends to do both to some degree.

Since one basic premise of this thesis is that the social and the psychological interact, the study has been limited to American literature and the American woman. In this way, the psychological development can be viewed against the background of a specific society. The major concentration of the study will be twentieth century American literature by and about women. However, because of the lack of previous work in this area, there will also be a chronological overview examining the reason behind the trends seen in the most recent literature. Further, because archetypal criticism itself is subject to so much misunderstanding and confusion, there will also be an examination of archetypal criticism's forms, uses and advantages.

The second chapter of this thesis will concentrate on the meaning of myth and archetype, as discussed by philosophers such as Mircea Eliade and Ernst Cassirer, anthropologists such as Sir James Frazer and

Joseph Campbell, and literary critics such as Northrop Frye. Though a variety of different theories and viewpoints will be presented, the emphasis will be on Jungian psychology because of the unity and depth it offers. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the female archetype in her various forms, the root from which the types of women in American literature, discussed in chapters three and four, spring. An important aspect of this discussion will be a description of feminine "initiation," Jung's term for the process of maturing or becoming a whole, integrated human being.

The third chapter will apply these concepts to particular works of literature and will move chronologically, tracing literary, social and psychological developments in America and indicating their inter-relationships. This tracing will begin with the earliest American literature, including the "Pocahontas" plays of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and will continue into the first two decades of the twentieth century. Because this development has been different in the four main geographical areas of the country--the Northeast, the West, the South and the Midwest--the chapter has been further divided geographically. The purpose of this overview chapter will be to provide necessary background for full understanding of trends in recent American literature.

The fourth chapter will be the most important, examining from an archetypal viewpoint the new literature by and about women. For the sake of clarity and order, characters and works will be divided into specific types, with understanding that the types will sometimes overlap. Only those works of high literary quality or those most clearly presenting the archetypes will be discussed. The study will culminate with this

chapter, which is intended to show the importance of approaching twentieth century literature about women from a psychological angle, as well as to prove the value of literature in understanding the whole of human life.

Though the main purpose of this study will be to trace the archetypal development of the American woman through literature, its broader emphasis will be on the human process of developing and maturing and on the relationship between literature and this process. Man's seeing himself clearly is becoming increasingly important in the twentieth century because of confusion and mounting pressure to survive both physically and spiritually; men's and women's seeing each other clearly and with understanding is equally important. We learn what we are, not only in isolation, but also in relation to each other.

## CHAPTER II

### ARCHETYPAL CRITICISM AND THE FEMALE ARCHETYPE

The kind of archetypal or mythic criticism following the tenets of psychologist Carl Jung is based on the premise that literature is not a self-contained artistic discipline. Rather, like all of the arts, it springs from human life on both the conscious and unconscious levels. We may easily see literature's connection with the conscious world, which it mirrors and defines. But the word "unconscious" is harder for us to accept and certainly more difficult to explain, especially since the two major charters of the unconscious, Jung and Freud, disagree in their terminology. What Freud termed the "unconscious" Jung termed the "personal unconscious" or that part of the human mind containing dreams, repressed energies and desires that can be related to personal experiences. Jung, however, delved further, pinpointed, and named that part of the psyche called the "collective unconscious." In his psychological studies, Jung discovered, through the dreams and art work of his patients, various patterns of images that he believed to be universal and recurrent, a theory supported by further study of the religions and tales of widely separated societies. These images, he hypothesized, stemmed from some sort of "racial memory," an inherent "unconscious" part of the psyche, in which slumber these images, waiting to be awakened by outside circumstances and experiences. In the ninth volume of his collected works, he explains the collective unconscious in the following manner:

In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature, and which we believe

to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix) there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal and impersonal nature, which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually, but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite forms to certain psychic contents.<sup>1</sup>

Diagrammed, Jung's basic three-level structure of the human psyche would appear as follows:

3rd Level	CONSCIOUS MIND (level of awareness where material of personal unconscious is generated and where material of the collective unconscious at last takes recognizable, nameable shape)
2nd Level peculiar to the individual, though he is unaware of its contents	PERSONAL UNCONSCIOUS (repressed dreams and desires, stemming from personal experience)--acquired
1st Level common to the human race, rather than peculiar to the individual	COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS (racial memory: material of basic archetypes, not yet having taken distinct shapes)--inherited

<sup>1</sup> Carl Gustav Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, trans., R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series XX (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), IX, p. 43.

Working from this basic premise of the collective unconscious, Jung described myth, not as a primitive, imaginary story, but as a narrative derived from the patterns of this collective unconscious and dealing with the universal plight of man on this earth. Since Jung saw elements of myth in literature, he believed literature to be a key to the collective unconscious. From the mythic standpoint, "The secret of artistic creation and of the effectiveness of art is to be found in a return to the state participation mystique--to that level of experience at which it is man who lives, and not the individual, and at which the weal or woe of the single human being does not count, but only human existence."<sup>2</sup> On this level, therefore, we may see the struggles and experiences of the various men and women of literature as aspects of Man's common experience, the universal, recurrent journey through life. One might even say that myth is Man's process of "becoming," described in symbolic language. As Joseph Campbell, a myth expert who views the subject from a more anthropological perspective, says, "It [myth] is dream-like and, like dream, a spontaneous product of the psyche and hence of the whole nature and destiny of man; like dream--like life--enigmatic to the uninitiated ego, and, like dream, protective of that ego."<sup>3</sup>

Jung described myths as psychologically necessary to the survival of a people: "Not merely do they represent, they are the psychic life

<sup>2</sup>Carl Gustav Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1933), p. 172.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph Campbell, "Bios and Mythos: Prolegomena to a Science of Mythology," Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), p. 22.

of the primitive tribe, which immediately falls to pieces and decays when it loses its myth heritage, like a man who has lost his soul."<sup>4</sup> The metaphor is particularly appropriate, because Jung claimed that the individual must also keep in touch with the basic archetypes, the basic patterns of myth, existing in the unconscious of all men and reaching consciousness via a symbolic vehicle. In the unconscious, where the archetypes exist originally, they are pure content, without real shape. If they reach the conscious mind, they at last assume the outlines we recognize. These archetypes, however, are vital to the mental health of a human being. One of the problems with modern man, especially Western man, is that, discarding his myths, he has lost touch with his archetypes, and thus with an essential part of his identity, a part Jung loosely defines as the "soul." As Jung writes, "In themselves, archetypal images are among the highest values of the human psyche; they have peopled the heavens of all races from time immemorial. To discard them as valueless would be a distinct loss."<sup>5</sup>

The archetype's symbolic vehicle, rather than the pure archetype itself--which is essentially shapeless, but pregnant with meaning--appears in literary works, whether as the gods of the classical tales or as modern characters like William Faulkner's Eula Varner and Lena Grove. Such appearances link the world of literature to the world of the unconscious, giving literature a uniting function. The symbolic vehicles may be unadulterated, clearly defining and giving understandable

<sup>4</sup>Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 154.

<sup>5</sup>Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, IX, p. 84.

shape to the contents of the unconscious, or they may be distortions, false shapes, untrue representations. When pure, they reveal vital aspects of human life; when distorted, they give warning of unhealthiness and psychic problems.

Mircea Eliade, in his Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism, cites the survival of symbols as prime proof of their value.

Today we are well on the way to an understanding of which the nineteenth century had not even a pre-sentiment--that the symbol, the myth and the image are the very substance of the spiritual life, that they may become disguised, mutilated, or degraded, but are never extirpated. It would be well worth while to study the survival of the great myths throughout the nineteenth century: one would then see how they were humbled, minimised, condemned to incessant change of form, and yet survived that hibernation thanks chiefly to literature.<sup>6</sup>

Though Eliade does not cite extensively the works of Carl Jung, he agrees with Jung concerning the main purpose of symbolic language: exposing aspects of human life otherwise unreachable.<sup>7</sup> As Eliade says,

Symbolic thinking is not the exclusive privilege of the child, of the poet or of the unbalanced

<sup>6</sup>Mircea Eliade, Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>In both The Sacred and the Profane and Images and Symbols, he speaks of an ultimate reality to which symbols are guideposts. Eliade wraps his work in religious rather than secular meaning, denying that symbols emerge from the unconscious, but in The Sacred and the Profane, he admits a similarity between the structures of the unconscious and of symbols. Understanding or coming to terms with symbols is what Eliade calls "living the universal."

mind: it is cosubstantial with human existence, it comes before language and discursive reason. The symbol reveals certain aspects . . . which defy any other means of knowledge. Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they respond to a need and fulfill a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being.<sup>8</sup>

Myths and symbols obviously extend their roots into a variety of areas. Besides being part of the study of psychology and religious philosophy (discussed by Jung and Eliade), they are closely related to anthropology and secular philosophy. To most anthropologists, myth has no revealing function. Its importance is historical, based on its position as stage in the development of man--through a very primitive, usually fallacious stage, the presence of which in modern man is cause for great concern. The most famous anthropological myth scholar is Sir James Frazer, whose multi-volumed work, The Golden Bough, explores the mythology of primitive cultures. Frazer equates mythology with superstitious magic and considers it erroneous. It is inconceivable to Frazer that man, with his remarkable rational facilities, did not sooner discover the insidious falsehood of this game of magic he was playing. Nonetheless, Frazer's contributions, like those of the other anthropologists,<sup>9</sup> is invaluable for its concentration on observed phenomena, and for its charting of the patterns of mythic consciousness in the human race.

<sup>8</sup>Eliade, Images and Symbols, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup>For further light on the subject, one should read The Anthropologist Looks at Myth, ed., Melville Jacobs (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1966).

The philosophical system of mythic thought, on the other hand, is best presented by Ernst Cassirer in The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, II. Cassirer explains that philosophy and mythology have long been at odds, philosophy, in fact, being intended to free man from myth. All cultural forces, however, are interdependent, he says, and are all part of the totality of human life and thought and awareness. Myth is especially significant in that it is the basis from which other cultural forms, including philosophy, developed. The primary function of myth is unification, since the mythic perspective concentrates on the whole, seeing not individual lives and experiences and systems of thought, but the whole pattern of human life. Cassirer also stresses the unique connection between myth and language; the two, he says, deal both with the material and the ideal, unlike philosophy, which deals mainly with the ideal.<sup>10</sup>

This relationship between literature and mythic symbols has been explored in depth by a variety of scholars, few of whom agree. One of the best known is Northrop Frye, who deals with four main types of criticism--historical, ethical, archetypal and rhetorical--in his major, but controversial book, Anatomy of Criticism. In his section, "Archetypal Criticism: Theory of Myths," Frye describes a very structured mode of literature, in which there is a story framework which the writer may fill out as he pleases. There are no unexplainables, and myth is confined and limited. As Frye says,

<sup>10</sup> Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, II, trans., Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 26.

It follows that the mythical mode, the stories about gods, in which characters have the greatest possible power of action, is the most abstract and conventionalized of all literary modes, just as the corresponding modes in other arts--religious Byzantine painting, for example--show the highest degree of stylization in their structure.<sup>11</sup>

It cannot be denied that Frye's is one of the few attempts to bring order to myth criticism, a subject that has become remarkably diffuse, partly because of myth's inherent quality of largeness. Order, in some degree, is necessary so that myth criticism will not be totally dissipated and will not become impotent, without force or meaning. Yet too much order ignores the essential quality of myth, as with Frye's claim that myth is imposed rather than inherent.

Frye says elsewhere that myth is a purely literary phenomenon:

The things that happen in myth are things that happen only in stories; they are in a self-contained literary world. Hence myth would naturally have the same kind of appeal for the fiction writer that folk tales have. It presents him with a ready-made framework, hoary with antiquity, and allows him to devote all his energies to elaborating its design.<sup>12</sup>

Jung, however, refutes this idea by denying that the materials of myth are received second-hand. The source of the author's creativity, he says, is the "primordial experience," which, because it eludes the

<sup>11</sup>Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 134.

<sup>12</sup>Northrop Frye, "Myth, Friction and Displacement," Twentieth Century Criticism: The Major Statements, ed., William J. Handy and Max Westbrook (New York: The Free Press, 1974), p. 164.

reasoning of the conscious mind, "requires mythological imagery to give it form."<sup>13</sup> The important point in this comparison between Frye's and Jung's ideas is the indication of the advantages of each: Frye's limitation and order and Jung's largeness and lack of limitation.

However, the basic premise of this thesis is that literature is in no way as limited as Frye would have us believe. Instead, it has dimensions and depths which make it live interdependently with countless other facets of human life--human life in itself being multi-dimensional.

This diversity of opinion is what has made archetypal criticism subject to so much misunderstanding. Such diversity, however, is probably inevitable. As Claude Levi-Strauss, author of The Raw and the Cooked: An Introduction to a Science of Mythology, says,

It [myth] cannot be contained within precise territorial limits or within the framework of any one system of classification. However it is approached, it spreads out like a nebula, without ever bringing together in any lasting or systematic way the sum total of the elements from which it blindly derives its substance, being confident that reality will be its guide and show it a surer road than any might have invented.<sup>14</sup>

The subject of myths and archetypes is enormous, and the subject of myth in literature can be grasped only with acceptance of a certain amount of disorder and mystery.

<sup>13</sup>Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 164.

<sup>14</sup>Claude Levi-Strauss, The Raw and the Cooked: An Introduction to a Science of Mythology (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 3.

The critic must, however, be clear in his own mind concerning the basic advantages of archetypal criticism. First, it opens up levels of understanding touched by few other forms of criticism. Secondly, it aids the reader or the critic in seeing literature as unifier, important to human life in a variety of areas and on a variety of levels. Thirdly, it adds to one's understanding of the totality of human existence, human life being, after all, the major concern of literature.

Therefore, the tracing of archetypes has a value extending beyond mere historical curiosity. It also has more complexity than the reader may at first realize. The unity stressed by mythology inevitably results in a complex joining of the individual, society and the human race as a whole. In turn, this joining affects the archetypes which stem from the unconscious. Erich Neumann, in Art and the Creative Unconscious, mentions two different categories of archetypes which must be studied: 1) those which are varied by the society through which they must filter; and 2) those which stem directly from the collective unconscious, pure and undistorted. The former are more often seen in literature. Neumann explains:

The archetypes of the collective unconscious are intrinsically formless psychic structures which become visible in art. The archetypes are varied by the media through which they pass--that is, their form changes according to the time, the place, and the psychological constellation of the individual in whom they are manifested. Thus, for example, the mother archetype, as a dynamic entity in the psychic substratum, always retains its identity, but it takes on different styles--different aspects or emotional color--depending on whether it is manifested in Egypt, Mexico, or Spain, or in ancient, medieval, or modern times.

The paradoxical multiplicity of its eternal presence, which makes possible an infinite variety of forms of expression is crystallized in its realization by man in time; its archetypal eternity enters into a unique synthesis with a specific historical situation.

Neumann's hypothesis explains the variations in literature of the basic myths and archetypes and symbols. One may trace the central motifs<sup>16</sup>--creation, the quest, the sea as infinity and the unconscious, the initiation of the hero, the circle as unity, and many others--and watch their variations in different societies and different ages. Societal attitudes often affect how close the literary images are to the pure, undiluted archetypes. The images of women in American literature, for instance, have varied from those in the early "Pocahontas" literature appearing in an agricultural, earth-oriented society to the uncertain, searching female characters of modern American literature. Though all archetypes vary once they reach the conscious mind, and these variations can signify characteristics or problems of different societies, the variations of the feminine archetype are especially interesting, since she is already complex and many-faceted.

As Erich Neumann explains in his volume The Great Mother, the feminine archetype is the negative, the positive, the central birth/death figure in myth. She both hinders knowledge in her womb-like

<sup>15</sup> Erich Neumann, Art and the Creative Unconscious: Four Essays (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> Jung himself uses the word "motifs," emphasizing the idea of archetypes as patterns or systems of images.

ouroboric<sup>17</sup> aspects and becomes the agent of growth and transformation. She builds, and she destroys. One of her sacrifices comes rebirth. To her belongs the cycle of life; from her we as human beings and as part of the universal whole emerge. And into her we, in those same roles, return. Miguel Serrano, in The Visits of the Queen of Sheba, writes literary music for her:

Since my life seems to have been so much like an abyss and to be more and more like one, I am trying to look within myself and discover the coffin of the original Great Mother. I will open it and inside I will probably find that she has taken the form of somebody else. Perhaps she will be the Queen of Sheba; possibly even Jesus Christ. Whatever form she takes will be the form of my soul.<sup>18</sup>

The guises of the Great Mother are many. She may be Demeter, the fertile mother, or Persephone, the daughter, concubine of Death. In his book, Neumann has traced these variations and explained the root archetype. In the preface, he states his belief in the importance of his work, explaining that understanding the female side of the human psyche is essential for the wholeness and spiritual health of the group as well as the individual.

Western man must arrive at a synthesis that includes the feminine world--which is also one-sided in its

<sup>17</sup>The meaning of this word stems from the ancient image of the snake with his tail in his mouth so that he becomes circular, self-sufficient, with neither beginning nor end. The term is used by Erich Neumann in The Great Mother (See footnote 19).

<sup>18</sup>Miguel Serrano, The Visits of the Queen of Sheba, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 1.

isolation. Only then will the individual human being be able to develop the psychic wholeness that is urgently needed if Western man is to face the dangers that threaten his existence from within and without.

The development of a psychic wholeness, in which the consciousness of every individual is creatively allied with the contents of the unconscious, is the depth psychologist's pedagogical ideal for the future. Only this wholeness of the individual can make possible a fertile and living community. Just as in a certain sense a sound body is the foundation for a sound spirit and psyche, so a sound individual is the human collective life, so often ignored, that gives psychological work with the individual its social significance for the therapy of human culture. Not only does our concern with the archaic world of the archetypes--though they are seemingly anachronistic and far removed from the everyday reality of modern man--provide the foundation for all psycho-therapy; it opens up to man a view of the world that not only enriches his own personality but also gives him a new perspective on life, and on mankind as a whole. The experience of the archetypal world leads to an inner form of humanization that, because it is not a knowledge of consciousness but an experience of the whole man, will perhaps one day prove more reliable than the form of humanism known to us now, which is not grounded in depth psychology.<sup>19</sup>

Neumann's ideas, that the psychic health of the individual and of society are integrally related, is vital to this particular study, in which societal attitudes (in this case, American attitudes) will be shown to distort basic archetypal truths. The basic premise of the individual's being the building block for the group, just as the group clearly affects the individual, may not always be true. There are exceptions to every generality. However, a society is made up of

<sup>19</sup>Erich Neumann, The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype, trans., Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series XLVII (New York: Pantheon Books, 1955), pp. xlii-xliii.

individuals, and, according to Jung, an essential part of the individual's psyche is his connection with the collective, with the human race as a whole. The three--individual, society, the human race--are certainly different, but are actively allied. In the particular case of the female archetype, recognition and acceptance of her is important on all three levels.

Neumann begins by establishing the independence and identity of his archetype. Using Carl Jung's definition, he carefully traces the spontaneity of archetypes, then discusses their emergence via the symbols and terms of the conscious world. The term "Great Mother," he says is a late one, but the archetypal female "was worshipped and portrayed many thousands of years before the appearance of the term."<sup>20</sup> The basic archetype envelops a number of figures, present as both positive and negative forces. She is an entity, but multi-faceted, and one must not expect to define her rigidly or inflexibly. This ambivalence is one characteristic of all archetypes, but is especially obvious in the Great Mother. Where her symbols are concerned, there is much intermingling and fusing. This complexity makes the task of the myth critic exceptionally difficult.

The Mother herself, says Neumann, can be divided into three basic categories--the Great Mother, Good Mother, and Terrible Mother--together forming "a cohesive archetypal group."<sup>21</sup> In literature and in conscious thought, she has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

side, says Jung, "The qualities associated with it are maternal solicitude and sympathy; the magic authority of the female; the wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcends reason; any helpful instinct or impulse; all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility."<sup>22</sup> In the natural world, her positive archetype is associated with the earth, woods, the sea or any still waters, the moon, rocks, trees, caves, springs, and "things and places standing for fertility and fruitfulness: The cornucopia, a ploughed field, a garden."<sup>23</sup> On the negative side, however, "the mother archetype may connote anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate."<sup>24</sup> Symbols of this Terrible Mother are the grave, death, nightmares, the "witch, the dragon (or any devouring and entwining animal, such as a large fish or a serpent)."<sup>25</sup> According to Neumann, the archetypal female is also further divided into two categories--the elementary and the transformative. The elementary character has ouroboric aspects; it is perpetual, both beginning and end, enclosing and including all within itself. Here the motherhood aspect dominates, stable, eternal. The transformative character, on the other hand, is the dynamic aspect, the harbinger of change. The

<sup>22</sup> Carl Jung, Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

two interact, rather than existing separately. For instance, the maternal qualities are part of either characteristic.

The kind of growth changes involved in the feminine, says Neumann, are almost numinous to males. The woman has blood-transformations, involved with child-bearing. The first menstrual cycle is in almost every society considered a major, if not the major step in a woman's life.<sup>26</sup> Neumann believes this metamorphic quality in women to have a profound effect on men, impelling, inciting creativity. He says, "Here it is a matter of indifference whether the transformation of the male is caused by the positive or negative fascination, by attraction or repulsion on the part of the woman."<sup>27</sup> At this point, he mentions the anima, the archetypal feminine aspect in the transformative part of the feminine, since it incites growth and change. Contact with the anima, or the feminine side of himself, is vital for the man's initiation, though normally his feminine aspect should not be dominant. Through the anima, the feminine side of his own psyche, and its possible extension into another human being--the woman he loves, the woman he marries, or simply the woman present during his arrival at "awareness"--the man reaches a union with the world. As Annis Pratt explains in "Women and Nature in Modern Fiction," to the young girl, the natural world is a part of herself with which she must come to terms directly. The man comes to terms with the natural world indirectly. "The hero

<sup>26</sup>Neumann, The Great Mother, p. 31.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

comes to 'know' woman and through her the natural world which the heroine already possesses as an extension of herself."<sup>28</sup>

The ouroboric aspects of the feminine impede progress by dissolution, a melting back into darkness; but the "soul-like anima" fascinates but does not obliterate."<sup>29</sup> The anima or "Kore (maiden-goddess) is unique in her bud-like qualities, discussed by C. Kerényi, in Essays on a Science of Mythology. "The Kore-goddess," says Kerényi, "throws light on the old mythological idea in its budlike capacity to unfold and yet contain a whole compact world in itself. The idea can also be likened to a nucleus."<sup>30</sup> The Kore or anima is mainly associated with possibility; she is that part of the feminine which has not yet flowered and become a full participant in the life/death cycle, which is the realm of the eternal, cyclical, stable Mother. She is also that part of the feminine hovering between life and death, like Persephone--the clearest example of the Kore--having one foot in the living world and one in the realm of the dead. As such, she has what Kerényi calls "nonbeing," or that quality of never really belonging to either half of the cycle.

Beside Persephone, Eros' wife, Psyche, is another mythical manifestation of the Kore archetype, especially important to this study because of her connection with feminine "initiation," Jung's term for

<sup>28</sup> Annis Pratt, "Woman and Nature in Modern Fiction," Contemporary Literature, 13 (1972), 477.

<sup>29</sup> Neumann, The Great Mother, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> C. Kerényi and C. G. Jung, Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 106.

archetypal process of becoming a complete human being (rather than simply the adolescent's entering into sexual maturity). Psyche's act of disobedience in viewing her husband plunges her into "all the pain of individuation, in which a personality experiences itself in relation to a partner as something other, that is, as not only connected with the partner."<sup>31</sup> In other words, through giving and joining, the human being finds his own separate identity. Through connection with another, the person can define himself as the "other," what one's partner is not. The whole Psyche/Eros myth is discussed in detail by Neumann in Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine. Like Persephone's, at first "Psyche's existence is a nonexistence, a being-in-the-dark, a rapture of sexual sensuality, which may fittingly be characterized as being devoured by a demon, a monster."<sup>32</sup> This devouring (or, in Persephone's case, rape) is archetypally symbolic of marriage, a relationship that will be discussed in detail in the fourth section of this study. What is important here is that the archetypal feminine is as capable of undergoing individuation as is the archetypal masculine hero, who faces a process of initiation before becoming the total human being called a man. Naturally, there is a difference in the feminine and masculine processes, since the psychological make-up of each, both conscious and unconscious, is different. As Neumann says, like the male, the female moves toward an awakening, but she must hold

<sup>31</sup>Erich Neumann, Amor and Psyche: The Psychic Development of the Feminine (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), p. 85.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

to the contents of her sleep, her unconscious, to be the total female human being: "In other words, Psyche's development does not run counter to the unconscious and the instincts, the 'powers of the earth.' She represents, to be sure, a development toward consciousness, light, and individuation, but, in contrast with the corresponding development in the male, she preserves the umbilical cord that attaches her to the unconscious foundation."<sup>33</sup> Properly Psyche is the perfect anima figure, whose union with Eros, the animus or masculine side of the mind, creates the total, healthy human psyche, in which both male and female are united harmoniously. It is this process of feminine and, ultimately, human individuation which will be the central issue of this thesis, since it is toward this goal that feminine representations in American literature can be seen to move.

Both Jung's and Neumann's descriptions are of the Eternal Feminine, without exact replication in any individual literary character, in any individual life. But their portraits are the root from which branch those figures that we do see--in books or, with greater complexity, in actual human life. However, the best way to understand the importance of the female archetype and the feminine initiation is by example, by an actual tracing of their development and representation in literature. American literature, because of America's own peculiar archetypal representation as the land of rebirth and renewal, is a particularly interesting vehicle for this discussion of the archetypal female.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

Through this method we may more clearly understand the manifestations of the Eternal Feminine, the reasons behind its variations and distortions, and the eventual initiation of the American woman, as represented in literature.

### CHAPTER III

#### CHRONOLOGICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL TRACING OF THE ARCHETYPE

America<sup>1</sup> in many ways has always been a phenomenon: young, tired, earth-oriented, machine-dominated, naive, commercialistic, altogether a peculiarity. The whole complex American identity began harmlessly enough--with Hope. America was the world's Eden, promising renewal to the life-weary, promising the return to innocence. As R. W. B. Lewis says in The American Adam, "The American myth saw life and history as just beginning. It described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening Old World."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, this dream, which began with emphasis on growth and renewal, ultimately became nightmare, associated with money, machinery, commerce. Somewhere along the hasty, hungry path of American history, soul--or that emphasis on the aesthetic, the spiritual, that part of life not associated with the material--was almost forgotten, and mere humanism, welfare programs, and role of the world's Big Daddy have never fully sufficed to bring back that lost memory.

<sup>1</sup>Geographically, the word denotes the United States. Figuratively, the word suggests a set of ideals, beliefs, and traditions associated with this particular country.

<sup>2</sup>R. W. B. Lewis, The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 5.

The incorruptible American Adam<sup>3</sup> was involuntarily tainted and corrupted by his very innocence. His enormous energy became mischanneled. The American Dream became the struggle of every American male, to "make it" by acquiring--through luck, pluck, and hard work--money, the "Princess," and, ultimately, a kind of American Nirvana. The American woman, on the other hand, who in the beginning often worked side by side with the male and even owned land in her own right,<sup>4</sup> was equally, though differently, affected by the Dream. The American form of initiation was, after all, a country symbolically struggling to break away from the womb. What, then, was left over for her? As the country grew and became more geographically divided--as in the industrial Northeast, for instance, the commercialistic form of the American Dream bloomed, and in the post Civil War South, the idea of rebirth and salvation through suffering<sup>5</sup> grew--she became an important part of the Dream in all its forms, though seldom pursuer of the Dream itself. She became representative--of the pure Princess, bought by money, promising illusory happiness, or of the raped, mutilated land

<sup>3</sup>For a full discussion of the American male as Adam, one should also see David W. Noble's The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden: The Central Myth in the American Novel Since 1830 (New York: Braziller, 1968).

<sup>4</sup>For an overall view of the position of women in Colonial America, one should see America Through Women's Eyes, edited by Mary R. Beard (New York: Greenwich Press, 1933); The Women of the Mayflower and Women of Plymouth Colony, edited by Ethel J. R. C. Noyes (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Gryphon Books, 1971); Daughters of the Promised Land: Women in American History, by Page Smith (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970); and The American Woman: The Feminine Side of a Masculine Civilization, by Ernest R. Groves (New York: Emerson Books, Inc., 1944).

<sup>5</sup>F. Garvin Davenport, Jr. The Myth of Southern History: Historical Consciousness in Twentieth Century Southern Literature (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970), p. 192.

so important to Southern identity. Yet, while representative to the American male, what could she be to herself? Instead of growing spiritually into an integrated maturity, she became hollow, frustrated, hungry, so bound up in these sentimentalized, representative identities that she lost touch with her basic archetypal identity, never undergoing the initiation process that would bring her to maturity. For, to reach maturity, the American woman cannot be earth goddess or transformative anima alone--and certainly she cannot be the archetype's distortions so apparent in American literature. She cannot be only the physical or only the ideal. She must be both, and she must be more. Keeping in touch with the whole of her archetype, she must move toward full awareness of herself, becoming complete, integrated, a human being.

A sort of dichotomy or imbalance has occurred in America. Out of its youth and energy and promise, America has developed into a predominantly masculine society. In spite of what Philip Wylie says in his Generation of Vipers about America's being controlled and undermined by insidious womanhood, this society, as a whole, has always strongly stressed the rational, the scientific, the aggressive, the materialistic, and has distrusted the intuitive, the passive, the "mysterious." Therefore, friction between the masculine and feminine has developed from lack of understanding. And American literature has mirrored this friction.

In his autobiographical The Education of Henry Adams, in which Adam presents his theories of life and history, the author laments America's dichotomized energy. The archetypal feminine force, or what he termed the dynamic Virgin, was to him "reproduction--the greatest

and most mysterious of all energies; all she needed was to be fecund."<sup>6</sup> America does, he said, have energy of a kind, yet that energy is one-sided, incomplete: "But in America, neither Venus nor Virgin had ever had value as force--at most as sentiment. No American had ever been truly afraid of either."<sup>7</sup> American society, he thought, was fragmented. America had lost touch with the feminine portion of its psyche, the source not only of reproductive power, but also of creative power.

All this was to American thought as if it had never existed. The true American knew something of the facts, but nothing of the feelings; he read the letter, but he never felt the law. Before this historical chasm a mind like that of Adams felt itself helpless; he turned from the Virgin to the Dynamo as though he were a Branly coherer. On one side, at the Louvres and at Chartres, as he knew by the record of the work actually done and still before his eyes, was the highest energy known to man, the creator of four-fifths of his noblest art, exercising vastly more attractions over the human mind than all the steam-engines and dynamos ever dreamed of; and yet this energy was unknown to the American mind. An American Virgin would never dare command, an American Venus would never dare exist.<sup>8</sup>

Just which forces contributed to this peculiar American dichotomy are difficult to pinpoint. Certainly the problem is more than merely social. What Adams discusses here is a dissociation working on a variety of levels--society, the personal unconscious, and the collective

<sup>6</sup>Henry Adams, The Education of Henry Adams: An Autobiography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1927), p. 384.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 383.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 384-385.

unconscious--both working upward from the deepest level of the mind to become apparent in social phenomena and being caused by social phenomena that cut one off from the basic archetypes. Perhaps the only method of tracing the development of this American problem with any clarity is through literature, which stems from and mirrors all levels of the mind. Through literature we may see both the basic feminine archetype and its variations and distortions as they are filtered, as Neumann says, through society.

The faces of the American woman in literature have been multitudinous. She has been, in the purest sense, an Earth Mother, nourishing life, representative of the land on which the earliest Americans depended, and even some contemporary Americans depend. She has been the Princess, personification of the goal of the American Dream, obtainable only by money, position and power. She has been Debutante, Housewife, Matriarch, Bitch, and even Ghost, only a shadow of her vital essence remaining. No one, in fact, is quite sure what she is by now. The American Dream, that most distorted of initiation journeys, has played its part in her mutation. Technology, secularization, the frantic pace of modern life--all have wreaked havoc with her. Now the Magna Mater is Philip Wylie's "Mom," and her role is chauffeur, cook, bridge player, but seldom nourisher of life. Now the anima is Cinderella, and, as Philip Wylie says, the generator of creativity has become the generator of money and commerce.<sup>9</sup> As an American phenomenon, she is a social and archetypal monstrosity.

<sup>9</sup>Philip Wylie, Generation of Vipers, 20th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1955), pp. 46-55.

In its earliest days, America generally saw its women from three points of view: 1) the Puritan; 2) the "Savage" (or the "Europeanized" Indian, represented in the Pocahontas plays); and 3) the practical-romantic (which later, once firmly established in the South, divided its women into fertile reproducers and "Southern Ladies," representative of Southern land and Southern society, respectively). All three, at the time, were both natural and necessary for simple social and physical survival.

The Puritans, that dynamic, fervent, hardy group who helped people New England, saw women and men both in a disciplined, work-oriented, religious framework. Both sexes were expected to be sober and diligent. Though their way of life seems both extreme and unattractive to us now, to blame the Puritans totally for America's or American woman's ills would be a mistake. They did, however, contribute to the problem with their introduction of the work ethic and with their adherence to the Calvinistic idea (first taught by St. Paul) that women were temptresses who, because they caused Adam's fall in Eden, were bound to be controlled and disciplined by husbands and fathers.<sup>10</sup> This Pauline theory, while beneficial in helping to establish order, was unfortunate both psychologically and socially. Psychologically, the natural feminine sensuality associated with the Mother archetype, so different from hollow, pornographic sexuality and so vital to identification of the feminine side of the psyche, was submerged, denounced, "purified." If women were identified with sensuality

<sup>10</sup>Katherine M. Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1966), pp. 140-142.

in unconscious and conscious thought, and yet were forced to forget or ignore this part of themselves, confusion was sure to occur.<sup>11</sup> The work ethic, even more beneficial and necessary to survival in the beginning of American history, eventually developed into the foundation of the commercialistic American Dream. As Norman S. Grabo says in his essay in The American Puritan Imagination, the problem with the Puritans came in their very dynamics, their struggle against the land.<sup>12</sup> While American myth was always earth-oriented, Americans were also always in violent or sweating conflict with the land. This conflict was never as pronounced in the South as in New England, partly because of the more fertile nature of the land itself. But, in the rocky soil of New England, the struggle to survive eventually became the commercialistic and materialistic struggle of the industrial world.

The early settlers of Virginia, on the other hand, brought over a practical-Romantic view of women. Women were especially welcome as breeders and companions.<sup>13</sup> They were also welcome as civilizing influences. They represented, in fact, both culture and reproduction. While the settlers of New England were mainly members of an industrial middle-class, their Southern neighbors often came from the aristocracy.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the more aristocratic European ideas of the woman on the

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>12</sup>Norman S. Grabo, "The Veiled Vision: The Role of Aesthetics in Early American Intellectual History," The American Puritan Imagination, ed., Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), p. 20.

<sup>13</sup>Ernest R. Groves, The American Woman: The Feminine Side of a Masculine Civilization (New York: Emerson Books, Inc., 1944), p. 44.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

pedestal were transplanted to Virginia and the Southern states. The "Southern Lady" was born.

The third view, most singularly American, focused on the myth of the Indian woman, Pocahontas, who represented a possible benevolent relationship between the savage and the civilized man. From Pocahontas emerged a figure curiously beautiful, curiously comforting--an American legend. "She [the Pocahontas figure] was," Philip Young says in an article in The Kenyon Review, "a sort of American Ceres, or Demeter, or Gaea, developed from Pocahontas--a fertility goddess, the mother of us all. We, by our descent from her, become a new race, innocent of both European and all human origins--a race from the earth, as in ancient mythologies of other lands, but an earth that is made of her."<sup>15</sup> It is no accident that the first indigenous American literature, though of poor quality, was closely connected to this Pocahontas myth. For what America represented archetypally in its dawn was natural life, sensuality, the earth. Pocahontas is vital to this particular study because the Pocahontas plays <sup>16</sup> are integrally connected with the Edenic myth of America itself and because they are among the earliest representations of the feminine archetype in indigenous American literature. In the twentieth century, the Pocahontas figure in relation to America has appeared again, mainly in such poems as Archibald MacLeish's

<sup>15</sup>Philip Young, "The Mother of Us All: Pocahontas Reconsidered," The Kenyon Review, 24 (1962), 408.

<sup>16</sup>For a discussion and chronological listing of the Pocahontas plays, see Lawrence Hutton's Curiosities of the American Stage (New York: Harper, 1891, facsimile rpt., St. Clair Shores, Mich.: Scholarly Press, 1968), pp. 3-18.

Frescoes for Mr. Rockefeller's City (1933) and Hart Crane's The Bridge (1930). The reason for this reappearance seems to be connected with the twentieth century search for native origins and archetypal identity that will be discussed in the third chapter of this study. But, as Young continues in his article, what Pocahontas--the Indian maid who once played nymph, turning cartwheels around the fort, half-naked--<sup>17</sup> represented eventually became distorted in American minds:

Pocahontas was domesticated for the whole of our society, where from the very start any healthy, dark happiness of the flesh is supposed to be hidden or disapproved. Pocahontas is the archetypal sacrifice to respectability in America--a victim of what has been from the beginning our overwhelming anxiety to housebreak all things in nature until wilderness and wildness be reduced to a few state parks and a few wild oats.<sup>18</sup>

In American literature this tendency to repress or tame is even more obvious:

Americans must see the Indian girl in one last way, as progenitress of all 'Dark Ladies' of our culture--all the erotic and joyful temptresses, the sensual brunette heroines, whom our civilization (particularly our literature: Hawthorne, Cooper, Melville and many others) have summoned up only to repress.<sup>19</sup>

All three of the writers Young mentions are similar in that, in at least one of Melville's novels (Pierre) and in the great majority

<sup>17</sup>Young, p. 392.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 415.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 415.

of the novels of Hawthorne and Cooper, a dark-light dichotomy does exist, personified in the female characters. The symbolic basic for this dichotomy is innocence versus experience, purity versus passion, or occasionally, good versus evil. The dark and light women may even represent the changing of life in Europe for the new way of life in America,<sup>20</sup> again related to the myth of America as Eden. It is the fact of the dichotomy itself which is especially important. On one level, Hawthorne, for instance, may be pursuing the psychological question of good versus evil. On another level, his is the American problem Henry Adam describes--the tendency to dichotomize, systematize, ultimately to become one-sided. The works of all of these writers are universal, yet at the same time singularly American. In divorcing himself from the old world and what it represented, the American also divorced himself from an important part of the human psyche. He took the purely masculine initiation route, complete breaking away from the womb, the darkness, sensuality, moving towards an extreme of rationality and the machine. On the way, America, and thus American women, lost touch with a part of itself, making impossible its maturation process.

As mentioned earlier, this American initiation took different forms in different geographical areas, although all were related to the archetypal representation of America as Eden. In the Northeast, the archetypal feminine can be traced in literature from Hawthorne to Fitzgerald; in the South, from Poe to Faulkner; in the West, from Cooper to Steinbeck; and in the more slowly developing literature of the

<sup>20</sup>Viola Sachs, The Myth of America: Essays in the Structure of Literary Imagination (The Hague: Mouton, 1973), p. 20.

Midwest, from Norris to Anderson. All of these major writers are both local and universal, basic truths taking shape according to local customs and attitudes and physical environment. As Neumann stresses, the archetypes which stem directly from the collective unconscious are altered by society through which they must filter (see footnote 15, chapter two of this thesis). Therefore, in a study of the archetypal development of the American woman through literature, it is important to obtain the right perspective by tracing, not only the archetypes themselves, but also their various shapes in different times and different geographical areas. The following is a time/area diagram of the manifestations of the archetype up until the last two or three decades:

NORTHEAST

MIDWEST

WEST

SOUTH

20th Century

American Dream & Disillusionment  
(Princess/anima becomes Terrible Mother, clearly destructive)

Western Woman=American Land

Norris' Midwestern intermingling of commerce and fertility

American Dream (Princess acquired through hard work and money)

Southern woman=Southern land

black/white dichotomy

black/white dichotomy

Southern Lady=Southern Southern culture

Puritans (work ethic-Calvinism)

Pocahontas as Legend

Southern Settlers (practical-romantic view)

17th Century

MYTH OF AMERICA AS EDEN

In the Northeast, where American society first took a strong foothold, the earliest of these manifestations developed within the rigid framework of Puritan philosophy. Since, with a few exceptions, the Puritans concentrated on rationality, on sermons and political tracts rather than the imaginative literature being discussed here, we must turn to Hawthorne, whose Puritan ancestors affected him strongly, for the best literary examples of the Puritan attitudes toward the archetypal feminine. Hawthorne's familiar Puritan woman, Hester Prynne of The Scarlet Letter, is a complex figure with multiple levels of representation. One point is obvious: she is a woman in conflict with both society and herself. If we consider the essence of both Hester and Pearl, we can see the basic reason behind this conflict and what Hester and Pearl represent on the archetypal level. In ancient mythology, the comparable mother and daughter representation is the Demeter and Persephone story, Persephone, as explained in chapter two, exemplifying the archetypal Kore or anima figure. As Kerenyi says concerning the mythological figures, "They are to be thought of as a double figure, one-half of which is the ideal complement of the other. Persephone is, above all, her mother's Kore: without her, Demeter would not be a Meter."<sup>21</sup> These are the roles which Hester and Pearl play. Hester is the goddess of fruitfulness, with aspects of tragedy; like Demeter, she has both regenerative and destructive qualities. Pearl is also embodiment of both light and dark--more so even than her mother.

<sup>21</sup>C. G. Jung and C. Kerenyi, Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), p. 109.

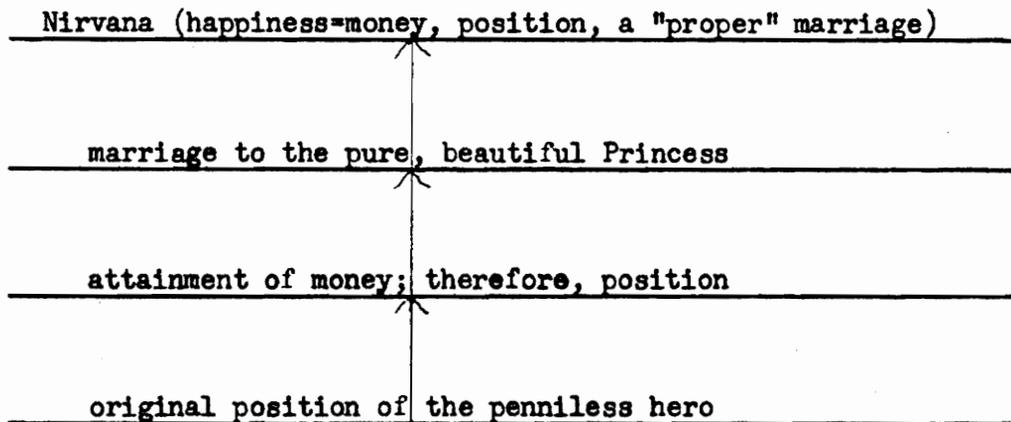
Like Persephone, she brings smiles with fleeting displays of affection, but hers is also the dark and terrible winter. She is her mother's fate, and, in a peculiar way, creator of her mother. Understood in this sense, The Scarlet Letter becomes more than mere social comment, tragedy, or even allegory. It becomes a complete death/regeneration myth. And it is natural that these two figures are misunderstood, condemned and even feared by the Puritans, since Puritan society was so strongly at odds with the sensual.

The dichotomy in The Scarlet Letter is between Puritan society and the feminine archetype; the dichotomy in other Hawthorne novels is between the dark and light women, also apparent in other novelists' writings. In The Blithedale Romance and The Marble Faun, the dark, strong, sensual Zenobias and Miriams are contrasted with the pure, more domestic Priscillas and Hildas. While The Marble Faun is set in Rome, The Blithedale Romance is significantly American. The suggestion of Eden is strong, and, in turn, suggests the Edenic American myth. Zenobia, in fact, arouses in Coverdale's mind, "a picture of that fine, perfectly developed figure in Eve's earliest garments."<sup>22</sup> Yet this Eden, tainted by materialism, does not survive, and Zenobia, the not-so-innocent Eve, too earthy and sensual for Hawthorne or for America, commits suicide. In Hawthorne's novels and short stories, the Priscillas survive, although as Leslie Fiedler says, "In general Hawthorne's Dark Ladies are superior to their pale sisters not only in their symbolic

<sup>22</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Blithedale Romance (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1958), p. 44.

resonance but even in their evocation of the reality of the flesh . . . ."23

Not long after Hawthorne drew his dark and pale women, the Northeast, with the coming of the Industrial Revolution, became more and more concerned with the attainment of happiness through money. Horatio Alger, in 1867 with the publication of Ragged Dick, began a whole new literary movement with his miraculous and purely American success stories. As Kenneth Lynn says in The Dream of Success, Alger's formula was the "equation of the pursuit of happiness and of business success with spiritual grace . . . ."24 In its classic form, the American Dream held the attainment of the pure, beautiful (usually wealthy) woman as middle rung in the ladder to success. Through the acquiring of money, the healthy, hard-working young man could marry the woman and thereby attain the highest position of all. Diagrammed, the American Dream would appear as follows:



<sup>23</sup>Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, rev. ed. (New York: Stein & Day, 1960), p. 298.

<sup>24</sup>Kenneth Lynn, The Dream of Success: A Study of the Modern American Imagination (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1955), p. 7.

Among the three basic unconscious manifestations of the archetype--Earth Mother, anima and Terrible Mother--the "Princess" of the American Dream is most closely related to the anima. Like the anima, she has, or at least seems to have, transformative qualities. She promises to produce a miraculous change in the situation of the struggling hero. She is grotesque, however, because of the nature of the transformation she produces. The true anima leads to maturity and generates creativity; the princess leads to material success and often to destruction.

As it became more pervasive and widespread, the Dream eventually contained a certain amount of disillusionment, even for the American male. In Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy, Clyde Griffiths, the young hero (who, though born in the Midwest, moves to and is strongly influenced by New York City), plots murder because of the Dream and is finally executed for the murder he planned, but did not commit. In Dreiser's Sister Carrie, sexual roles are reversed, although, except for the fact that Carrie's road to success lies through her body, the Dream is still basically masculine. In this case, the Dream is even worse because of the horrible mutation and commercialization of the sexual force. Kenneth Lynn says, "As Sister Carrie knew, the dispensation of her favors was a potent means for getting ahead, and therefore she viewed the act of love as a marketable commodity to be coldly bargained over; when she needed Drouet's help in Chicago, she became his mistress, but when her husband failed in New York she refused to let him touch her."<sup>25</sup> Again, the end result is tragedy.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., pp. 243-244.

The culmination of the Dream and its disillusionment came during the war-weary twenties in F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby. Here the transformative quality of the anima/princess is clearly illusory. Daisy Buchanan is as white and golden as the traditional princess should be. Further, she is Gatsby's star, his light across the water, always beckoning, luring and even seducing. At last the distorted anima has become the Terrible Mother, clearly destructive, demanding sacrifices. As the narrator, Nick Carraway says, "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy--they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness, or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made . . . ." <sup>26</sup> Though she still exerts tremendous pull, the Princess has finally been unmasked. Hers is as deceptive a mask as the American Dream is a false quest. They are both distortions of the archetype; rather than leading to spiritual growth and wholeness, they are intended to lead to material success and to generate money and commerce.

In the West--a mythological as well as geographical designation--American energy was bent upon conquest, conquest of the Frontier and conquest of the Wilderness. The Frontier male, first depicted in the Leatherstocking tales of James Fenimore Cooper, was clearly an American Adam, stalwart and clean-thinking--but usually an enemy to the truly primitive. He moved easily within the forest, but was never integrally

<sup>26</sup>F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), pp. 180-181.

connected with it. He was too pure. And his ideal woman, represented by Cooper's "lilies," was equally pure to the point of absolute, deliberate unreality. In fact, Natty Bumppo, Cooper's Adam, is so pure, is so much the woodsman, that he is almost completely separated from the female. Only once does he ever consider a relationship with a woman--with buxom Mabel Dunham in The Pathfinder--and even she fails to snare him. He remains free and totally alone, for even the forest through which he wanders is not always friendly.

In Studies in Classic American Literature, D. H. Lawrence pursues the significance of Natty Bumppo as Adam and of the inevitable black/white separation personified in Cooper's women. In The Last of the Mohicans, there are two female characters: dark Cora and her sister, the White Lily. For the latter, Lawrence has only scorn:

Cora is the scarlet flower of womanhood, fierce, passionate offspring of some mysterious union between the British officer and a Creole woman in the West Indies. Cora loves Uncas, Uncas loves Cora. But Magua also desires Cora, violently desires her. A lurid little circle of sensual fire. So Fenimore kills them all off. Cora, Uncas, and Magua and leaves the White Lily to carry on the race. She will breed plenty of white children to Major Heyward. These tiresome 'lilies that fester' of our day.<sup>27</sup>

Lawrence goes on to compare Cooper's black/white dichotomy with Thomas Hardy's, explaining that the division is "indicative of the desire in man. He wants sensuality and sin, and he wants purity and 'innocence.'"<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup>D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: The Viking Press, 1964), p. 58.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

Cooper and Hawthorne both personally prefer the purity, but remain fascinated by the sensuality that threatens to taint and corrupt the Garden of Eden. Archetypally, acceptance and understanding of both are necessary for full maturity.

The legendary pioneer heroine--blonde and blue-eyed--continued in Western literature beyond Cooper, although the Dark Woman was usually absent. While Western literature as a whole declined in quality, the pure flower became more and more apparent. Nicholas J. Karolides describes her in his The Pioneer in the American Novel:

Generally, she is a dependent creature. This dependency is expressed in her expectation of being looked after. She does not seem to do things for herself, nor try to help herself. She looks to the hero or others for assistance, again with an underlying air of expectation as of a right, rather than a privilege.<sup>29</sup>

She is hollow, without force, representative of the American desire for a perfect purity that has little to do with maturity. Karolides says, however, that this picture of the Pioneer woman began to change in the literature of the early twentieth century. Woman became a more active participant.<sup>30</sup> She began to work like a man or to become, almost as in the South, symbolic or representative of the earth.

By the twentieth century, disillusionment with Eden had become strong, but the West, its boundary lines having moved all the way to California, still held promise. Because Western land could no longer

<sup>29</sup>Nicholas J. Karolides, The Pioneer in the American Novel (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), pp. 84-85.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 89-98.

be taken for granted, the Western woman in literature began to be more earth-oriented, representative of man's deep longing for what had been lost with burgeoning technology and growing population. In John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath, the wandering Joads, driven from home, search for the land of promise, the land of milk and honey. The daughter, Rose of Sharon, is as fertile and life-giving as the land they hope to find in California. At the end of the novel, she becomes pure Earth Mother, nourishing the dying, clearly representative of the life forces. Western literature had travelled a full circle; from Pocahontas through the white lilies to Rose of Sharon, a flower of another kind. Yet Western Woman had still failed to achieve an identity of her own. To reach maturity, she would have to be more than representative. From her fertile, dark, intuitive roots, she would have to move toward awareness, maturity, wholeness. Rather than being mere representation, she would have to be human being, aware of herself archetypally, aware of herself as a person.

In no other area of the country was this particular problem of representation rather than maturation more pronounced than in the South. Southern literature has always been distinctly regional, yet always universal. Its mythologies, the mythologies of Man, have unique twists, even unique perversions. Southern society itself is built on myths that have taken distorted shapes, have become almost unrecognizable. Beautiful, monstrous, wonderful and singular, a whole body of myth-patterned thought took shape in a region where earth was all-important. And at the center of this delicate, precarious, bizarre form was a woman, either completely devoid of earth-mother qualities or a woman so fertile

and green as to be more earth than human being; or else the matriarch, who, with age, achieved a powerful, almost genderless state. These classifications are, of course, applicable only to the white woman. The black female's development has been slightly different, as will be discussed in the following chapter of this thesis. But the white woman, whoever she was, was all-important to Southern society, whether she sat quietly, translucent hands folded, or whether she picked cotton like a Black, feet bare. She was the center. And all the hypocrisy, all the beauty, all the hard work in the stinging sun, all the passionate devotion to rich soil and the absolute ownership of land revolved around her. She was a special woman, sometimes precious pet, sometimes whore. But she exerted an encompassing influence. And the literature which bloomed in the lush, sultry, kaleidoscopic South always reflected her influence.

The most curious form of Southern womanhood is portrayed by Edgar Allan Poe, far less a regional writer than William Faulkner, for instance, but far more enmeshed in the idea of the "Southern Lady." Poe, of course, had very personal previsions in his portrayals: his females were ladies, or ghosts, or dark enchantresses, or innocent children. Perhaps Margaret Mitchell's *Scarlett O'Hara* or *Melanie Wilkes* would be the logical example of the Southern Lady, but Poe's characters are far more complex and far more interesting. They are, in fact, the original distortion of the anima archetype carried to an extreme. Whereas the Southern Lady was transformative anima archetype gone hollow, the shell without the vital energy, many of Poe's women are ghouls. Though closely related to death, they are not even real

manifestations of the Terrible Mother, since theirs is death without compensatory life. Whereas the Terrible Mother destroys, and her rites involve blood sacrifices, even she brings regeneration in the end, if only from the blood spilled on the earth. Ligeia is an interesting example. She is powerful, so powerful that she fights her way back from the dead. But she doesn't bring life in death as the Eternal Feminine, Demeter and even Persephone do. Instead, she brings death in life. D. H. Lawrence suggests that the destructive hollowness of Poe's women stems from Poe's overwhelming desire to know his women consciously, to rationalize rather than to feel them<sup>31</sup>--again, a truly American as well as personal problem.

William Faulkner, on the other hand, was clearly aware of the importance of life and fertility in relation to the feminine. Though his female characters are never really human, archetypally they are pure. David M. Miller, in an article in Modern Fiction Studies, makes a general division of Faulkner's women into two categories: ghosts and earth mothers. The ghosts are practically sexless; the earth mothers embody sex itself. As Miller says, "In either case, it is fertility (or lack of it) which forms the characters."<sup>32</sup> The earth mother category ranges from the most obvious in Eula Varner and Lena Grove to the more ethereal, more tragic Caddy Compson. Eula, especially during her early years, is pure earth mother--sedimentary, ouroboric, complete in herself.

<sup>31</sup> Lawrence, p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> David M. Miller, "Faulkner's Women," Modern Fiction Studies, 13 (Spring, 1967), 3.

Her beginning and her end are purely her own existence. Hers is hardly mortal selfishness; she is merely without any need beyond herself. The world slides past her; she sits. And when she does move, it is with the slow, unconcerned movement of the sea--certainly eternal, certainly powerful.

As Faulkner writes in The Hamlet,

Her entire appearance suggested some symbology out of the old Dionysic times--honey in sunlight and bursting grapes, the writhen bleeding of the crushed fecundated vine beneath the hard rapacious trampling goat-hoof. She seemed to be not a living integer of her contemporary scene, but rather to exist in a teeming vacuum in which her days followed one another as though behind a sound-proof glass, where she seemed to listen in sullen bemusement, with a weary wisdom heired of all mammalian maturity, to the enlarging of her organs.<sup>33</sup>

Her outrageously large body suggested some extremely primitive Venus of Willendorf, and the picture of her riding to school each day chewing on her cud--a cold-potato--is actually obscene. Faulkner needs to use no subtlety, since he is portraying, not a woman, but an untempered and therefore grotesque aspect of Woman.

Eula and Lena Grove of Light in August are both beautiful and grotesque--beautiful because of their purity and close connection with the Earth Mother aspect of the female archetype, grotesque because they are not female human beings in their own right. They are only part of what a woman should be, the ouroboric but not the transformative, the archetypal root woman before the initiation process, before becoming

<sup>33</sup>William Faulkner, The Hamlet (New York: Random House, 1940), p. 95.

fully aware of herself and the surrounding world.

Caddy Compson is still another case, far more shadow than monstrosity. One receives glimpses of a real human being here, but the reader is never allowed a look into Caddy's soul. All one sees is shadows. And Faulkner portrays her only through the eyes of the men in her life. For all--Benjy, Quentin, and Jason--she is a measuring rod of their own qualities. Never is she allowed to exist for her own sake. She is damned from the beginning, and, as Catherine Baum says in "The Beautiful One: Caddy Compson as Heroine of The Sound and the Fury," in the end she is damned, like Eula Varner, for having the riches of the world when she was the riches of the land.<sup>34</sup>

On the other side of the coin in Faulkner's novels are the Ghosts, those women whose sexuality has been curtailed, by the war or by personal tragedy. As Mr. Compson says in Absalom, Absalom, "Years ago we in the South made our women into ladies. Then the War came and made the ladies into ghosts."<sup>35</sup> In these cases, the viable force of womanhood has been drained by long misuse, leaving only a very brittle shell. Miss Coldfield, of Absalom, Absalom, whose name suggests lushness gone, not merely fallow, but cold and infertile, is a clear example of this phantom woman. She, too, represents the Southern soil, but its ruined aspects, where all that remains is a faint whiff of green.

<sup>34</sup>Catherine Baum, "The Beautiful One: Caddy Compson as Heroine of The Sound and the Fury," Modern Fiction Studies, 13 (Spring, 1967), 44.

<sup>35</sup>William Faulkner, Absalom, Absalom (New York: Random House, 1936), p. 12.

The most tragic, however, of Faulkner's figures are the modern girls who have no womanhood, whose bodies are thin and flat and dry, temporarily exciting, without consistent, earthy riches. These are the Temple Drakes, beautiful, hard-eyed, sterile. Of all females, they are the most dangerous and the most pitiable. Since these women are most clearly related to the literature of the past few decades, the type will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The literature of the Midwest is curious, because it shows the influences of the American Dream on more fertile land than in the Northeast, and indistinct, because it borrows and joins aspects of Northeastern and Western literature. For instance, Frank Norris, with his The Octopus (1901) and The Pit (1899), deals with the effects of commercialism on the wheat country, the wheat itself being symbolic of fertile America.<sup>36</sup> The events of The Octopus take place in California, but their influences seem more Midwestern, with a peculiar intermingling of money and the market with nature and growth. In this case, the literal geographical location is far less important than the particular attitudes--dominant in the Midwest--affecting the work. Norris' character Hilma Tree is herself symbolic, and embodiment of the land, bearer of children as it bearer of wheat. Out of the strange Midwestern marriage of business and the natural world is born a character who brings calm and mature love in the benevolent framework of married life. Hilma is a significant contrast to one of Norris' earlier characters, Trina, the masochistic wife in MacTeague; with Trina the sexual force is so strongly equated with money that she once actually

<sup>36</sup>Frederick T. Cooper, "Frank Norris' The Octopus," in Studies in the Octopus, comp., Richard Davison (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1969), p. 14.

spreads money on the bed, strips and lies nude on top of the coins.

The major twentieth century writer of the Midwest, Sherwood Anderson, was strongly influenced by Henry Adams,<sup>37</sup> whose theories form part of the basis for this chapter. Anderson is treated last in this chapter, for while clearly American and intensely aware of the peculiar American problem and the particular distortions caused by the American Dream, he was also aware of solutions. Anderson does not see women merely as representations, merely as sentimentalized ideals or purely as reproductive forces. Rather, he sees them as creative forces (Kate Swift of "The Teacher")<sup>38</sup>; as essential parts of the life cycle (rather than merely a sexual force); and as human beings. In "The Egg," an indictment of the American Dream, the father's attempt to force the egg--an obvious dramatic symbol because of its relationship with birth and its cyclical, continuous shape--into a bottle represents "the futility of human attempts to contain or subdue the primal organic forces of nature."<sup>39</sup> At the end of the story, the father takes the egg upstairs, meaning to destroy it, but when "he got into the presence of mother something happened to him. He laid the egg gently on the table and dropped on his knees by the bed as I have already explained."<sup>40</sup> After the struggle to subdue and distort has been abandoned, there is calm.

<sup>37</sup>Rex Burbank, "The Artist as Prophet," Sherwood Anderson: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed., Walter B. Rideout (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), p. 71.

<sup>38</sup>Chris Browning, "Kate Swift: Sherwood Anderson's Creative Eros," Studies in Winesburg, Ohio, Charles E. Merrill Studies, ed., Mathew J. Bruccoli and Joseph Katz (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1971).

<sup>39</sup>Benjamin T. Spencer, "Sherwood Anderson: American Mythopoeist," Sherwood Anderson: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 161.

<sup>40</sup>Sherwood Anderson, "The Egg," The Portable Sherwood Anderson, ed., Horace Gregory (New York: The Viking Press, 1949), p. 462.

The most significant of Anderson's figures, however, is old Mrs. Grimes of "Death in the Woods," feeder of dogs and men, a frail, tragic, strangely beautiful figure. Though she herself never undergoes the initiation process, dying as she has lived, merely a nourisher of others, her effect on the narrator is significant. When her body is found, she seems almost young, beautiful, lying in the snow, with the tracks of dogs in a circle around her. What she symbolizes is unity and wholeness: old age and youth, life and death, beauty and ugliness. As Jon Lawry shows in his article "Death in the Woods and the Artist's Self in Sherwood Anderson," "He [the narrator] had not known relationship and meaning; he had not known that his seeing the dead woman in the snow was no mere event, but rather definition for of the mystery and beauty of woman. The creation of the woman's story, the discovery (through sympathy and communion) of her self, lead him into whole recognition of his being."<sup>41</sup> Anderson has established a new initiation route for the American male: discovering the feminine archetype, incorporating its meaning into his own psyche and, in turn, discovering his own place in the cycle of life and thereby reaching maturity. How different is the transformative quality of the old woman from that of the Dream's white princess.

Anderson's stressing of unity and an interaction between the male and female, leading to awareness and maturity, is a major step in the archetypal development of the American woman. From the basic myth of America as Eden, the feminine archetype, distorted by mischanneled

<sup>41</sup>Jon Lawry, "Death in the Woods and the Artist's Self in Sherwood Anderson," Sherwood Anderson: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 123.

longings and ideals, emerged half-formed and incomplete--as Earth Mother alone, as anima devoid of any actual force--until, in the stories of Sherwood Anderson, she at last became a force to be reckoned with in the true initiation of the American male. It would take the frustration of the twentieth century, its increased emphasis on the psychological, to spur further development. The American woman has yet to reach her own initiation, to come to terms with her own archetypal essence and her own humanity.

CHAPTER IV  
VARIATIONS AND MEANING OF THE ARCHETYPE  
IN TWENTIETH CENTURY LITERATURE

The twentieth century American woman has not always been either lovely or lovable--even to herself. Struggling to discard false roles, she has often fallen or forced herself into other roles, equally false, even less attractive. She has been angry bitch, devouring Mom, passionate revolutionary, all-electric-kitchen housewife, suffering artist, promiscuous wife. On the individual level, she has had her personal uncertainties and her personal triumphs; on the collective level, her uncertainties have grown increasingly large and have given difficult, though triumphant birth, to awareness, if not to complete resolution. But the process has been painful. The literature which has recorded this birth reeks of violence, insanity, suicide and frustrated sexuality. It also hints of promise.

One of its most promising aspects is the increased number of talented female writers in America. Until the twentieth century, such writers were relatively few and relatively minor. The reason for this increase is partly social, of course; social change and revolution have helped shape much of twentieth century literature. But the reason is also psychological, emerging from a new awareness of longings, frustrations, desires and dreams that are no longer received second-hand. Rather than merely representing, the American woman has begun to exist for her own sake. Simone de Beauvoir, in The Second Sex, noticed earlier in the century that "They [women] have no religion or poetry of their own:

they still dream through the dreams of men."<sup>1</sup> Or, as one of the women in M. Pabst Battin's "The Sisters" says to her husband, "But when you [men] sleep beside us through the night you bring also your dreams, and in the warm close intimacy of the dark you ask us to share in these dreams. Your man's warmth beside us through the night is the thing we most desire, and yet we cannot have it, for it gives us fearful nightmares that are not truly ours."<sup>2</sup> The women writers of the twentieth century--Anais Nin, Joyce Carol Oates, Anne Sexton, Sylvia Plath, Lorraine Hansberry and others--have at least exposed this dreamlessness and have, at times, even attempted to fill the gap. They, and American women as a whole, becoming slowly aware of a certain hollowness, have begun the search for their own dreams, their own Selfhood.

The overthrowing of old ideas and false identities has caused confusion, and has often twisted the dreams into nightmares more terrifying, at least on the surface, than the American Dream at its most disillusioning. Sometimes the adjusting of perspectives has completely destroyed balance. Even among the female writers themselves, whose literature will be emphasized here, there has been either great unhappiness or great achievement, sometimes both. And the female characters or personae of twentieth century American fiction and poetry have seldom been beautiful or even satisfactory. They have, however, been increasingly human. To understand these changes and their

<sup>1</sup>Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans., H. M. Parshley (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1961), p. 132.

<sup>2</sup>M. Pabst Battin, "The Sisters" in Bitches and Sad Ladies: An Anthology of Fiction by and about Women (Harper's Magazine Press, 1975), p. 335.

significance, we must trace the appearance of five major divisions or distortions of the feminine archetype, apparent in and peculiar to the twentieth century: 1) the Great American Bitch (Earth Mother becomes Terrible Mother out of frustration with weakness and sterility, her own and the American male's); 2) the Lost Woman (the wanderer, following an illusory sexual quest in her attempt to find her identity); 3) the Counterfeit Married Woman (the woman trapped by a marriage that can never be real union); 4) the Artist or Artist-Revolutionary (both white and black women, reaching outside of themselves in an attempt to become whole); and 5) the Dead Woman (the woman surviving, but no longer feeling, loving, giving). These types may seem at first more tragic than the more innocuous types discussed in the last chapter. But exploring why they have appeared and to what point they may finally be moving may reveal the promise of a healthier future for both the American woman and the American man.

In preparation for this study, we must backtrack and look at Kate Chopin, one of the few really significant women writers of the nineteenth century, a woman whose major work was condemned because of its frank, surprisingly objective portrayal of a woman's desperate attempt to find and keep herself. The Awakening, Mrs. Chopin's last and most important work--almost prophetic in its anticipation of the twentieth century--was published in 1899, in itself a significant date. As Larzer Ziff says in The American 1890's: Life and Times of a Lost Generation, "On the very eve of the twentieth century," the novel

"raised the question of what woman was to do with the freedom she struggled toward."<sup>3</sup>

The book traces the "awakening" of Edna Pontellier, a Southern woman from Mississippi who has married into Creole society. Edna is an introverted woman, sensitive and intelligent, but not domestic. Because of her sheltered, almost Puritanical background, she feels out of place among the Creole women, who are frankly sexual, but singularly chaste. As the book opens, she is spending the summer at Grand Isle and often watches the women around her, whose identity is inseparable from children, husband, family:

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their husbands and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.<sup>4</sup>

Ironically, Edna's best friend, Madame Ratignolle, is the epitome of the Creole wife and mother, with full-blooming body, healthy beauty and a somewhat suspicious tendency towards fainting. When she witnesses Madame Ratignolle giving birth at the end of the novel, Edna decides to commit suicide, to drown herself to escape the motherhood role she sees as otherwise inevitable and which she believes to have been forced upon

<sup>3</sup>Larzer Ziff, The American 1890's: Life and Times of a Lost Generation (New York: The Viking Press, 1966), p. 304.

<sup>4</sup>Kate Chopin, The Awakening in The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, ed., Per Seyersted (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 888.

her by her husband and children.

During the course of the novel, desire has awakened in Edna because of her love for young Robert Lebrun, the perfect gentleman, who believes in flirting with married women, but who goes to Mexico rather than consummate his illicit affair with Edna. Robert gone, Edna is forced to turn to the less gentlemanly Alcee Arobin for at least half of the fulfillment she seeks. But he can only satisfy physical desire; he cannot give her love, so she is left fragmented and dissatisfied. As Joan Zlotnick says in "A Woman's Well: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood and Motherhood," Edna commits suicide because "She cannot reconcile the demands of body and soul, a soul which does not draw her towards God or religion, but to Robert Lebrun. As she approaches death, Edna experiences what life has withheld from her: concurrent physical and spiritual satisfaction in the embrace of the sea."<sup>5</sup>

The basis of the problem, however, is more complex than mere reconciliation of the physical and spiritual. As Mrs. Chopin says, "In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight--perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman."<sup>6</sup> Social pressures and physical frustration play a role in Edna's demise, but it is her own psychological

<sup>5</sup>Joan Zlotnick, "A Woman's Well: Kate Chopin on Selfhood, Wifehood, and Motherhood," The Markham Review, 3 (1968), [4].

<sup>6</sup>Chopin, p. 893.

longings, her own dissatisfaction, her own fragmentation which drive her back to the womb, her archetypal roots, as signified by the sea. Edna is not so much afraid of motherhood as she is afraid of being limited to that single part of herself. During her most restless period, after Robert has left for Mexico, she turns half-heartedly to a neglected aspect of her personality, the creative, and takes up sketching, which also fails to satisfy her. She cannot seem to make of herself an integrated human being. In her search for freedom, she tears herself away from important aspects of herself, fearing to be tied or limited by them. Because she cannot discover or shape a complete Edna, she wants to lose herself again and sink into a forgetfulness more profound than the unawareness she began with. At one point, while swimming, she "seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself."<sup>7</sup> Her fascination with the sea, source of both life and death, is not in itself dangerous; her self-destructiveness lies in her running away, her unwillingness to remain awake by being aware of her own frustrations, perhaps at last being able to come to terms with all aspects of herself. Whether or not there might have been a different, happier resolution, however, is unclear. As Kenneth M. Rosen says in "Kate Chopin's The Awakening: Ambiguity as Art," the novel "gives no definite answers because the function of myth is to present that which is universally complex and which rarely lends itself to resolution."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Chopin, p. 908.

<sup>8</sup>Kenneth M. Rosen, "Kate Chopin's The Awakening: Ambiguity as Art," Journal of American Studies, 5 (1972), 198.

This lack of resolution is in itself important, for it indicates a certain sincerity or truth in the novel. Mrs. Chopin, decades before other writers were to become deeply aware of this particular problem, presented frustrated women and their "shaking off of restraints to become what as women they actually are rather than what a man-managed society expects them to be: beneath the restraint there exists a questing animal."<sup>9</sup> Mrs. Chopin suffered for her insight, however; because she failed finally to condemn Edna's adultery and apparent self-centeredness, society condemned her and her work to the point where her literary career was terminated. As Larzer Ziff says, "She was alive when the twentieth century began, but she had been struck mute by a society fearful in the face of an uncertain dawn."<sup>10</sup> Several decades were to elapse before another woman author would reopen the subject and continue tracing the painful awakening of the American woman.

In the meantime, old distortions persisted, shifted slightly, took new, even more distorted forms. The first three decades of the twentieth century were loud with scathing indictments of the American woman, many uncomfortably true. In general, and on the surface, she seemed empty, hollow, frustrated, strident and devouring. Her illusory softness had disappeared, and she was Fitzgerald's Daisy Buchanan, dressed in white but possessing a Circe-like attraction or

<sup>9</sup>Lewis Leary, Southern Excursions: Essays on Mark Twain and Others (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), p. 167.

<sup>10</sup>Ziff, p. 304.

else she was blatant siren with thin, hard body and bright lips or else she was what D. H. Lawrence spoke of with abhorrence as the educated woman: "Alas, she was an American heroine. She was an educated woman. She knew all about ideals. She swallowed the ideal of equality with her first mouthful of knowledge. Alas for her and that apple of Sodom that looked so rosy. Alas for all her knowing."<sup>11</sup> Alas, indeed, for naivete that became sophistication rather than wisdom. But Lawrence's invective is not quite accurate. The American woman was not heroine; she was bitch, at least to those who did not understand and were afraid of her. Like anyone first becoming aware of his poverty, the American woman found her new half-knowledge painful. Knowing that what she had been before was sham, she looked desperately for what she should be. Uncertain and frustrated, she became angry and self-centered and, sometimes, destructive.

Because men, too, were floundering in a twentieth century world that seem chaotic and confusing, male and female needed each other even more strongly than before, but, having lost touch with themselves, they had also lost touch with each other. Thus they fought and badgered in an attempt to regain control of the situation. Strangely, it is what appears to be the ugliest of masks worn by the American woman, born of this twentieth century frustration, which comes closest to the Universal Feminine and to humanity. The Great American Bitch, almost an institution now, is the Great Mother become Terrible Mother out of sheer desperation. She may drive men crazy, but only because she is half-crazy

<sup>11</sup>D. H. Lawrence, Studies in Classic American Literature (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), p. 34.

herself in a confusing world. The responsibility for bolstering and strengthening her men seems to be on her shoulders, so, backed against the wall, she literally fights tooth and nail for his soul. Her seductions are not to draw power from, but to force men to rediscover their own power. Her only weapons are her tongue and her body, so she uses these at every opportunity.

Ernest Hemingway and Edward Albee draw the most striking portraits of her. Hemingway's Brett Ashley of The Sun Also Rises is, of course, the classic example. Here the woman is in love with the man who is physically as well as spiritually impotent. Driven by frustration and a sexuality without outlet, she seduces every man around her. Hers is a hopeless bitchery, for there is no chance that she will be successful in any attempt to cure impotence. Her desperate run ends with a 19-year-old matador, for whom Brett really cares. But she has lost her essence by now, and, realizing she can only destroy, she sends her matador away. At the end of the book, she tells Jake, "You know, it makes one feel rather good deciding not to be a bitch . . . . It's sort of what we have instead of God."<sup>12</sup>

A less obvious, but perhaps more true-to-life depiction appears in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." Margot Macomber is apparently a beautiful vicious bitch with no conception of and certainly no sympathy with her husband's internal struggle. She seems to covet power over her husband, to want to keep him incompetent and emasculated. She flagrantly pursues the "man," the great white hunter, obviously anxious for her husband to be aware of her sexual

<sup>12</sup>Ernest Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), p. 245.

infidelity. In the end, when Francis supposedly regains his masculinity by learning to kill, she shoots him. Out of fear? It certainly seems so.

But the discerning reader will detect false notes. There are moments in the story when she seems greatly hurt by what she sees in her husband. Then she will go away for awhile and return with her mask firmly in place, and she will smile and smile and flaunt her sexuality and harass her husband. It seems entirely possible that the true explanation of her actions is far more subtle than might be expected. She could be trying to force her man into a realization of a kind of manhood far superior to that which Robert Wilson possesses, a kind in which there is tenderness and compassion. It could well be that she loves him, that his helplessness is a great pain to her, and that, in her own way, she is doing her best to help. If nothing else, she believes, seeing her with another man will arouse some strong and honest reaction. But it does not. Only the killer instinct does. And the kind of man that Margot struggles to bring out in Francis is submerged more deeply than before.

Hemingway himself was probably unaware of the full significance of his two women, for he hated them both. Entirely different is Edward Albee, who treats his magnificent bitch, Martha of Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?, with a great deal of understanding. Martha is certainly Earth Mother turned Terrible Mother. The former label she even applies to herself. She is larger than life, with great, fertile breasts and hips. She exudes an animal magnetism. But George, her husband, although he has real potential for power, has grown slack. Martha rages against

what seems to be loss of that force they both need to be fulfilled.

Forrest E. Hazard in "The Major Theme in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" writes that the play "asserts that the feminine principle-- i.e., the physical universe, its natural operations and tendencies-- yearns to be mastered by the masculine principle--i.e., the civilizing force of rational intelligence so that she may shed her fierce, rude exterior and bloom like a garden under his firm but loving hand."<sup>13</sup> From the fusion of the symbolic male and female principles, Hazard continues, emerge progress and the greatest attainments of civilization.

In a sense, Hazard is correct. Martha is striving for a fusion between the rational and the sensual, between male and female. But what she wants is not to be mastered, but to be strengthened with her husband's strength, while, in turn, making him strong. The true marriage. The true partnership. Separate and integrally connected roles being fulfilled to their capacity. In the end, Martha's bitchery is as futile as that of both Brett and Margot. When the imaginary son, who is Martha's rebirth principle, dies, her own fiercely blooming womanhood pales, too. The play does not end as well as Forrest Hazard seems to believe. The perfect union is never achieved.

Though perhaps the most repugnant type of all to those who see only results and never seek to understand causes, the bitch, nevertheless, has more force and humanity than any preceding type. Frustration in itself is a sign of life. And, as Pat Rotter says in her introduction to Bitches and Sad Ladies: An Anthology of Fiction By and About

<sup>13</sup>Forrest E. Hazard, "The Major Theme in Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" CEA Critic, 31 (1968), 11.

Women, the bitch's anger is often healthy:

Most women have been conditioned from childhood to swallow their anger, but if a sad lady is going to learn to value herself she must accept and learn to deal with her feelings of anger instead of masochistically turning them against herself. It is not only acceptable but often very useful for a woman to be angry at the man she loves, the parents she loves, the child she loves. It helps free her from someone else's definition, and sets standards within the relationship.<sup>14</sup>

It is certainly discouraging when no apparent good comes of this release of frustrations, but the hurt and frustrations are beneficial in themselves, for they are undeniable indications of life.

Far more dangerous, at least to herself, is the second type, the Lost Woman, who wanders from sexual relationship to sexual relationship, hoping in this manner to find herself. Such emphasis on the purely physical is dangerously illusory, since sensuality and the life forces are certainly a vital aspect of woman's identity. But there is a grave difference between sexual relationships without commitment and a union that takes place on a variety of levels: the physical, the emotional, even the archetypal. One leaves the lover only more hungry and more frustrated; the other is a vital step in the overall initiation process. Sex, especially violent sex, or sex that results in deterioration of the mind, is a part of much twentieth century woman's literature. Because honesty and real participation in this area have been denied her so long, the woman turns to open or illicit or even perverted sexuality as

<sup>14</sup>Pat Rotter, Bitches and Sad Ladies: An Anthology of Fiction By and About Women, introduction, p. viii.

the key to her freedom, her humanity. "But it is not sexuality which will free the sad lady," says Pat Kotter, "more often it will imprison her . . . ."15 Frustrated by the finally obvious hopelessness of this "sexual quest," the Lost Woman will completely give up the real initiation journey, will kill herself either literally or symbolically (Edna Pontellier) or will return to a state of animalism or semi-consciousness (Robin Vote of Djuna Barnes' Nightwood).

The literature of the twentieth century Lost Woman began early, in the 1930's, and has continued into the 1970's. In 1937, Djuna Barnes published Nightwood, a richly poetic novel which Ulrich Weisstein, in his article, "Beast, Doll, and Woman: Djuna Barnes' Human Bestiary," describes as "baroque."<sup>16</sup> The dream-like atmosphere of the novel is important, for it helps reveal one of the book's essential purposes: to trace, on the deepest symbolic level, a particular woman's failure to become a human being. The woman is Robin Vote, who moves halfway between the animal or natural world and the world of human beings, never fully able to relate to either until the last chapter, when she finally discards all attempts to become fully human. When we first see Robin, she is being brought back to consciousness in a hotel room where she has fainted. Our method of meeting her is in itself meaningful: "It is significant that we first meet Robin--la somnabule, the sleepwalker--when she is being awakened; before that moment, we have no knowledge of

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>16</sup>Ulrich Weisstein, "Beast, Doll, and Woman: Djuna Barnes' Human Bestiary," Renaissance, 15 (Fall, 1962), 4.

of her life. Her life might be said to begin with that moment, and the act of awakening to be, symbolically, the act of birth."<sup>17</sup> Robin is not, however, prepared for the world onto which she opens her eyes. She marries, has a child, feels trapped and, desperate, flees, finally entering into relationships with women, two of whom are important here. The first is Nora Flood, a woman who shelters and cares for the world. The second is Jenny Petherbridge, who most enjoys what she takes second-hand, love included. Robin ultimately leaves them both, first Nora for Jenny, then Jenny to return to her essential wildness and animality.

The total meaning of the book is difficult to determine, but as Weisstein says, "Little doubt remains that in Djuna Barnes' novel, the normal functions of man and woman have been perverted."<sup>18</sup> The central male figure of the novel, Dr. O'Connor, is homosexual, and the central female figures are Lesbians. But sexuality is not really the basic issue here. The central issues are human identity and human relationships. The Lesbianism and homosexuality are both symbolic. Dr. O'Connor is torn between manhood and womanhood, but, on another level, embodies all the world's wisdom, of all ages and times, of both sexes. Robin is torn between her animal and her human natures; she is the woman half-asleep, who has not and cannot undergo full initiation. The room in which we first see her "being born" is as close to the natural

<sup>17</sup>Joseph Frank, "Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Three Parts," pt. 2, Sewanee Review, 53 (1945), 440.

<sup>18</sup>Weisstein, p. 11.

world as she can make it. She is "surrounded by a confusion of potted plants, exotic palms and cut flowers, faintly oversung by the notes of unseen birds . . . ." <sup>19</sup> At this same time, Felix, her future husband, sees her and is disquieted, for she seems to him to be "beast turning human." <sup>20</sup> She even smells to him like the natural world:

The perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry, overcast with the odour of oil of amber, which is an inner malady of the sea, making her seem as if she had invaded a sleep incautious and entire. Her flesh was the texture of plant life, and beneath it one senses a frame, broad, porous and sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay fishing her beneath the visible surface." <sup>21</sup>

His vision of her is purely archetypal: "Such a person's every movement will reduce to an image of a forgotten experience; a mirage of an eternal wedding cast on the racial memory . . . ." <sup>22</sup> This very primal, natural quality in Robin is the source of her problem. Though she is, in many ways, self contained and egotistical, she is only half-awake, incomplete, fragmented, uncertain of her own human identity.

Robin's relationships with Nora and Jenny--like many Lesbian relationships in literature--is symbolic. On the symbolic level, loving another woman is a way of finding oneself, like looking into a

<sup>19</sup>Djuna Barnes, Nightwood (New York: New Directions, 1937), p. 34.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

mirror.<sup>23</sup> For Nora, the relationship parallels that of mother and child, for Nora is the maternal aspect of Woman. She is an untempered giver, to such an extreme degree that she betrays, rather than fulfills, herself:

Nora had the face of all people who love the people-- a face that would be evil when she found out that to love without criticism is to be betrayed. Nora robbed herself for everyone; incapable of giving herself without warning, she was continually turning about to find herself diminished. Wandering people the world over found her profitable in that she could be sold for a price forever, for she carried her betrayal money in her own pocket.<sup>24</sup>

Jenny, on the other hand, lacks even the tragic beauty of Robin and Nora. Barnes describes her as "the squatter," one who takes life second-hand. She even wears someone else's wedding ring. She is the woman with no identity of her own at all, a "vampire," as Weisstein calls her, who loves others only to "suck their blood and steal their identities."<sup>25</sup>

As in The Awakening, there is no satisfactory resolution at the end of the novel. We at last see Nora and Jenny alone, Robin returning to a completely animalistic state, on all fours, communicating with barks and growls to Nora's dog. Like Edna Pontellier, she has allowed herself to be defeated in the frustrating process of initiation. She has died to her complete feminine identity and thus to her humanity.

<sup>23</sup>Weisstein, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup>Barnes, pp. 51-52.

<sup>25</sup>Weisstein, p. 9.

Two decades later, during the 1950's, another woman writer, Anaïs Nin, wrote of similar lost women in a series of poetic novels and short stories. Nin's major female characters--Sabina, Djuna, Lillian, Jeanne and Stella--appear intermittently in all of the works, coupling, recoupling, alone or searching for identity in the mind or body of another, male or female. In the novel most clearly expressing her major theme, The House of Incest, published in 1958, Nin depicts a "series of psychological tortures," all different, but each "conceived as having the same source: an incapacity to love fully and freely. The incapacity in turn is the result of self-engrossment, of a failure to transcend the narcissistic and homosexual elements which, the author believes, are characteristic of immature emotional relationships."<sup>26</sup> Mature relationships, on the contrary, are based on a reaching outward, a giving, a realization of one's self in union with and separate from the other. In the first chapter, the unnamed female narrator begins, "My first vision of earth was water-veiled,"<sup>27</sup> and ends, "I awoke at dawn, thrown up on a rock, the skeleton of a ship choked in its own sails."<sup>28</sup> As Oliver Evans explains in his study, Anaïs Nin, this mention of water and being cast from water is archetypal and "refers to the separation of the individual soul from the universal soul, to resume its independent identity . . . ."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Oliver Evans, Anaïs Nin (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Anaïs Nin, House of Incest (Chicago: The Swallow Press, Inc., 1958), p. 15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Evans, p. 29.

The first of the narcissistic relationships described is the narrator's affair with another woman, Sabina; again, as in Barnes' work, the Lesbianism is symbolic. Emerging from the unconscious to begin her initiation journey, the narrator looks for herself in the face, body and mind of another woman. As Evans explains,

The narrator sees, or imagines that she sees, in Sabina the other half of herself, and thinks that through union with her she can achieve wholeness. In reality, however, she is not in love with Sabina, but with herself; even the desire to be joined to her complement represents a form of self-love, and the wholeness that she imagines might result from this is not a real wholeness.<sup>30</sup>

The two are not only human beings; they are symbolic of aspects of Woman--Sabina, the predatory Terrible Mother; the narrator, the Earth Mother.<sup>31</sup> Sabina wears a black cape, heavy steel jewelry, is a lover of darkness. As the narrator says, "She was an idol in Byzance, an idol dancing with legs parted; and I wrote with pollen and honey."<sup>32</sup> To emphasize their symbolic quality, the author uses sun/moon imagery: "The narrator is associated with the sun (a fertility symbol) and with warmth generally, while Sabina is associated with the moon--beautiful, but barren and cold--and is described in a series of steel images, testimony at once of her coldness, her invulnerability, and her destructive power."<sup>33</sup> At the end of this chapter, the narrator is again alone; we are not told what has finally separated the two women, but the failure of this self-destructive, narcissistic love is in itself

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>32</sup>Nin, p. 22.

<sup>33</sup>Evans, p. 31.

important. What we see is unhappiness, frustration and, in the narrator's words, "The too clear pain of love divided, love divided . . . ,"<sup>34</sup> all caused by the illusory sexual quest.

The next brief chapter is a sinking back into the unconscious. "I am floating again,"<sup>35</sup> says the narrator, lost in uncertainty and solitude. After this brief interim, another destructive relationship is described, this time between Jeanne and her brother. This incestuous, self-love affair is never consummated; it brings only pain. As Jeanne tells the narrator, "I kissed his shadow and this kiss did not touch him, this kiss was lost in the air and melted with the shadow. Our love of each other is like one shadow kissing, without hope of reality."<sup>36</sup> Again, the woman fails to find what she is seeking--a union that will bring wholeness.

In her earlier book, A Spy in the House of Love (1954), Nin also introduces us to Sabina. But this Sabina is different. Rather than being predatory, she is lost, assuming mask after mask, lover after lover. This Sabina is literally and symbolically an actress, a weaver of lies because she knows no truth in herself. Married to a man she loves and who trusts her, asking no questions, she still feels compelled to look for fulfillment in illicit affairs. Her husband, Alan, does not really know her; he sees in her what he wishes to see, and she fosters his illusions. Returning home after being with another man--having told

<sup>34</sup>Nin, p. 33.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

Alan she was working in a play--she feels "impelled by a force outside of herself to be the woman he demands, desires and creates. Whatever he says of her, about her, she will fulfill. She no longer feels responsibility for what she has been. There is a modification of her face and body, of her attitudes and her voice. She has become the woman Alan loves."<sup>37</sup> This shifting of identities, this uncertainty, this desperation that leads Sabina from bed to bed, creates in her a peculiar excitement, a fiery quality that associates her again with the Terrible Mother. The first time the lie detector (who symbolizes Sabina's guilt feelings, constantly following her) sees her, he thinks, "everything will burn!"<sup>38</sup>

Sabina's basic problem is fear of giving herself and fear of needing. What she gives Alan is a mask or facade. What she brings to other men is her desire of conquest. She wants to be like a man (or what she considers to be like a man)--able to love without surrender, to walk away of her own free will and without regrets. Even the cape she wears symbolizes this desire: "Also the cape had within its folds something of what she imagined was a quality possessed exclusively by man: some dash, some audacity, some swagger of freedom denied to a woman."<sup>39</sup> Her sexual exploits are her way of pursuing this freedom. But as Pat Rotter suggests will inevitably happen to the woman seeking identity through sexuality, she is ultimately trapped by her own quest:

<sup>37</sup>Anais Nin, A Spy in the House of Love (New York: British Book Centre, Inc., 1954), p. 107.

<sup>38</sup>Nin, A Spy in the House of Love, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

She felt lost. The dispersion had become too vast, **too extended**. A shaft of pain cut through the nebulous pattern, Sabina had always moved so fast that all pain had passed swiftly as through a sieve leaving a sorrow like children's sorrows, soon forgotten, soon replaced by another interest. She had never known a pause . . . . She had lost herself along the frontier between her inventions, her stories, her fantasies and her own true self. The boundaries had become effaced, the tracks lost; she had walked into **pure chaos, and not a chaos which** carried her like the galloping of romantic riders in operas and legends, but which suddenly revealed the stage props: a papier mache horse.<sup>40</sup>

Ladders to Fire (1959) traces the relationship and interrelationships of Sabina, pianist Lillian, and dancer Djuna. As in her other works, Nin uses sex as a symbol, an urge for union or freedom rather than a desire for pleasure. The first of these interrelationships is between earthy, full-bodied, but **self-deprecatory** Lillian and Djuna, who is everything Lillian is not--fragile, graceful, unmistakably feminine. Djuna, born into poverty, has compensated for her painful childhood by becoming the world's lover:

While wearing the costume of utter femininity, the veils and the combs, the gloves and the perfumes, the muffs and the heels of femininity, she nevertheless disguised in herself an active lover of the world, the one who was actively roused by the object of his love, the one who was made strong as a man is made strong in the center of his being by the softness of his love. Loving, in man and woman not their strength, but their softness, not their fullness but their hunger, not their plenitude but their needs.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>41</sup>Anais Nin, Ladders to Fire (Chicago: The Swallow Press, 1959), p. 36.

Djuna is also the only woman in the novel able to be friends with both male and female. She is a stabilizing force in this particular work, close to what the integrated woman should be, though in an earlier novelette, Winter of Artifice, Nin describes Djuna's narcissistic, self-love relationship with her father. Djuna is hurt, too, by her role as the one-who-understands, for all characters in the book--including the man Jay--fix their identities by her compass. She feels as though the others view her as something more than woman. For Lillian, Djuna is the ideal, the self she wants to become, the person she wants to possess. The affair is not physical; there is no sexual act. But Lillian tries desperately to absorb the other woman, watching the way she walks, fingering the exquisitely feminine clothes she wears and "by wearing Djuna's feminine exterior, swaying her hips, becoming Djuna."<sup>42</sup>

Whereas with Djuna, Lillian is the child, with Jay, Lillian's next love, she becomes the mother. Abandoning her other borrowed identity, Lillian feels a new sentiment: "This passion warmer, stronger than the other passion, annihilating desire and becoming the desire, a boundless passion to surround, envelop, sustain, strengthen, uphold, to answer all needs."<sup>43</sup> By filling this one need so completely in Jay, however, Lillian leaves unfulfilled his other needs. And because she knows this lack, she is constantly jealous and afraid.

When her one real rival, Sabina, does enter the picture, however, she is caught in a web more complex than any she has dreamed of. Jay

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

and Sabina outwardly hate each other, inwardly desire each other because they are so much alike. Sabina and Lillian are also attracted to each other, Lillian believing that she sees in Sabina what she herself, again, wants to become. "You act as I would act if I had the courage,"<sup>44</sup> Lillian tells Sabina. The two women enter into a relationship that is never fully consummated, for, when they embrace, Lillian realizes that Sabina is really embracing Jay. This many-sided relationship is the most painfully complex of all that Nin depicts in her novels. None of the three characters is able to really love, for they love only themselves--or what they wish to be--in others.

In her own essays, Anais Nin claimed a level of reality more important, more vital than that revealed in what is usually called "realistic" fiction.<sup>45</sup> In all her of her works, Nin is concerned with this internal, deeply psychological, sometimes archetypal reality. Her major theme is, as Oliver Evans says, "rebellion and incompleteness in women."<sup>46</sup> Her characters are desperate, searching and lonely, and their sensuality is more than physical. It stems from total desire, total longing, total frustration.

The literature of Barnes and Nin deals most specifically with the Lost Woman's sexual quest, but the theme has reappeared again and again in women's literature, into the seventies. Isadora Wing, for instance, in Erica Jong's Fear of Flying (1973), leaves her husband

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>45</sup>Evans, p. 194.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

to seek fulfillment with other men, only to return to her husband at the end of the novel. In this case, the marriage relationship may be unsatisfactory, but the restless wandering from man to man, from bed to bed, is even more so.

Most women writers of the twentieth century agree on one point: that marriage for a woman, and usually for a man, often leads to frustration and unhappiness. Sometimes the married woman will attempt suicide; sometimes she will seek fulfillment in extra-marital affairs; and sometimes, as in Alix Kate Shulman's popular novel Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen, the woman who has married a dream and has found the dream illusory will turn away from marriage, give up on the relationship completely, and walk into a future that promises little but escape. Marriage and the typical marriage relationship, say many of these writers, is a nightmare bred and fostered by society. As Sasha, the ex-prom queen, realizes, "It was all there in black and white in all the text I had ever studied. Baybury boys are taught it is weak to need a woman, as girls are taught it is their strength to win a man."<sup>47</sup> Shulman's book, however, only touches upon the truth; its appeal is mainly for those anxious to find an easy scapegoat in man. The truth is that marriage is a series of frustrations for individuals who do not have themselves to give, who either fear and refuse union or who forget the the importance of simultaneously being a separate individual. For the woman, especially, marriage must be two-fold: she must know herself, and

<sup>47</sup>Alix Kate Shulman, Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen (New York: Bantam Books, 1973), p. 293.

she must give; through giving with awareness of her own separateness, she completes the process of becoming a fully integrated human being.

The process seems fairly simple, but it obviously is not, considering the number of failures we see around us each day and which we see in literature. One of the major writers of the twentieth century, Joyce Carol Oates, depicts in her literature such failure carried to an extreme. Lack of love, unhappy marriages, extra-marital affairs and a lack of identity often lead to insanity or violence. Reading too much of Oates at once can, in fact, be almost unbearable. As Walter Sullivan says in "The Artificial Demon: Joyce Carol Oates and the Dimensions of the Real," the author's consistently depressing pattern may even get monotonous: "I do get a terrible sense of futility, not to mention deja vu watching pair after pair of her characters degenerate into insanity and the shedding of blood."<sup>48</sup> Yet it is obvious that Oates' extremes fulfill a definite purpose. As Sullivan continues, Oates' world is not reality, nor is it intended to be. "She is saying," explains Sullivan, "that we are all crazy to one degree or another, and in taking this position, she puts herself in agreement with much modern psychology and even judicial theory. There are no longer the good and the evil among us, but merely the sick and the well."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Walter Sullivan, "The Artificial Demon: Joyce Carol Oates and the Dimensions of the Real," The Hollins Critic, 9 (Dec., 1972), 11.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

Sullivan's statement is perceptive, but perhaps not completely accurate. Again, we must remember that Oates writes novels of extremes. Where many of us are troubled, Oates' characters are emotionally disturbed; where many of us become angry or frustrated, Oates' characters commit murder; where to many of us marriage may be disappointing, to many of Oates' characters, marriage is shattering. By ballooning, exaggerating human characteristics and human problems to grotesque proportions, Oates makes us sit up and take notice.

Wonderland (1971) is a conglomeration of disturbing elements--the American Dream becoming nightmare, father murdering family, daughter fearing father and, most of all, men and women hating, fighting, murdering, hurting, misunderstanding each other. The central character of the novel is Jesse Vogel, but it is the women in Jesse's life--mother, girlfriend, wife, lover and daughter--who are especially significant to this study. Book One of Wonderland--"Variations on an American Hymn"--presents a marriage filled with a special kind of frustration. Jesse's parents are very poor; they have four children and a fifth on the way. The father is haunted by his failure to provide, his inability to attain the American Dream of success, and, most of all, by the fact that he is a family-man, trapped. He spends more and more time walking alone in the woods during long, sleepless nights. His wife is a tired, once-beautiful woman. The two are separated by their own weariness and the inability of each to understand or share with the other. Reaching his breaking point, the father shoots every member of the family--except Jesse, who escapes--and then kills himself.

Opening the novel in this manner enables Oates to set the stage for the tragedy of Jesse's own marriage to Helen, years after his adoption by a wealthy family and his becoming a doctor. For Jesse, the marriage is unsatisfying, painful. But for Helen, the failure of her marriage is the failure of herself:

She had married him but she did not know him. She had thought that marriage would be the beginning of her life; she had had a long life as a daughter, a famous man's daughter, and she had been eager to begin her real life. She would be a woman, womanly and fulfilled. A wife. But this had not come about . . . . And then, puzzled, she had believed that the birth of her first child would fulfill her. So much apprehension and pain and joy . . . . But the birth had left her exhausted and at a distance from herself, from her own body. Her baby had overwhelmed her. She was ashamed of herself and it occurred to her that she must have another baby, another baby to make her normal, a real woman. But after the second baby nothing was different. She felt a final, terrible certainty about her strangeness: she would never become a real woman.<sup>50</sup>

Helen's first pregnancy is described as a horrifying experience. She is resentful, afraid, feels dirty and unclean. She wants to abort the child, kill herself, sit in a tub of constantly running hot water to cleanse herself. She wants, in fact, to be sterile.

Throughout the book, there are perverted relationships. Always there is tension, fear, resentment between the sexes, culminating in the love/hate emotions shared by Jesse and his daughter Shelley. In fact, relationships are exactly the opposite of what they should be, partly because they are founded on illusion and daydreams. Marriage, far from being a union that leads to maturity, is instead a disunion, a painful awareness of separation that often leads one to doubt himself.

<sup>50</sup>Joyce Carol Oates, Wonderland (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, 1971), p. 412.

In Them, winner of the National Book Award in 1969, Oates depicts marriage as escape, especially escape from oneself. Like Wonderland, the novel is bloody and violent to an extreme. The book begins with a murder and rape and includes an especially brutal beating and a woman's shooting of the man she loves. Maureen, the central character of the novel, is the daughter of a policeman and Loretta, a once pretty woman made fat and slovenly by marriage. From the beginning, Maureen has little reason to be happy or proud of herself and her family. The situation is especially painful for her because she is both sensitive and intelligent. While still in her teens, she discovers that by selling herself for money, she can obtain an identity and a kind of power:

The bills would not change in any way and yet they would become hers. Its power would become hers. The man's giving her his money was not a simple act but the transformation of the money itself, so that it became another kind of money, it became hers, it was magical in her hands and secret from all the world, and yet it was unchanged.<sup>51</sup>

Her secret discovered by her stepfather, Maureen is badly beaten and becomes mentally ill, drawing away from reality and her own self by becoming simply an enormous mound of flesh, mechanical and unaware. When she recovers, she loses weight, goes back to school, gets a job, but still runs from the self she hates. "I only want to escape the doom of being Maureen Wendall all of my life,"<sup>52</sup> she says. Half of her wants to be awake; the other half is afraid. And from her fear arises

<sup>51</sup>Joyce Carol Oates, Them (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1969), p. 191.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 409.

her desire to be married: "I want to marry a man and fall in love and be protected by him. I am ready to fall in love."<sup>53</sup> Yet mixed with this overwhelming desire is a degree of uncertainty and cynicism: "Is it different with love? What is it like to give yourself with love? Or do you lie there and feel terror to know that, love or not, a husband or a stranger, it is all the same and no words can change it?"<sup>54</sup> Eventually she does marry, and her marriage turns out to be all that she expects it to be, including the terrible strangeness. She tells her brother, Jules:

I wake up sweating and next to this man, a man I don't know, I mean I don't remember if it's my husband or not or some other man, someone who picked me up. I can't go through it any more, Jules, I'm finished. I'm going to forget everything and everybody. I'm going to have a baby. I'm a different person.<sup>55</sup>

Marriage has become Maureen's escape route from the "old" Maureen she does not want to recall. But the marriage itself is not union. Husband and wife are strangers to each other.

In Oates' most recent novel, Do With Me What You Will (1973), the main character, Elena, escapes with her lover from a confining, unrealistic marriage. From childhood, passive Elena (aptly characterized by the novel's title) has been victim, toy, goddess--everything but human being to the men in her life. To her mother, the beautiful Ardis,

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., pp. 311-312.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 316.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 477.

she has been an extension of Ardis' own desires and frustrations. Never considered human by others, Elena never is quite human, until the end of the novel, when she supposedly breaks free, leaving her husband and cutting off her long blonde hair (symbol of the idea of femininity others foist upon her). Her half-mad father kidnaps her from the school yard when she is a child, and Elena accepts the situation passively until rescued, dirty and half-starved, by the authorities. Returned to her mother, Elena grows up in the shadow of her mother's desire to live her life through her daughter. "Ardis knew she herself was a very beautiful woman, and that a certain power resided in her face and in her body, but for some reason this power had dimmed . . . ." <sup>56</sup>

Therefore, beginning to grow old, she attempts to make Elena a younger version of herself so that, in a sense, she will never lose the physical beauty on which she bases her ideas of womanhood. They even do modeling jobs together as "look-alikes." Ardis is a strong woman, but is also unable to survive except by living off men. Ironically, at one point she tells Elena,

We're our own ideas, we make ourselves up; some women let men make them up, invent them, fall in love with them, they're helpless to invent themselves . . . but not me, I'm nobody's idea but my own. I know who I am. I know who you are too. We'll both do well, don't worry . . . . <sup>57</sup>

The next day Ardis gets a job as a cocktail waitress/hostess and begins

<sup>56</sup>Joyce Carol Oates, Do With Me What You Will (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1973), p. 75.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

another kind of relationship with a man, again depending upon her physical beauty as a livelihood.

What Ardis arranges for Elena is a similar, but more secure situation--marriage to a lawyer, Marvin Howe, old enough to be Elena's father. Howe is a ruthless, dynamic man who treasures Elena for her separateness, who treats her like a rare and beautiful object. "I don't want to contaminate you with my work,"<sup>58</sup> he tells her. She is, for awhile, content to be treasured, protected, manipulated. Beneath the doll-like exterior, however, beneath the beautiful, controlled mask, dissatisfaction, frustration and awareness begin to grow. She takes a lover, wants first to commit suicide, then finally wants to be free. As she tells her husband, "If I stay here something might happen to me. I might be careless of myself. I might want to die . . . . I might make someone hurt me."<sup>59</sup> One has the impression--though one is never quite sure--that she moves into a future which, if not trouble-free, is at least free.

In all of the above cases, Oates draws a picture of a kind of marriage that results in maturation only when one leaves it. Inside the marriage framework, women, and often men, cannot be human beings. For marriage is neither union nor initiation experience; instead, it is delusion and disappointment. One must, however, be aware that Oates is not saying in reality that marriage must always be a failure. Instead, she is saying that failure in marriage is an American, a human

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 121.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 516.

problem. And the cause of this failure is lack of love and understanding caused, in turn, by lack of maturity and personal awareness. For women who are unsure of themselves as human beings and who cannot reach their initiation or selfhood in and through union, marriage can only be frustration.

Two less traditional roles for the woman are those of artist or revolutionary or a combination of both. Talented, sensitive, vehement, the female artists and revolutionaries have reached outside themselves in an attempt to become integrated human beings. Sometimes they have been successful; at other times they have been tragically unsuccessful and have only fallen so deeply inside themselves that they have withdrawn, or have attempted to withdraw from life completely. The artist is an unusual woman, a special case. Through art itself, she may reach a union with the world that results in serenity, or, as in the case of the persona in the poems of Sylvia Plath, her failure to achieve unity may result in a tension that creates the force and power of the art.

Sylvia Plath's novel and several volumes of poetry combine the voices of author, character and persona and make them inseparable. Together, they are the voice of twentieth century Woman, frustrated, sad, fragmented. Assuming that Plath's writings are purely autobiographical would be a mistake. One must remember, as Stephen Spender reminds us in "Voices from the Grave," that "Poetry is a balancing of unconscious and conscious forces in the mind of the poet, the source

of the poetry being the unconscious, the control being provided by the conscious."<sup>60</sup> Or, as Nan McCowan Sumner says in "Sylvia Plath," an article in Washington State University Research Studies, "Plath was concerned with far more than her own psychological state, but she employed her own experience as a continuing metaphor for what she believed was the state of contemporary life."<sup>61</sup> Failing to integrate herself, she was at least able to make her literature a whole.

In The Bell Jar, her only novel, Plath writes of Esther, a contemporary young woman, chic, intelligent, and talented. Esther possesses every advantage most young girls desperately desire and finds them all useless. She gradually withdraws, slips into depression, then insanity, attempts suicide, is institutionalized, and finally succeeds in killing herself. The impact of the novel arises from its frankness, its exposure of insanity caused by a woman's fragmentation--the division between the smooth social mask and the frightened child beneath. As Marjorie Perloff says in "A Ritual for Being Born Twice: Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar," the central action of The Bell Jar "may be described as the attempt to heal the fracture between the inner self and the false-self system so that a real and viable identity can come into existence."<sup>62</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Stephen Spender, "Warnings from the Grave" in The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium, ed., Charles Newman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 199.

<sup>61</sup> Nan McCowan Sumner, "Sylvia Plath," Washington State University Research Studies, 38 (1970), 113.

<sup>62</sup> Marjorie Perloff, "A Ritual for Being Born Twice: Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar," Contemporary Literature, 13 (1972), 509.

The attempt, of course, fails tragically. The "bell jar" of the title symbolizes the isolation into which Esther finally withdraws.<sup>63</sup> A ritualistic return to the womb through death is the only remaining method she seems to have for becoming whole.

The persona of Plath's poetry seems to have similar feelings. The portrait of contemporary society in the poetry is as damning as that in the novel. The persona, being a part of and representative of contemporary society's sicknesses, feels envious of nature and the unity she finds there. She cannot help watching and speaking of nature, though, as Ingrid Melander says in The Poetry of Sylvia Plath: A Study of Themes, "Mingled with her fascination is the poet's deep feeling of man's separateness or estrangement from nature and an equally deep experience of nature as inherently hostile to man."<sup>64</sup> Her feelings sometimes seem ambivalent. Again and again she speaks of nature as being a threat to her, but she also seems to love it, to feel envy. It is possible that, seeing how all wild creatures know and understand their places in the scheme of life, she feels frustrated and alone, and, therefore, envious. Nature is, indeed, a threat because it keeps her painfully aware of her own incompleteness. As Melander says, "The theme of estrangement is very closely related to the themes of hostility and threat; indeed, sometimes they cannot be regarded as separate, but rather as different aspects of one basic attitude to nature (and, by extension, to life)."<sup>65</sup>

<sup>63</sup>Charles Newman, "Candor is the Only Wile: The Art of Sylvia Plath," in The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium, p. 35.

<sup>64</sup>Ingrid Melander, The Poetry of Sylvia Plath: A Study of Themes (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1972), p. 47.

<sup>65</sup>Melander, p. 48.

From this realization of her own fragmentation and the unity of nature emerges the persona's attitude towards death. "More than just a simple wish to die,"<sup>66</sup> the death theme is the idea that "self-realization is possible only in death."<sup>67</sup> The woman of the poems desires passionately to become a part of nature through sacrifice of life and conscious awareness. In the poem "I AM VERTICAL" from Crossing the Water (1971), the poet/persona expresses a wistful longing for unity:

#### I AM VERTICAL

But I would rather be horizontal.  
 I am not a tree with my root in the soil  
 Sucking up minerals and motherly love  
 So that each March I may gleam into leaf,  
 Nor am I the beauty of a garden bed  
 Attracting my share of Ahs and spectacularly painted  
 Unknowing I must soon unpetal.  
 Compared with me, a tree is immortal  
 And a flower-head not tall, but more startling,  
 And I want the one's longevity and the other's daring.

Tonight, in the infinitesimal light of the stars,  
 The trees and flowers have been strewing their cool odours.  
 I walk among them, but none of them are noticing.  
 Sometimes I think that when I am sleeping  
 I must perfectly resemble them--  
 Thoughts gone dim.  
 It is more natural to me, lying down.  
 Then the sky and I are in open conversation  
 And I shall be useful when I lie down finally:  
 Then the trees may touch me for once,  
     and the flowers have time for me.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>68</sup>Sylvia Plath, Crossing the Water (London: Faber & Faber, 1971), p. 26.

The poet/persona is also intensely aware of her specific situation as a woman--more particularly, the woman artist. Annette Lavers, in her article, "The World as Icon: On Sylvia Plath's Themes," speaks of the poet's "profound uncertainty about the possibility of reconciling womanhood and intellect."<sup>69</sup> Womanhood is the central problem, and out of the uncertainty and tension caused by the artist/persona's confusion about herself as a woman (and as a person) emerges the finest art. Many of Plath's poems are concerned with birth, often bloody, painful, difficult to understand, but usually inevitable, sometimes even pleasing. As the artist projects her feelings about womanhood and motherhood into her poems, the poems, in turn, become her children. In "Stillborn," another poem from Crossing the Water, the poet/persona joins her ambiguous, confused ideas about motherhood and art and her feelings of hatred and love into a single image:

These poems do not live; it's a sad diagnosis.  
 They grew their toes and fingers well enough,  
 Their little foreheads bulged in concentration.  
 If they missed out on walking about like people  
 It wasn't for any lack of mother-love.<sup>70</sup>

Plath's poetry is both complex and difficult because of the overlapping and fusing of feelings, ideas and the identities of woman and artist. To fully understand Plath's importance, one must understand the autobiographical and the universal elements of the poems. Like any worthwhile literature, Plath's poetry combines the personal,

<sup>69</sup>Annette Lavers, "The World as Icon: On Sylvia Plath's Themes" in The Art of Sylvia Plath: A Symposium, p. 131.

<sup>70</sup>Plath, Crossing the Water, p. 35.

the social and the archetypal into the literary unit. As Sumner says, "Using age-old metaphors to express the ages-older human desire to start afresh, to cleanse by destroying all . . . ," Plath "combines the mythological with the most recent psychological insights to create a rich and terrible portrait of life in contemporary society."<sup>71</sup>

Plath's contemporary, Anne Sexton, who won a Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1966 for her volume, Live or Die and who, like her friend Sylvia, committed suicide, is also closely identified with the persona of her poetry. Her work deals to a large extent with nature, womanhood, and death. Sexton's poetry, however, often concerns, more specifically, relationships between man and woman, sometimes marriage relationships, sometimes those between woman and lover--almost always unhappy. In her poem, "To My Lover, Returning to His Wife," Sexton expresses the transiency of extra-marital relationships and the frail, temporal quality of her own identity through such a relationship. She herself is like a watercolor, easily washed away, but the wife is reality:

She is so naked and singular.  
She is the sum of yourself and your dream.  
Climb her like a monument, step after step.  
She is solid.<sup>72</sup>

However, the poet/persona is no more satisfied with her own role as wife. In "Man and Wife," she laments,

<sup>71</sup>Sumner, p. 121.

<sup>72</sup>Anne Sexton, Love Poems (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1969), p. 22.

We are not lovers,  
 We do not even know each other.  
 We look alike  
 But we have nothing to say.<sup>73</sup>

Ultimately, the reader realizes that it is the artist's role as woman which dissatisfies her. She cannot come to terms with herself. "What is reality?" she says, "I am a plaster doll."<sup>74</sup> In the same volume, one of her most beautiful poems reveals her desire to discard her role as woman completely. She begins,

I was tired of being a woman,  
 tired of the spoons and the pots,  
 tired of my mouth and my breasts,  
 tired of the cosmetics and the silks.  
 There were still men who sat at my table,  
 circled around the bowl I offered up.  
 The bowl was filled with purple grapes  
 and the flies hovered in for the scent  
 and even my father came with his white bone,  
 But I was tired of the gender of things.<sup>75</sup>

And she ends triumphantly,

O daughters of Jerusalem,  
 the king has brought me into his chamber.  
 I am black and I am beautiful.  
 I've been opened and undressed.  
 I have no arms or legs.  
 I'm all one skin like a fish.  
 I'm no more a woman  
 than Christ was a man.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup>Anne Sexton, Live or Die (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1966), p. 27.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

In her poetry, the artist seeks more to transcend rather than integrate. She does not want to become all that she is as much as she wants to become more or something other than she is. The essential difference between Plath and Sexton seems to be the idea of integration versus the idea of transcendence, though both seek their ultimate goals through death.

Nature, too, is important in Sexton's poetry, often connected with the idea of renewal. At times, Sexton seems to reach a point where hope breaks through frustration. This ideal of hope, a fresh start, is associated with spring and the color green, as in her poem, "It is a Spring Afternoon":

Surely spring will allow  
 a girl without a stitch on  
 to turn softly in her sunlight  
 and not be afraid of her bed.  
 She has already counted seven  
 blossoms in her green green mirror.  
 Two rivers combine beneath her.  
 The face of the child wrinkles  
 in the water and is gone forever.  
 The woman is all that can be seen  
 in her animal loveliness.  
 Her cherished and obstinate skin  
 lies deeply under the watery tree.  
 Everything is altogether possible  
 and the blind men can also see.<sup>77</sup>

This particular poem is especially interesting because it does not depict resolution outside of womanhood. It depicts, in fact, the movement of the child-woman into full adulthood, hopefully and without fear. Sexton's other poems, even those that are hopeful, shy away from

<sup>77</sup> Sexton, Love Poems, pp. 26-27.

this sort of initiation, depicting the person's either becoming something other than woman or returning to childhood. Its singularity gives the poem a certain pathos, as though we are seeing the poet/persona knowing, but never able to achieve.

The fascination with death and the unusually depressing view of life so important to the themes of both poets often tends to make us back away, fearful of the extremes of despair. Before the twentieth century (with the exception of the works of Kate Chopin and a few others) women's literature was usually so romantic that the anti-thesis seen in Plath and Sexton is especially startling. As Newman points out, "The problem is that while we have granted the woman a measure of sophistication and sympathy in our fiction (although for the last truly sympathetic portraits, we must go back to Joyce and Lawrence) we have been loath to permit her genuine despair. Somehow, while male protagonists can wallow forever in the absurdity of their existence, those female characters who partake of universal skepticism usually turn out to be nothing more than morose bitches whose rejection of the world is considered presumptuous."<sup>78</sup> But despair, like frustration, is a singularly human phenomenon. Because the female writers are human--though they have not yet reached an accord with themselves as individuals, women, members of the human race--they feel despair. Their special sensitivity and awareness magnifies their situation and creates hopelessness out of frustration.

<sup>78</sup>Newman, p. 44.

Sometimes the female artist has been more successful in coming to terms with her dual roles as artist and woman. The poetry of Denise Levertov, for instance, is marked by a serenity very different from the painful struggles and uncertainties of Sexton and Plath. Levertov's poetry offers an alternative, a way to integrate artist, woman, human being. As George Bowering shows in his article "Denise Levertov" in The Antigoneish Review, the artist recognizes the loneliness of the individual. "But it is that loneliness that forces the imaginative act--the individual will fall down inside himself, or he will try to find some possible communion."<sup>79</sup> Levertov, the artist/persona, seeks to join herself to the world by finding her universal truths through awareness of the tangible world, nature and the world of the senses. Reaching outside of herself, she explores the world's mysteries. Yet, as Bowering says, "the mysteries are never merely anterior to men. They are part of them."<sup>80</sup>

Her idea of the marriage relationship is a union that parallels the union among the individual, the world of nature, and the universal. Her poem, "The Wife," from With Eyes at the Back of our Heads, depicts joy in marriage:

A frog under you,  
 knees drawn up  
 ready to keap out of time,  
  
 a dog beside you,  
 sniffing at you, seeking  
 scent of you, an idea unformulated,

<sup>79</sup>George Bowering, "Denise Levertov," The Antigoneish Review, 7 (Autumn, 1971), 80.

<sup>80</sup>Bowering, p. 33.

I give up on  
 trying to answer my question,  
 Do I love you enough?

It's enough to be  
 so much here. And  
 certainly when I catch

your mind in the  
 act of plucking  
 truth from the dark surrounding nowhere

as a swallow skims a  
 gnat from the  
 deep sky

I don't stop to ask myself  
 Do I love him? but  
 laugh for joy.<sup>81</sup>

Levertov's is not the alternative for everyone. She sees herself as woman/artist, an identity we cannot all assume. Her most recent book, The Artist in the World, is a collection of essays discussing her role and work as an artist. Yet her special importance to this study is the unity, serenity and emphasis on humanity apparent in her poetry. In a fragmented society where fragmented individuals struggle to come to terms with themselves and with each other, integration is possible.

This reaching outward is also characteristic of the revolutionary, the woman who either submerges her identity in her zeal for social change or seeks to integrate her womanhood with her social responsibilities. Often she is also artist. Often she is also a black woman--the Nikki Giovanni's, the Toni Cade Bambara's, and the Lorraine Hansberry's. These artist/revolutionaries are usually black

<sup>81</sup>Denise Levertov, With Eyes at the Back of Our Heads, (New York: New Directions, 1959), p. 48.

simply because the black woman feels it especially necessary to come to terms with herself on a variety of levels and to justify herself to those around her, as well as to herself.

Except for a few early novels such as Gwendolyn Brooks' Maude Martha (1953), the literature of the black woman has been sketchy at best. As Mel Watkins and Jay David say in their introduction to To Be A Black Woman: Portraits in Fact & Fiction, ". . . the black female writer has been more rare than her white counterpart, and black men, overwhelmed with the problem of their own emasculation, have usually avoided the subject. Consequently, the black woman has been treated only tangentially in American literature and in most previous sociological studies, and no in-depth portrait has been available in a single volume."<sup>82</sup> Recently, however, there have been both studies and anthologies, the best of which, simply because it contains only literature by and about black women, is The Black Woman: An Anthology, edited by Toni Cade. For years, however, the black woman was seen less as a whole person, a woman, than as a type--purely the animalistic, or purely the mother-figure. As Nikki Giovanni says in "Woman Poem,"

it's a sex object if you're pretty  
and no love  
or love and no sex if you're fat  
get back fat black woman be a mother  
grandmother strong thing but not a woman . . .<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup>Mel Watkins and Jay David, ed., To Be A Black Woman: Portraits in Fact and Fiction (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1970), introduction, p. [1].

<sup>83</sup>Nikki Giovanni, "Woman Poem" in The Black Woman: An Anthology, ed., Toni Cade (New York: New American Library, 1970), p. 13.

The special urgency, however, of the black woman's initiation, created by swift social change, has been an advantage. Black men have found the black woman a necessary part of the initiation they look for so desperately, and black women, accused of taking strength away from or castrating black men,<sup>84</sup> have been forced to discover their own regenerative, transformative, creative quality. One may see this idea in Mari Evans' poem "I AM A BLACK WOMAN":

I am a black woman  
 the music of my song  
 so sweet arpeggio of tears  
 is written in a minor key  
 and I  
 can be heard humming in the night  
 Can be heard  
       humming  
 in the night

I saw my mate leap screaming to the sea  
 and I/with these hands/cupped the lifebreath  
 from my issue in the canebrake  
 I lost Nat's swinging body in a rain of tears  
 and heard my son scream all the way from Anzio  
 for Peace he never knew . . . I  
 learned Da Nang and Pork Chop Hill  
 in anguish  
 Now my nostrils know the gas  
 and these trigger tire/d fingers  
 seek the softness in my warrior's beard

I  
 am a black woman  
 tall as a cypress  
 strong  
 beyond all definition still  
       defying place  
 and time  
 and circumstance

<sup>84</sup>For a discussion of this particular problem, one should see "Is the Black Male Castrated?" by Jean Carey Bond and Patricia Peery in The Black Woman.

assailed  
 impervious  
 indestructible

Look  
 on me and be  
 renewed.<sup>85</sup>

To Be Young, Gifted and Black, a collection of the words and thoughts of playwright Lorraine Hansberry, edited by her husband, Robert Nemiroff, reveals with unusual clarity the particular struggles and triumphs of the artist/revolutionary. Hansberry, who died of cancer at 34, is perhaps less virulent and more reasonable in her writings than many of her contemporaries, but she is no less strong. Her award-winning play, A Raisin in the Sun, is certainly an indictment of particular social conditions, but it is also an exploration of what it means to be a human being. Hansberry does not appear idealistic about the human race in her writings, but she does speak with both understanding and compassion. In the foreword to To Be Young, Gifted and Black, Nemiroff quotes her as saying, "I wish to live because life has within it that which is good, that which is beautiful, and that which is love. Therefore, since I have known all of these things, I have found them to be reason enough and--I wish to live. Moreover, because this is so, I wish others to live for generations and generations and generations."<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup>Mari Evans, "I AM A BLACK WOMAN," in Black Literature in America (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), pp. 349-350.

<sup>86</sup>Lorraine Hansberry, from a speech given at a conference for black writers, March 1, 1959. Quoted by Robert Nemiroff, in To Be Young, Gifted and Black (New York: New American Library, 1969), p. xvii.

Concerning herself with life and with the human situation, Hansberry became aware, integrated, and hungry to continue living.

In A Raisin in the Sun, Hansberry explores three aspects of the black women, in their relation to the black man and to themselves. The three women of the play--Mama, Ruth and Beneatha--may represent motherhood, wifehood and selfhood, respectively. Walter, Mama's son and Ruth's husband, is fighting desperately for his own initiation into manhood. He is obsessed with the American Dream and believes he will only find his manhood through money. When Mama asks him why he is always worried about money, he says passionately, "Because it is life, Mama!"<sup>87</sup> Mama is guide, nurturer, bulwark of her family since the death of her husband and must take care not to overpower or emasculate her son by too much mothering. Ruth, the wife, must listen and must sacrifice. Beneatha, Walter's sister, the modern young black woman, must reach her own initiation; therefore, she strikes out at Walter and has little patience with his weakness and his indecision.

The three are not only identified by their relationships with Walter, however; they are also believable persons in their own right. And, taken together, they form a picture of the total, integrated black woman--as mother, wife, individual. Mama is strong with a belief in life. She carefully nourishes a small plant that grows in their apartment, undernourished but stubborn, just as her children grow stubbornly in the surrounding atmosphere of poverty. Often, when

<sup>87</sup>Lorraine Hansberry, A Raisin in the Sun (New York: New American Library, 1958), p. 61

something goes wrong or there is friction in the family, she moves vaguely to water the plant, instinctively assuming her role as nourisher and life-giver.

Ruth is personification of woman's symbolic role as wife. Frustrated by her poverty and by Walter's weaknesses, she is, nonetheless, giver. She is even willing to sacrifice her motherhood and abort her unborn child to help foster her husband's dreams. But the old nightmare, that American Dream of success, divides them and keeps them from sharing. At one point Ruth cries out to Walter in desperation, "What else can I give you, Walter Lee Younger?"<sup>88</sup> She is wife completely, to such an extreme degree that she betrays herself by smothering her own hopes and desires. She is the black woman involved in the black man's journey to manhood.

Beneatha, the youngest of the three, is concerned with her own selfhood. She experiments with various roles, various activities in an attempt to discover herself, not defining herself in terms of others, but on her own terms. "People have to express themselves one way or another,"<sup>89</sup> she tells Mama and Ruth, but they scoff at her, seeing only that she is self-centered, not that she is honestly struggling. Beneatha is the "new" black woman, conscious of and proud of her blackness. She is, however, often selfish and unsympathetic--the opposite of Mama and Ruth, who submerge their own selfhood. Taken together, however, the three women form a complete human being--mother, wife, self--nurturer, giver, individual. Only when the human being

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

becomes one-sided, narrow, do failure and insurmountable frustrations occur.

As Toni Cade says in her essay, "On the Issue of Roles," in The Black Woman, "Revolution begins with the self, in the self."<sup>90</sup> The revolutionary, whether she be black or white, must not submerge her own identity in her zeal for social change, as is the temptation in twentieth century society. Neither must she fail to reach outside of herself for some kind of unity. The woman, whether artist or revolutionary or wife or mother, must be aware of her own complexity, taking her separate parts and integrating them and becoming whole. If she ignores or submerges part of herself, she will never become fully human.

The final type to be discussed in this chapter is the Dead Woman, sister to the weary bitches, lost women, unhappy wives and frustrated artists. She is not, however, a potential suicide; she seeks separation rather than physical death. She keeps on breathing, but she feels nothing. Tired and disillusioned, she is the most tragic figure in contemporary literature, a warning to all of us that an arid society breeds arid souls.

The most striking examples of the Dead Woman is Maria Wyeth of Joan Didion's novel Play It as It Lays (1970). Maria is very young, in her early thirties, but has already gone beyond being old. The novel, which is brief, spare and appallingly candid, is set in the

<sup>90</sup>Toni Cade, "On the Issue of Roles," The Black Woman: An Anthology, p. 109.

deserts and glittering cities of the American Southwest--California and Nevada. There is no coolness, lushness, or fertility anywhere--not in the setting, in the language Didion uses, or in Maria's mind. Surrounded by the very rich and the very empty, Maria sees little to foster the optimism, inherited from her father, with which she began. She has had parts in two films; she has been married to Carter, the director of these films. But the marriage brought little except Kate, a beautiful four-year-old daughter with brain damage. During the course of the novel, Maria vacillates between trying to save her already-severed relationship with Carter and moving with new lovers, who also give her little joy. She becomes pregnant by one of these lovers, has an abortion, but is haunted by the unborn child. Gradually she begins to withdraw from those around her, until she can no longer even hold a conversation.

The only person Maria can finally relate to is BZ, a dissipated, cynical man who keeps telling Maria that she must recognize and accept the fact of nothing. And gradually this nothing is all that Maria sees and feels. Carter torments her sometimes, accusing her of growing old. When Maria asks him why he torments her, "He would sit on the bed and put his head in his hands. 'To find out if you're alive.'"<sup>91</sup> Maria has reached the end when BZ asks her to tell him what matters, and she says, "Nothing."<sup>92</sup> When BZ finally decides to kill himself, he comes to Maria. Because Maria only half-heartedly tries to stop him, understanding why he has chosen suicide, BZ's wife, Helene, blames her for

<sup>91</sup> Joan Didion, Play It as it Lays (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1970), p. 198.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

BZ's death. And Maria, at the end of the novel, is in an asylum, welcoming the solitude, the quiet, turning away all visitors. Her only plans for the future, she says, are to get and keep Kate and can fruit. At last she says, "One thing in my defense, not that it matters: I know something Carter never knew, or Helene, or maybe you. I know what 'nothing' means, and keep on playing.

"Why, BZ would say.

"Why not, I say."<sup>93</sup>

The Dead Woman is the extreme. There are other alternatives. Individuals have managed to become healthy, integrated human beings; perhaps more women will be able to do so if they survive the bitterness and frustration and misunderstanding that accompanies certain changes. To become a whole and healthy human being, the woman must be aware of her archetypal roots, her connection first with the natural world and with the life cycle. If she is never literally a mother, never bears children, she must still come to terms in some way with her own fertile, life-giving qualities--perhaps through artistic union with the world around her. Also part of these same archetypal roots are the regenerative, transformative qualities of the anima, which play a role in the man's initiation and which spur change, both in herself and in the man. These changes, or moving to full consciousness and awareness, may often be painful and frustrating for the awakening woman, tempting her to give up and return to a state of complete unawareness--even through death, or worse, through a sort of death in life, devoid of feeling.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

But the woman who persists, who does not ignore her archetypal roots, who moves toward union with the masculine without betraying her own separateness, who at last can come to terms with and accept all aspects of her Self, is a healthy human being. She can feel, give and become what she actually is--living rather than representing, sharing rather than submerging, becoming rather than dying. This integrated woman is not an ideal that can never become reality; she is not more than human; she simply is human.

Her appearing only rarely in twentieth century literature is a result of the human and, specifically, American tendency to dichotomize, to value the part instead of the whole. Because we have valued an illusory innocence above mature awareness, we have remained, as a society, sad, cynical children. However, though the examples used in this chapter seem depressing, perhaps even hopeless, the situation is actually positive. The few select examples of integrated selfhood, such as Levertov and Hansberry, are simply part of the overall pattern, in which problem and possible solutions are both apparent. We are presently in an uncertain stage of growth, in which the chaos often seems more obvious than the calm. But, again, though frustration and confusion may not always result in resolution, chances are good that, ultimately, they will. The violence, perversion and anger in much of the literature discussed in this chapter are simply part of our growth pains--or, to use another metaphor, pains warning of trouble, of illness, but hinting that we are possibly on the road to recovery.

CHAPTER V  
CONCLUSION

This particular study can only begin to cover ground as yet almost untouched by literary critics. If the sociological examination of what is called women's literature<sup>1</sup> is still new, the psychological examination is even newer. Therefore, the author of this thesis has been forced to cover considerable unexplored ground and, for the sake of order, to classify according to types, when absolute classification of literary characters or, certainly, of human beings is impossible. Exceptions do not mean, however, that classifications are not useful or important. In this study, the labels attached to literary characters (in the fourth chapter, especially--the Great American Bitch, the Lost Woman, the Counterfeit Married Woman, the Artist-Revolutionary, and the Dead Woman) exist partly for the sake of convenience, partly for clarification, partly because these characters are far more nearly types than human beings--the very problem being discussed. Future studies, however, able to concentrate on more depth on particular novels, characters, or fictional situations may avoid the categories that tend to overlap, as those in chapter four obviously do. At this point, when a large, untouched area must be examined as a basis for future studies, what may seem to be an arbitrary selection of literary works and an arbitrary labeling of types is simply a necessity.

<sup>1</sup>In this case, the term does not necessarily mean literature written for women, but literature in which women play an important role or literature which helps illuminate the psychological development of women.

The question remains, however: How important to literary understanding and, further, to human understanding is such a study? There are three possible answers: 1) such a study is interesting to women, since they are the focus here; 2) such a study is an important footnote--but no more--to literary criticism, and borders dangerously on overemphasis of the psychological, the archetypal, and the female, rather than the purely literary; and 3) the study is important because it presents literature and human life as interdependent and because understanding the psychological development of women leads, on a larger scale, to a more complete understanding of human life as a whole. All three alternatives are at least partially true. The study, by concentrating on the archetypal development of women does, perhaps, extend the boundaries of literary criticism beyond those agreed upon by all critics. Yet the third alternative is also true. Linking literature to all levels of human life--the individual, the social, the universal--tends to rightly stress the human aspect of literature. And understanding why the peculiar American manifestations of the female archetype have appeared can reveal larger social and even larger human problems.

Whether or not one accepts Jung's terminology, whether or not one even accepts the hypothesis of there being parts of the psyche that can be labelled "feminine" or "masculine," most of us are aware that there seems to be an increasing amount of friction and resentment between the sexes, a friction clearly reflected in modern literature. In the place of understanding, there is confusion--even, at the extreme, perversion and insanity. It is painfully obvious that a problem of

some kind exists. Critic Annis Pratt, in her article "Women and Nature in Modern Fiction," observes, "There have been a few signs in modern British or American fiction . . . of a world beyond sexually divisive selfhood, a world where men will begin to foster their 'feminine consciousness' and women their latent transcendence so that an androgynous and more fully human lifestyle can emerge."<sup>2</sup> As this study has attempted to prove, there have been signs of a slow and painful development--of women as women and, thereby, as human beings. Pratt's statement is important, however, because it re-emphasizes the schism, the problematical lack of unity that characterizes male/female relationships. It also re-emphasizes the idea that we are whole, integrated human beings--where womanhood is not based on mere sex appeal or mere idealization and where manhood does not depend on financial success or physical aggressiveness. If we are to understand our need and look for solutions on the individual or group level, we should not ignore the role literature plays in human life, especially in twentieth century life with its increased confusion and increased emphasis on the psychological.

The purpose of this thesis, then, has been to trace the archetypal development of the American woman as portrayed in literature. Archetypal criticism was chosen as the basis for this thesis because of its unifying qualities, its viewing of literature as inseparable from human life on all levels. Archetypally, the American woman has been

<sup>2</sup>Annis Pratt, "Women and Nature in Modern Fiction," Contemporary Literature, 13 (1972), 490.

shown to be fragmented, disintegrated, uncertain. In earliest American literature, she appeared either as Earth Mother alone or as a distortion of the female archetype--in neither case as having undergone the initiation process that would bring her to full maturity. In the following centuries she took a variety of forms in America's four major geographical areas--the Northeast, the Midwest, the West and the South--all forms being distorted in some way by America's own peculiar identity problems. At present in the twentieth century, the American woman in literature has become less and less attractive--sometimes even horrifying--but also more human. Losing her purely representative qualities, especially those related to the American Dream of success, she has become frustrated, angry, tired, but at least aware of herself and her own position. Viewed in this way, the Great American Bitch, the Lost Woman, the Counterfeit Married Woman, the Artist-Revolutionary and the Dead Woman hold promise of a self-awareness that could result in the kind of integrated human personality Annis Pratt speaks of.

There are certain hypotheses that must be accepted before the real import of such a study can be felt. However, since all theories of literary criticism are less provable than applicable, one must judge the usefulness of these hypotheses as applied to the particular area of literature under discussion. Most important, we should not be afraid to a variety of types of criticism to more fully illuminate literature. Nor should we fail to see the interdependence of all types. The true place of archetypal criticism in the study of women's literature as yet may not be clearly defined--and will not be until the critics stop resenting what seems to be a Jungian emphasis on the masculine initiation. But it

is the critic's responsibility to explore as many avenues as possible in the study of literature and to be aware of movements and tendencies in literature that relate to the complexity we call human life.

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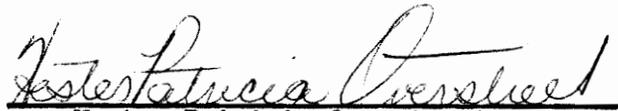
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Hester Patricia Overstreet

THE ARCHETYPAL DEVELOPMENT  
OF THE AMERICAN WOMAN THROUGH LITERATURE

by

Hester Patricia Overstreet

(ABSTRACT)

This thesis attempts to trace, on an archetypal level, the reasons behind certain recurrent character types in twentieth century American literature about women. Because of his emphasis on the "collective unconscious," the theories of psychologist Carl Jung are used as the basis for this study. The basic feminine archetype, herself complex, always retains her primary qualities, but shifts form slightly, according to the particular time and society in which she appears. Therefore, her various appearances in American literature can be linked to social as well as psychological phenomena and must be traced carefully from the literature of early America, through the literature of four distinct geographical and social regions--the Northeast, the West, the South and the Midwest--to twentieth century American literature, which is often violent and extreme, but which shows promise of growth and awareness.

The word "development" is important to the study, which concentrates on the archetypal process of "initiation," or becoming a complete, aware, mature human being. Few female characters in American literature have undergone this type of initiation, just as American

women in general have often failed either to recognize their archetypal roots or to move from those roots into "individuation" or Selfhood. Men and women are first basically human, then male or female, then individual; to be fully aware of themselves, both men and women must come to terms with all three identities, learning who they are alone and in relation to each other.