

# Recovering A Bifurcated Project: Mythical Representations of Female Initiation in Young Adult Fiction

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To write about menstruation in myth, poetry, fiction, drama and folktale is to write an essay about disguise and displacement, as the taboos of prehistory find continued expression in modern European and American culture. (Delaney, Lupton, and Toth, *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation*)

Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. (Adrienne Rich "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision")

Psychoanalytical criticism traditionally holds that the family romance and oedipal strife are the primary dramatic and structural principles governing literary textuality. Harold Bloom, for example, argues that the rivalry between poetic fathers and sons for dominance over the primal scene of instruction is central to literary production. A similar rivalry lies at the heart of the production of culture as well. More recently, however, psychoanalytical criticism—influenced less by classical Freudianism and more by the works of Melanie Klein, Julia Kristeva, Jane Gallop, and Meredith Skura—has begun to pay more attention to the preoedipal project, which, unlike the oedipal, with its emphasis on secondary relationships, focuses on primary relationships that center on the mother. The position I will advance here is that the oedipal and the preoedipal are not two separate projects but are rather two aspects of a single bifurcated project that fundamentally determines both. I will argue that a concerted effort to recover, or withdraw, this bifurcated project through the "anti-oedipal" is present in contemporary young adult fiction which re-enacts the liminality of menarcheal rites. Specifically, the recovery of the project is presented through the re-founding of maturation in the mythic ground of experience. Topographically, the recovery lies in the redress of the imbalance between culture and nature, the

profane and the sacred. The aim of the “anti-oedipal” reenactment of liminality is the reconfiguration of the maternal and paternal voices on a non-hierarchical ground. The means of this re-enactment is most evident in some writers’ re-appropriation of the models and conventions of folkloric representations of female initiation.

In recent years, writers of young adult fiction dealing with maturation and menarcheal rites have set out to reappropriate folkloric models and conventions. These writers, which I will look at in some detail here, include Monica Furlong, *Wise Child*; Diana Wynn Jones, *Fire and Hemlock*; and Patricia Wrightson, *Balyet*. The result of their work is a narrative that satisfies both a psychological as well as a literary imperative (that it also satisfies the social goes without saying). This reappropriation of folkloric materials has also contributed to critical theory by helping to define what might be called the “anti-oedipal project”—a project that necessitates a revisioning and redefinition both of human relationships as well as of literary narrative structures. The initiatory project that is bifurcated in the tension between oedipal and preoedipal discourse is recovered in the anti-oedipal, which requires us to join the implied reader so we become agents of revision rather than victims of the male-dominated project of oedipal strife. What is achieved in this enterprise is nothing less than the unmasking of a cultural fallacy. The revisioning involved in this project signals a change in a heretofore inflexible pattern of cultural history.

Two terms crucial to my argument are “project” and “preoedipal.” By “project” I mean something closely akin to the psychoanalytic term “projection,” which, as J. LaPlanche suggests, carries connotations of displacement and describes “the operation whereby qualities, feelings, wishes or even objects...are expelled from the self and located in another person or thing” (1973:349). Topographically, a projection is a movement away from the center toward the periphery. A “project,” by contrast, can be an “operation” without being a “movement away from the center” (350). Both terms can imply a reference to some essential structure or scheme or plan, but “project” best preserves this sense. By “project” I also mean to imply an intention or “intentionality” in the phenomenological sense—that is, as a motivation or behavior shaped by unconscious or unrealized conceptions, ideas, or beliefs. Economically, the incentive behind the “operation,” “structure,” or “intention” of either a project or a projection is counter-phobic. Given the terms of the present discussion, the root or source of the incentive behind a “projection” is a patriarchal bias, or anxiety that is oedipal by nature and therefore grounded in a primary or secondary narcissism. In patriarchal discourse, not even the idea of the “preoedipal” escapes this bias. By contrast, the root of the incentive behind a “project,” as I need to use the term in my

discussion here, lies not in a primary narcissism but rather in a “primary identification.” The idea of a “primary identification” is problematic and undeveloped, as LaPlanche notes, because it refers to an “identification” that has no object—that is, it designates a primal, inchoate organization of the psyche that occurs prior to the full differentiation of subject and object. This points directly toward the idea of “participation mystique.”

C.G. Jung says of *participation mystique* that, “It denotes a peculiar kind of psychological connection with objects, and consists in the fact that the subject cannot clearly distinguish himself from the object but it is bound to it by a direct relationship which amounts to a partial identity. This identity results from an *a priori* oneness of subject and object” (Jung 1971:456-7). An example of this *a priori* oneness is our participation in the mother, which is perhaps best understood as an instinctual, cyclic, non-narrative condition. This condition is the ground of the “preoedipal.” The “preoedipal” is a sort of simultaneous non-narrative perception as well as an inchoate narrative processing. Thus, by “preoedipal” I mean something not merely “personal” but rather something “aboriginal.”

A classic example of the tensions between the oedipal and the preoedipal projects in their traditional sense, both in a narrative of female initiation as well as in interpretive discourse can be found in the critical debate over Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*, a work that might easily be regarded as one of the first “modern” works of young adult fiction. The bifurcated project lies suspended between two competing claims, one present in Sandra Gilbert’s report of Richard Chase’s position that “the novel’s power arose from its mythologizing of Jane’s confrontation with masculine sexuality” (1979:478) and the other present in Adrienne Rich’s report of Phyllis Chesler’s claim that, in general, “women are motherless children in a patriarchal society” (1979:468). Which is the oedipal project and which the preoedipal is not difficult to discern—Chase places Jane’s struggle in the context of secondary relationships, while Chesler locates the struggle in the realm of primary relationships—that is, with the mother, who happens to be absent. Rich attempts a reconciliation or a resolution of the tensions here when, in her own interpretation, she suggests that

Charlotte Brontë is writing—not a *Bildungsroman*, but the life story of a woman who is *incapable* of saying *I am Heathcliff* (as the heroine of Emily’s novel does) because she feels so unalterably herself. *Jane Eyre*, motherless and economically powerless, undergoes certain traditional female temptations, and finds that each temptation presents itself along with an alternative—the image of a nurturing or principled or spirited woman on whom she can model herself, or to whom she can look for support. (470)

What is foreshadowed in *Jane Eyre* and in the commentaries it has generated are the tensions between the socially constructed and the aboriginally mythic.

A patriarchal or phallocentric culture or “reading” does not, as I intimated earlier, recognize the preoedipal/oedipal binary structure as a bifurcated project; it maintains, rather, that the two elements are simply earlier and later stages of a single project, with the former being almost fully devalued. It also denies or devalues the noumenal and sacred aspect of the mythic. What this construction denies is that the preoedipal mother is aggressive, seductive, and subversive both to the masculine ego and to masculine discourse as well as to the hierarchies they construct. The position needing to be advanced here is that the preoedipal mother has always been alive and well in folklore and fantasy—even if it has worn many disguises—and that contemporary women writers of young adult fiction are repositioning this project in a configuration with the oedipal that erases hierarchy, and ultimately stands as a refutation of Freud’s (and his followers’) appropriation of the oedipal story as a representative model of the psyche.

Oedipal and preoedipal narratives of initiation are the product of an initiatory project that necessarily works through primary and then secondary relationships, but *not necessarily in the terms and conditions of oedipal strife*. The oedipal aspect of the project works through social situations and arrangements, while the preoedipal aspect works through the subjective and inherent *human* situations that overdetermine social situations. Both aspects of the project, or both narrative impulses, are present in folklore and both are psychological, but where the former is “social” (i.e., it develops in service to the maintenance of social order) the latter is “mythic” (i.e., it expresses an underlying noumenal reality which primarily serves the development of a subjective self). In folkloric representations of female initiation, it is almost axiomatic that the tensions between the social and the mythic are resolved, and this remains true even as folkloric materials are captured in literary forms or “fixed” in standard collections. I should stress here that by “mythic” I mean that element which privileges the operation and structure of the sacred. In an important sense, the “mythic” *is* the sacred prior to the intervention of either institutionalized theology or ideology—for example, in a participation mystique (as I am attempting to use terms here) the mythic is the sacred expressed in ritual and art prior to interpretation or the impulse to interpret even as it is unfolding in the nascent stages of narration. In other words, the sacred is an underlying reality that finds expression in the mythic. Myth, in turn, provides the dynamic precedent for this *participation*, while ritual directs the inchoate shape of its narrative structure.

If, for the sake of argument, initiations of maturation involve four primary elements or fields—the mythic, the sexual, the psychic, and the social—then, in the context or climate of an oedipal culture, “oedipal” initiations almost always require a subordination of the sexual and psychic to the social as well as a displacement or subversion of the mythic. All four of these elements are vulnerable to being psychologized or mythologized (i.e., made susceptible to the intrusion of patriarchal hierarchicalizing through linear narratives). They are vulnerable, that is to say, to being misread either through a concretistic fallacy, where the subject is lost in an absolute identification with the process or object (complete empathy), or through a reductive fallacy, where the subject falls prey to the illusion that it has gained ascendancy over a process or object that the subject has first emptied of its noumenal content (a symbol is intellectually reduced to a sign). In other words, oedipal initiations are almost always a process of socialization wherein the sole aim is the production of a social being. The problem that arises here is that the economy of the initiation is lost because the culture, for reasons of its own, has failed in its primary obligation to maintain a balance of the four elements mentioned above.

“Preoedipal” initiations, on the other hand, usually involve a working through of the sexual, psychic, and social by means of the mythic, or by some ritual that satisfies the mythological imperative. This points toward the creation of narratives, albeit different narratives than the one revealed in the Oedipus myth—narratives appropriate to both female and male maturation. (This concept is reminiscent of Adrienne Rich’s arguments that the myths are not wrong but our interpretations of them are.) Preoedipal initiations, then, are a process of subjective humanization where the aim is the creation of an autonomous, generational adult—that is, where the initiand is encouraged toward ownership of her or his own social agency as opposed to being shaped into an agent of objective and projected social norms. It must be stated at once that, in the context of an oedipal culture, preoedipal initiations, by necessity, almost always achieve their goal through a subversion of the projects of the dominant culture and through the revisioning and reappropriation of primary projects that have been either displaced or repressed—or through the recovery of projects “felt” to have been lost. One of its aims, then, is the redress of the oedipal imbalance. In this sense, “preoedipal” becomes “anti-oedipal.”

The tensions between the social and the mythic, discussed earlier in reference to *Jane Eyre*, are present not only in narratives of initiation but in female rites of initiation as well. It is a matter of no small importance to my argument, of course, that the critical debate centers on the “Red Room” section of Brontë’s novel, in which Jane, as many commentators have

suggested, is experiencing the onset of menstruation. Perpetuating the bifurcated project and the dissociative kinds of discourse it produces has the effect of perpetuating menstrual taboos and the cultural silence regarding the matters of menarche and menopause.

In *The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation* (1988), authors Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth argue that menarcheal rites and menstruation have never been dealt with directly in literature and collections of folklore because literary narrative production has, for the most part, always been controlled by men; that is, men have acted as authors and publishers and as collectors, translators, and editors of oral and textual folk narratives. Appearing first in 1976 and then revised in 1988, *The Curse* ranges across anthropology, psychology, cultural history, and literary study to make the point that not only has the representation of this issue central to women been controlled by men but that menstruation, from menarche to menopause, as well as the beliefs, rituals, and attitudes surrounding it have been controlled and shaped by men's domination of culture, politics, religion, and medicine. They do not suggest that a golden age of matriarchy ever existed; they simply demonstrate what it means that, historically, women's subjectivity and biology have evolved in the shadow of a male-dominated discourse. This theme carries over into their chapter on folklore, which they were writing at the same time Bettelheim was writing *The Uses of Enchantment* (1977). In it they reiterate their position that folkloric materials lack explicit representation of menarche and menarcheal rites, a lack they seem to equate with failure.

In the chapter on folklore, "The Bleeding Tower: Menstrual Themes in Fairy Tales," Delaney, Lupton, and Toth point out that explicit references to menarcheal rites and the *fact* of menstruation are almost always met with resistance:

Weaving in and out of the mythmaking imaginations of centuries are those symbols of the eternal feminine: blood, flowers, the witch, the moon. When these images appear in poetry, fiction, or mythology, critics are reluctant to associate them with that most female of attributes, the menstrual cycle. The same neglect has applied to menstrual themes that seem to fill the universe of folktales. (1988:160)

In their new afterword to this chapter they acknowledge that Bettelheim's work has significantly changed our reading of folktales and report finding a comfortable correspondence between his reading and their own. That such matters are represented emblematically in myth-like characters and situations is important because this avoidance (or absence) of explicit references to

menarche and the presence of symbolic representation makes clear that folkloric motifs already embody an oedipal displacement of preoedipal issues and themes. What this displacement says about the oedipal project is significant: first, the oedipal complex and its attendant projects are an avoidance or denial of preoedipal matters and speak of a genuine fear not just of menstrual blood but also of the essence and evolution of the feminine; and second, that the oedipal project encourages a kind of collective forgetfulness and fosters a cultural misreading that de-sacralizes (violently objectifies—see “concretistic fallacy” above) the symbol and reduces transformations achieved through symbol to the status of mere change.

The contemporary repositioning of psychoanalytic theory contributes significantly to our rereading and revaluation of folkloric representations of initiation in literary texts. It is almost a commonplace among Anglo-American and French feminist revisionists of Freud to view the body as a cultural construction and to understand the suppression of the female body as an overriding project of masculine discourse. In this view, the female body is always located or positioned within a male text and, along with it, the female voice. Thus, in the beginning was the text, and all voices arise from and are the product of the *text*. The patriarchal appeal to theological and literary precursors (the textual version of oedipal strife) provides the authority for all claims intended to protect masculine hierarchy. In this light, a primary feminist project lies in deconstructing masculine discourse (by undoing its underpinnings in the Oedipal complex), reclaiming the female body, and repositioning subjectivity and the female voice within the body. This project, which works to the benefit of both genders, makes the human body and its subjectivity the producer of texts rather than a product or consumer of texts. What is most important about this is that it acknowledges and respects the priority of the voice over any supposed authority of the text; it privileges subjectivity and the integrity of the individual voice. In doing so, it diminishes competitiveness and encourages dialogue and consensus—it militates against one individual's or group's monopolizing the mode and terms of discourse.

Madelon Sprengnether, in *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, takes the revision of Freud a step farther than most by positioning Freud in a less imposing stance. She interprets Freud's choice of oedipal strife as the cornerstone of his theory less as a matter of his compelling insight into human behavior and more as a matter of his misreading his own psychological drama as a paradigm for the construction of a model of the psyche of an entire culture: “In choosing the Oedipal story as a basis for understanding his own history, as well as that of his culture, [Freud] privileged and legitimized the status quo, which represses femininity

and the figure of the mother, relegating both to a position of subversion" (1990:x-xi). The difficulty this creates, Sprengnether argues, is that "The Oedipus complex formalizes a conflict internal to patriarchy between paternal authority and maternal priority" (xi).

Sprengnether's insights have significant implications for literary production as well as for theory: first, she wants to "offer speculations about how one might displace Freud's emphasis on Oedipus in order to include the mother as an active figure in the process of enculturation and thus to open new possibilities for imaging and interpreting female subjectivity"; and second, to offer an "intervention into the Oedipus conflict in order to release its theoretical stranglehold on feminism"(xi). This stranglehold, in part, is epitomized by the assumption that the preoedipal mother is little more than a vestige of something primitive and prior to a fully encultured consciousness. From this point of view, to address the preoedipal mother smacks of nostalgia at best, and atavism at worst—in either case, any attempt to recover or revalue the preoedipal mother is dismissed as regressive.

Sprengnether's position makes preoedipal matters as much the subject of teleology as of archaeology. She would argue that the matter of the preoedipal is not just the object of a repression that needs to be undone, but that it is also the subject of a psychical function that needs to be recovered, revisioned, and revalued.

### **Disguising the Subversive Text**

The folkloric narrative is never wholly oedipal, preserving much of its preoedipal aspect through disguise and concealment. It is the product of a bifurcated project—an oedipal text with a preoedipal subtext, with the preoedipal aspect of the project being the carrier of the subversive element of the tale. Where the oedipal project, both structurally and thematically, works through or describes stages of human development in which secondary issues of socialization and political domination have come to the fore, the preoedipal project centers on primary issues of survival, rejecting the desire for "mastery over" in favor of the need for "residing with."

*Wise Child*, *Fire and Hemlock*, and *Balyet* do not involve a dramatic reappropriation of folkloric models, motifs, and symbols of female initiation, but distinguish themselves rather by their manifestly revisionist approach to those traditional materials. None contain an explicit treatment of menarche, depending instead on the familiar symbols of witches, grandmothers, absent mothers, failed fathers, mirrors, stones, flowers, blood, the moon, the sea, and, of course, the color red. Their revisionist achievement is not realized in what they say about menarche and menstruation but rather in what they



do *not* say. It is as if they understand that menarche, as the pre-eminent event of female maturation, has been exaggerated—its ritual importance co-opted by men (i.e., appropriated and defined by patriarchy in yet another gesture of oppression). Thus, the revision is achieved not through the explicit treatment of subject but rather in each narrative's restoration of the anagogic dimension through a reclamation of the numinosity of the folkloric. In other words, and by way of foreshadowing the argument that will follow, each narrative is grounded in its author's understanding of the liminal quality of initiation as well as in her respect for the ontological status of both symbol and ritual.

Each of these tales is presented in a different narrative mode and thus each invokes the numinous in a different manner. Furlong's *Wise Child* is wholly fantasy, set in fifteenth-century Scotland, and plays upon the tension between dogmatic Christianity, on the one hand, and sorcery, with its ties to the restorative powers of nature, on the other. Jones's *Fire and Hemlock* is set in England in the present (1985) and relates a nineteen-year-old young woman's struggle to piece together the fragmented memories of the events of the past ten years of her passage from childhood through adolescence—some events are actual, some are imaginary (the product of her immersion in folk ballads, such as *Tam Lin*, and in fictional narratives ranging from Arthurian legends to her own fantasies). Her emotional confusion is complicated by incursions of the supernatural into her everyday world. The narrative is a psychological thriller as the heroine struggles to sort out what she calls her "double-life," which is caused both by her repression of painful adolescent experiences and by conflicting spells cast by the everyday world *and* by a rich fantasy world. In this respect Jones's narrative and Furlong's have much in common. In Wrightson's *Balyet* this same tension is structured a little differently. *Balyet* is also set in the present (1989)—this time in Australia. It relates the initiation of a girl into young womanhood when the self-image she inherits from her secular world of white colonialism is drawn into conflict with the aboriginal spirit-world of the "forgotten ones." Thus, where *Wise Child* might be catalogued as a "fantasy" (with a remote claim to being historical), and where *Fire and Hemlock* might be catalogued as part mystery and part "psychological thriller," *Balyet* would probably best be catalogued as an "adventure story" having both "contemporary young adult" as well as anthropological interests. Here their differences end.

Taken as narratives of female initiation—especially as narratives that revise, or better, re-vision folkloric materials in ways that subvert patriarchal misreadings and interpretations—these books have a great deal in common. First, they demonstrate that menarche and initiation are more than just announcements of the advent of maturation—that is, initiation is not simply

a matter of indoctrination, and a ritual event is no substitute for a life-long commitment to a set of fundamental human values. Menarcheal rites, themselves, are rituals of transformation, contingent upon the subjectively experienced numinosity of the event and require the initiate to pass through a liminal phase. Second, Wrightson, Jones, and Furlong understand that the initiator cannot be just anyone but must be someone with a genuine interest in the initiand's soul. And third, common to these three works is the tacit assumption that the world of patriarchal values poses the greatest threat to the maturation of the young woman in her own right. Maturation in these works is implied to be the result of the initiand's own subjectivity becoming her source of self-definition. Significantly, the priority of her own experience supplants the authority of patriarchy and its definitions of who, what, why, and how she should be.

Thus, while neither Wrightson, Jones, nor Furlong deals explicitly with menarche, even though each of the main characters is obviously going through puberty, and their narratives remain silent about menstruation, this does not mean they are silent on the subject. Quite the contrary, they open a narrative space where instruction and initiation become possible. While the novels present the familiar symbols of menarche and relate instances of awakening sexuality, they also seem to take the biological and physical signs of maturation as unproblematic and given. Each writer seems to share the position taken by the authors of *The Curse* that, on the one hand, "menstruation [is] an essential forming experience in the human condition" (Delany et al. 1988:xi) but that it is an experience whose significance must be balanced, on the other hand, against the understanding that "menstruation is a *cultural* phenomenon ... [that] it is not 'womanhood,' and that women must not be defined or limited by it" (17). By the same token, they tacitly acknowledge that the taboos surrounding menarcheal rites and menstrual blood are also cultural phenomena, created (in all likelihood) by men as a means of controlling what men have perceived to be the "fearful power" of women. In any event, while Wrightson, Jones, and Furlong remain sensitive to the fear and confusion that attend the onset of menstruation, their narratives are attuned to and focused upon the fear and confusion that attend the existential passage from childhood into adulthood.

For these writers the importance of the initiation lies in the phase that anthropologist Victor Turner has identified as the liminal phase—that is, the crucial phase that lies between the separation from the mother and society and the initiand's eventual return and reintegration as a full member of the community. In this phase, the initiand undergoes or experiences "the communication of the *sacra*" at which time "potential understanding" is converted into "real gnosis." The key to this conversion (and this point cannot be stressed enough) is that during liminality the initiand has *not*

undergone a ritual death in anticipation of a ritual rebirth, as analytical critics are fond of suggesting, but rather the initiand is quite literally as dead as one can be while still functioning as biological organism. The initiand's past has been forever lost and, in terms of the development of the soul and realization of one's potential as an autonomous adult, there are virtually no assurances one will be born again. This is the danger of it, and this is why most refuse the call to initiation, preferring instead to participate in a demythologized or empty initiation and to settle into an easy acquiescence to cultural and social norms. The initiatory rite merely opens a passage into liminality, clearing the way for the possibility of a successful transformation.

In terms of narrative development, as Wrightson, Jones, and Furlong show, all attention is focused upon the heroine's passage through the liminal phase, and the reader is called to witness as well as to participate in the re-enactment of the transformation. The heroines are not Sleeping Beauties, Cinderellas, or Snow Whites, but rather initiands in a liminal stage of psychic and social development, confronted by tests and engaged in training by way of lessons communicated through dramatic, unfamiliar experiences. Thus, the great transformations once symbolized by sleep, waiting, or separation have, in these works, become a narrative stage. Symbolic sleep has become the scene of instruction and, in the narrative re-enactment, the reader struggles with the initiand through the liminal dream—a dream that is every bit as magical and mysterious as before, but is also governed by the need to engage the seriousness of the everyday. The initiand is called upon to redefine what is important, to function in a world shaped by powerful feelings and competing loyalties, and to leave behind the illusory safe world of duty, obedience to authority, and the safety of parental protection. Each novel initiates its protagonist into the conflicts between a demythologized world of the status quo and a "spirit-world" in nature whose priority and insistence upon a self-defining subjectivity has been usurped by the authority of a paternalistic social order. In these works set in contemporary times, adults are not portrayed as especially wicked or malevolent or magically absent, but rather they are portrayed as self-absorbed, mildly neurotic, or simply not well enough developed as adults themselves to be of much help in the development of their children.

Of the three novels I will look at here, Monica Furlong's *Wise Child* (1987) makes the most explicit use of folkloric materials. *Wise Child* is abandoned by her parents ("a woman so beautiful she is known as Maeve the Fair" and Finbar, who "was usually away at sea" [5]) and left in the care of her grandmother, who is the first both to enthrall her with the power of story-telling as well as to encourage her in the discipline of the hearth and of schooling. As her grandmother ages, the stories and lessons begin to fade, and when she dies, the teachings die with her. *Wise Child* turns to poor relatives,

who are unable to care for her, and finally is put up for "auction"—a town institution devised by the church to avoid the burden of having to care for orphans, usually by placing them in the keeping of some adult who would exploit and abuse the child (11). Just the prospect of the auction goes a long way toward disabusing Wise Child of her infantile fantasies about her own uniqueness. Convinced that her father will return to rescue her, she longs to make a case for caring for herself until his return (12). The auction produces a struggle over Wise Child between Fillan, the "fair-skinned and blushing" village priest who wants to see that she is raised in a "Christian home," and Juniper, "the dark, glowing woman," (13) a single woman and an outsider who lives apart from the community and has "something uncanny about her" (3).

The struggle comes about when Fillan tries to mediate between Juniper's offer to care for the girl, including seeing to it that she attends mass every Sunday, and a mean-spirited woman known to reduce girls to "anxious and worn little workhorses before they were eight years-old." Juniper interrupts the priest's protestations by suggesting that Wise Child should be allowed to choose for herself—a trait that will become Juniper's signature in her guidance of Wise Child's passage through adolescence. None of Wise Child's options seem desirable to her until a timid aunt intercedes and, inadvertently, puts Wise Child to her first test. Wise Child, caught between her fears of the obvious cruelty of the soul-appropriating woman and the rumors of Juniper's being a witch in the service of the devil, wrings her hands at her "terrible predicament," hears her Aunt insist (dishonestly) that Wise Child's father wished for her to be cared for by Juniper. Wise Child interprets her Aunt's gesture as some sort of cue and chooses to go with Juniper (14-15).

Wise Child has one final task to perform before accompanying Juniper to her white stone house, set high up from the village "on a sort of inland cliff" as if "you were on the roof of the world" (21). She must attend her grandmother's funeral. Believing her abandonment by all that is familiar complete, Wise Child cannot escape an overriding sense of doom that attends her feelings of sadness and loss. This loss, however, reminds her of another—that of her mother (18-19). In this passage, Furlong's command of her material and her genius for narrative complexity shine. Wise Child's separation from the patriarchal world of secondary relationships is complete and, at the same time, several levels of primary relationships in the maternal world have been undone. Furlong uses dramatic irony here to set the stage for Wise Child's maturation cum autonomy.

Wise Child's belief that "nobody wanted [her] except a witch" is ironic in as much the one person who literally wants to possess her is indeed a witch, and a black witch at that. It is, as both the reader and Wise Child will discover only much later, none other than her mother, Maeve the Fair. Thus, in the lines that precede this lament, the Maeve the Fair that is "lost to [Wise

Child] forever” is the wished-for-mother, the preoedipal primary object of the participation mystique (18). Eventually Wise Child’s initiation will lead her into a life of deeper and more fundamental primary relations, ones in which she will find herself more deeply rooted in the earth as well as in her own body; she will transcend the judgmental part of herself that she acquired growing up in the village (she is “all likes and dislikes” [36]) and will tap into a well-spring of compassion for others. It needs to be added at once that Furlong, in articulating this level of the primary, scrupulously avoids anything that would suggest she is lapsing into a cultural construction of the feminine as a naturalized object; she is, rather, describing a biological connectedness that both women and men have with the earth but that is often lost sight of in their everyday lives as well as in their dealings with one another.

In the passage cited above, when Wise Child separates from the patriarchal world, she crosses over a threshold into the liminal. For Juniper, who will become her initiator, is a sorceress who has earned the title “Doran”—literally from the Gaelic word for “entrance” or “way in.” A doran is “someone who [has] found a way in to seeing or perceiving” (83). And her home and its environs are nothing less than a threshold, or liminal, world perched high on a cliff between mountain and moor, and extending from deep caverns below to the roof of the sky. “The life that is gone,” for which Wise Child weeps, is the infantile life of illusions that make up the everyday world we are born into. At the same time, the liminal world through which Juniper’s tutelage leads her produces its own uncertainties:

Juniper was a wonderful teacher, partly because lessons got mixed in with everything else. She would draw a picture of the seas and countries around Britain so that I would understand the story of a voyage or a love story or a battle, and she would alternate a piece of history with a fairy story so my attention remained sharp. I puzzled over what was “real.”

“Did that *really* happen?” I would ask Juniper. “Or is it just a story?”

“Just a story,” she would echo me mockingly.

“There are many kinds of reality,” Juniper explained. “Only silly people think there is only one kind. I don’t live in the fairy reality and neither do you. I live in two or three kinds of reality, though. So, I expect, will you.” (68)

While the schooling Wise Child receives may cause her some confusion and lead her to question “reality,” it is far more thorough than what other children get.

In addition, she learns about herbs and flowers and how to make potions and cures from them. But most important of all, she learns lessons about herself, about living in her own body and celebrating life in doing

the simple chores by which we sustain ourselves. When Wise Child, for example, announces to Juniper that she doesn't like cooking or cleaning or "any of those things" because they are boring, Juniper tells her, "Everyone has to do those things."

"Rich people don't," [Wise Child] pointed out.

Juniper laughed, as she often did at things I said in those early days, but at once became quite serious.

"They miss a lot of fun," she said. "But quite apart from that—keeping yourself clean, preparing the food you are going to eat, clearing it away afterward—that's what life's *about*, Wise Child. When people forget that, or lose touch with it, then they lose touch with other important things as well."

"Men don't do those things."

"Exactly. Also, as you clean the house up, it gives you time to tidy yourself up inside—you'll see." (36-37)

With these simple lessons begins the process of maturational initiation, whereby the initiand is led through her body into her own subjectivity, and finally into generational adulthood grounded in that rarest of achievements, a life of self-definition. As in most cases, the *sacra* experienced and received in liminality are communicated through the obvious, the mundane *sacra* of human life.

### Shattering "Reality"

Regardless of whether the *sacra* are communicated through the obvious or not, initiatory rites require a death no less fearful than biological death—both involve the same uncertainty: the letting go of the familiar, and a surrendering of the self and the will to the unknown. While *Wise Child* presents this letting go and surrender as something inevitable through her use of the traditional motif of the orphan, Diana Wynne Jones, in *Fire and Hemlock*, intensifies the drama of the struggle both by setting her action in the "Nowhere/Now Here" of the folktale, on the one hand, and the metaphysical "nowhere," or "still-point" of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, of cosmological myth, on the other. This "imaginal" setting is placed, in turn, in the everyday world of contemporary England, but Jones adds a psychological twist, first, by creating some confusion in the narrator's mind between "real life things" and "made up things," and second, by giving her heroine, Polly, who is now nineteen, what seems to her to be a "double set" of memories. Like *Wise Child*, *Fire and Hemlock* recounts events after they have occurred; the difference between them is that Wise Child knows how

her story ends before she begins her narrative, whereas the narrative about Polly recounts her working-through her memories of past events to reach some resolution within them. In this case, the reader actively shares in the narrator's confusion and struggles with the same mysteries.

By way of contrast, in Furlong's novel, *Wise Child* emerges renewed from the liminal at the narrative's conclusion. She is indeed one born into herself and seeing the world as if for the first time: "My world seemed to have changed, and I no longer knew where I was, or who I was. The sun was slowly going down, making the whole world golden when I saw it.... 'Oh, Juniper, isn't it beautiful?' ...At that moment I knew, beyond a shadow of doubt, that I, *Wise Child*, should become a *doran*" (Furlong 1987:228). In Jones's novel, however, Polly is about to emerge from the liminal at the narrative's beginning, not transformed but rather about to acquiesce to the banality of the adult status quo. Looking at what had once seemed a haunting and mysterious picture called "Fire and Hemlock" that had been an important part of her life from the time she was nine years old, she says, "The penalty of being grown up was that you saw things like this photograph as they really were" (Jones 1985:4). What catches her and pulls her back into actively re-living the years of her maturation, between the ages of nine and nineteen, is her coming across a story called "Two-timer" in a collection called *Times Out of Mind* that she remembers having read before.

"Two-timer" is about a man who "went back in time to his own childhood and changed things, so that his life ran differently the second time" (Jones 1985:4). As Polly thumbs through the book looking for one story she thought had been called "Fire and Hemlock," she feels odd when it isn't there and wonders if she had dreamed it. Polly's doubt grows into a confusion which, in turn, leads to a kind of panic: "Why should she suddenly have memories that did not seem to correspond with the facts?" (5). At this Polly begins to search back through her past that "seemed a smooth string of normal, half-forgotten things: school and home, happiness and miseries, fun and friends," and so on. She is carried back to the time of her parents' divorce, memories of a favorite book called *Heroes* and, with a shock of recognition, "The Funeral!" (also a chapter in her favorite book) (6). Like *Wise Child*, Polly reenters the liminal phase of her initiation with a separation from the everyday world that occurs at a funeral. But unlike *Wise Child* who goes to live with Juniper after her grandmother's funeral, in Polly's case the funeral occurs just before she goes to live with her grandmother, who becomes one of her important supporters, in the role of Fate and Wisdom; as she passes through liminality.

In an essay entitled "The Heroic Ideal—A Personal Odyssey," Jones describes her folkloric and mythic sources as well as what she set out to accomplish in *Fire and Hemlock*. Drawing upon the ballads of *Tam Lin* and *Thomas the Rhymer*, Homer's *Odyssey*, *The Fairie Queene*, the Brothers Grimm, and *Cupid and Psyche*, she aimed, above all, to create a female hero with whom all girls could identify and, through that, with whom all *persons* could identify; and, second, "what she wanted to do *really* was to write a book in which modern life and heroic mythical events approached one another so closely that they were nearly impossible to separate" (Jones 1989:134). The story would have to be a journey of the mind, where the unfolding maturity of the body and the demands of adult life would introduce complexities that would compete with ideals and memories of childhood, thus driving the imaginal, heroic self down the path of forgetfulness. Jones feels that children, especially, are instinctively close to the heroic ideal—they live, in their straightforwardness and naivete, almost in a heroic mode—but at the onset of puberty, "people *do* lose sight of their ideals quite often in adolescence and young adulthood; they tend to see life as far too complex and then come up with the idea that things are only valid if they are unpleasant or boring. The myth of Cupid and Psyche is certainly about this. Or, as Eliot says: 'human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality' and the defense is to deny the imagination any reality at all" (139).

A main folk element that Jones draws upon is the vision of the future lover—a vision, she says, serves as the high ideal, the thing to strive towards, which is, "in plain human terms, love." She sees this as shaping the quest of both female and male hero alike to seek the sacred within and to live up to its standards. Following any ideal, of course, sets the stage for conflict, and where there is conflict there must also be a "letting go."

Thus the funeral (or "The Funeral") at the beginning of the book marks the death of childhood for Polly, first, because it is here she has a vision of her future love, Tom, and second, because she falls under the spell of a female with supernatural powers, Tom's ex-wife, Laurel, "a particularly terrible type of woman . . . who confuses fact and fiction impartially for her own ends" (Jones 1985:136). Laurel is part Siren, part Circe, and part Queen of the Fairies. Polly's mother, Ivy, is too self-absorbed and too emotionally (and physically) absent to be of any help to Polly through the confusion of adolescent yearnings and fears, and it would be all too easy for Polly to slip into the same mundane oblivion as her mother. Ivy, who clings to men and then complains that they are ruining her chance for happiness, has always been critical of Polly's reading: "'Look at you,' Ivy said [to her nineteen year-old daughter] You've rotted your mind with reading books. You can't take a realistic view of life like I do. You can't see the world as it is any longer'" (269).



Were it not for Polly's strength of feeling, her love of books, imagination and the life of the mind, which will not let the heroic ideal fade altogether from the core of her being, the lessons Polly gains from watching her girlfriends' suffering through their own growing pains might have been lost on her. This, in turn, might have left her unprepared to grasp the meaning of her grandmother's explaining the riddle of the ballad of *Tam Lin*, which is the key to her recognizing the heroic task that lies before her. The liminal phase of the initiation would have failed to transform her consciousness, and Polly would have simply been reabsorbed back into the everyday world. Instead, when the moment is upon her, Polly is able to perform the "strenuous and truthful act of memory" that breaks the thrall holding her and Tom captive—a revisionary heroic act that combines Odysseus' confronting the Sirens and Janet's rescue of Tam Lin, an act driven, at once, by the heroic ideal of the mind *and* of love.

Polly's immersion in the liminal phase lasts ten years, from the time she is nine until she reaches nineteen. It is a passage through puberty, a developing female body, first kisses, and sexual longing, but it is also a passage through many guises; she is Hero, "Gerda in *The Snow Queen*, Snow White, Britomart...Pandora, Eurydice, and Janet." Jones demonstrates her intuitive understanding of the liminal in her choice of an "organizing overlay." For this she has chosen Eliot's *Four Quartets*, first for the opening setting at the funeral it provides:

Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose garden...

Quick said the bird, find them, find them  
Round the Corner....Through the first gate,  
Into our first world, shall we follow  
The deception of the thrush? ("Burnt Norton," I, 11-24)

Jones' second use of Eliot's poem concerns its interpretation of her title and its description of the overlay of her narrative path:

I chose the poem because it combines static meditation with movement in an extraordinary way, to become a quest of the mind away from the Nothing of spiritual death (Hemlock in my book), towards the Fire which is imagination and redemption—the Nowhere of my book. A heroic journey from Nothing to Nowhere is what Polly takes. (1985:140)

She closes her essay with the lines from Eliot she says echo the structure of the *Odyssey* as well as give shape to the Coda of *Fire and Hemlock*, and which—not coincidentally—describe the configuration of liminality:

“What we call the beginning is often the end/ And to make an end  
is to make a beginning. / The end is where we start from” (“Little  
Gidding,” V, 1-3).

### Reclaiming the Common Ground

If *Fire and Hemlock* can be called the story of Polly's journey from Nothing to Nowhere, then the same can be said of Patricia Wrightson's *Balyet*. And Juniper's claim in *Wise Child* that there are many different “realities” proves equally true in *Balyet*, just as it does in *Fire and Hemlock*. For Balyet, the shadow spirit of a young aboriginal girl banished a thousand years ago, and Jo, a headstrong and self-centered fourteen year-old who is left to her own devices by her mother, are both caught in a virtual “Nowhere” between the unconscious commercial world of the everyday and the lost world of the “forgotten ones.” Jo is consumed by boredom and Balyet is condemned to wander endlessly for committing a crime so great that not even death will take her.

What Wrightson's novel adds to the present discussion is the introduction of the anthropological dimension which casts into relief the folkloric and psychological contexts of ritual initiation in all three works. For Jo's and Balyet's worlds mirror each other across time, and the surface that reflects them is the material present, which—by virtue of its “nowhere-ness”—is an example of what Victor Turner calls “historical liminality.” Historical liminality occurs, according to Barbara Myerhoff who cites Turner, “during transitional periods of history ‘when the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape’” (1982:117). Into this amorphous time and space Wrightson introduces Mrs. Willet, an aboriginal woman called a “Clever Woman,” who is one of the last caretakers of the ancient, sacred sites of her people. In Mrs. Willet lies both the essence of balanced preoedipal, primary relations as well as an understanding of the damage done by cultural misreadings where the necessity of balance has been displaced by an assertion of patriarchal authority.

In one sense, both Balyet and Jo have fallen victim to rituals of initiation that have gone awry or, in Jo's case, perhaps, a society where such rituals are altogether lacking. As Myerhoff suggests, “The interplay of biology and culture is the subtext of all rites of passage” (109), we live at the edge of paradox; we belong both to Nature and Culture, and we perpetually struggle

to announce and renounce the ambivalent condition. To the extent that ritual successfully mediates the paradox between nature and culture, when the mediated balance begins to erode, and culture begins to suppress what is natural, the culture must enter a process of radical revision overdetermined by nature or the culture will begin to die. Both Balyet and Jo are caught in patriarchal cultures that set out to contain and suppress female sexuality and its subjectivity. In the case of Balyet's society, the culture is bound by ritual practices that privilege male dominance, and in the case of Jo's society, the culture has become wholly de-sacralized, with the development of the adolescent being directed merely by peer pressure and the values of the marketplace.

Both Balyet and Jo are left without means of giving direction or expression to their developing sexuality (or of cultivating a self-image and subjectivity appropriate to their evolving bodies). Each, with her undeveloped cultural consciousness, is led into conflict by adolescent biological yearnings. Balyet thus violates a taboo that leads to the deaths of two blood brothers, and Jo, "all new-painted," sneaks off to follow a boy from school only to end up in a flirtation with his older brother (1989:61-66). Each is abandoned by her society in an initiatory liminal stage from which there is apparently no hope of reintegration, no way in and no way out:

There should have been men's voices singing like wind and sea; and children sleeping against their mothers...There should have been young men sitting by the old ones....There should have been laughter and talk from the women near at hand; and firelight gleaming in dark eyes....

*What will I do?* sighed Balyet in her long and dreadful loneliness, mourning for lost fires and lost people. (61)

Rituals are important to working through liminality ("periods when the past has lost its grip and the future has not yet taken definite shape"), because "rituals [to the extent they always carry vestiges of their source in religious practice] celebrate or commemorate transhuman powers which, though invisible, are regarded by believers as the first and final causes of natural and cultural phenomena" (Turner 1982:201). Wrightson directs her two heroines through this process by reintroducing at once the sacred time and space both of the body and of the origins of culture in nature. Sacred time and space have priority over secular time and space, which are constructions of ego consciousness and which are always set over against nature—secular time and space are constructions that assert their own authority through rational discourse, which always functions to de-sacralize experience, while sentimentalizing or romanticizing nature and their relationship to it. (One might go so far as to say that they are a reaction-formation intended to defend the secular's vulnerability against the threat of

its own dissolution in the biological and the sacred.) The sacred time and space in *Balyet* find their counterparts in *Wise Child* both in Juniper's world of sorcery as well as in the very nature of fantasy of itself; in *Fire and Hemlock* they are present in Polly's psychology as well as in the meditative space in the compositional tone of Eliot's *Four Quartets* that Jones uses to provide the structural "overlay" of her novel—not to mention its presence in her revisioning of the ballad of *Tam Lin* and *Thomas the Rhymer*. What is gained by clearing a ritual space for the initiand (and for the reader) is a shift in consciousness; this is the shift Turner described earlier as a reorienting of the self from potential understanding to pure gnosis. This same idea appears, of course, in Aristotle's *Poetics* and describes both the development of the hero as well as the workings of dramatic performance on the audience.

Myerhoff turns to anthropologist Sherry Ortner for a description of this "shift in consciousness"—a shift not unlike what we see in the resolution of *Fire and Hemlock*, in a turning point in *Wise Child*'s development, as well as in Mrs. Willet's teaching:

Achieving the appropriate shift in consciousness is the work of ritual. Ortner concludes: "The re-shaping of consciousness or experience that takes place in ritual is by definition a reorganization of the relationship between the subject and what may be called reality. Ritual symbolism always works on both elements, at reorganizing (representations of) 'reality,' and at the same time reorganizing (representations of) 'self.'" (Myerhoff 1982:129)

Myerhoff concludes that "a view of reality and a corresponding view of self are thus established through ritual, creating a subjective psychological state that restructures meaning." This "meaning" is what Doran Juniper, and the Clever Woman, Mrs. Willet, have to teach, as do the ancient and classical texts that Polly reads. Mrs. Willet reports,

The secrets were hidden with a cunning that was deep. . . . They were ordinary things that lay in the open for anyone to see: one tree in a forest, one stone on a hillside, a grassy hollow, a pool. It was only their truth that was secret, and only those who knew it could find them.

One stone among many, stroked to a polish by thousands of hands and tingling to the touch; one pool closing silently over the gift of leaves. . . . No one without teaching could tell these were the sacred storehouses of life. No one could know that the stone held the spirits of unborn children, and would give them up when the right hands stroked it and the right person sang the proper song. (1989:34)

Simply put, the “meaning” is that nature has priority over culture, and that the relationship between them is nonhierarchical, despite patriarchal constructions of culture. Turner, for example, suggests that “Westerners have thrust from conscious awareness [perceptible sacred symbols and rituals] in order to effect their rational conquest of the material world” (1982:13).

The lesson takes different forms in different contexts. For Polly it is the recognition of the need for letting go of the “not-I”—that is, for recognizing that shared subjectivity is not to be found in possessing another as an object. Where Polly must understand “difference,” Wise Child must recognize her kinship with what is in nature (as opposed to what she has been taught by her culture)—that is, she must learn a different kind of “letting-go” that involves not allowing her ego-consciousness to objectify experience or to allow fear to contaminate her potential for intersubjectivity. Her recognition comes to her when she must confront her fear of crossing a footbridge:

It was a terror of falling, of being lost and swept away of losing myself, of not being Wise Child anymore.

As if a door had opened, I suddenly thought of something else. Only the other night. . . . I had felt part of everything, part of animal and bird, tree and stone. If I was part of everything, then I was also part of bridge and stream, of the sharp rocks beneath the water and the tumbling, rushing waters. *Even* if I fell into the waters, and *even* if I was swallowed up by them, I would still be a part of it all. In such a world . . . nothing terrible could happen to me. (Furlong 1987:92)

In *Balyet*, it takes the form of Jo’s being drawn out of her self-absorption to recognize the validity of Mrs. Willet’s ties to the past, which is also her own, and the importance of that past to the construction of an authentic future (Wrightson 1989:80-1). For Balyet herself, the situation is more complex. Mrs. Willet must put her teaching into the service of communication with the “Forgotten Ones” and to urge upon them a revision of their own cultural values, a revision that will undo cultural excesses that drew them too far out of nature. In one respect, changing the past is as easy as changing the future, when one is in “sacred” or ritual time. But Mrs. Willet will accomplish her task not so much because she can reach back into time but because Jo and Balyet share a common problem of young women growing up in patriarchal cultures, and the passage of one thousand years has done little to erase that commonality.

Jo identifies with Balyet's situation and finds Balyet's punishment as unfair and as unjust as the boredom and criticism she is forced to suffer. Their sisterhood lies in the subjectivity they share across time, and the strength of this affective tie compels Mrs. Willet, with the help of her own teacher, to cross the historical limen between now and then to negotiate a transformation of the past's injustices with the "Forgotten Ones," thus releasing Balyet and the past's hold on the present. This negotiation is fully generational, and even Mrs. Willet must experience it as a novice:

In liminality the novice enters ritual time and space that are betwixt and between those ordered by the categories of past and future of mundane experience. The cultural guidelines of secular conduct are now erased or obscured. Something weird and numinous replaces them. (Turner 1982:202)

Even though we evolve out of nature into culture, culture cannot supplant nature. To lose sight of the priority of nature is to fall prey to the misuse or misreading of culture. Through her teacher's spirit and the ritual she invokes, Mrs. Willet reasserts the priority of nature. The shadow-spirits of the "Forgotten Ones" recognize both that, in their fear, they are guilty of excess in their desire to protect cultural taboos and that, as a result, they have gone against nature. The "Forgotten Ones'" resolution of the injustice releases Balyet, transforms Jo, and provides at least the opportunity for the present to redeem itself and emerge from its historically liminal state into one that properly values intersubjective communication and community. What is most important here in terms of the present discussion is that this resolution redresses the imbalance between culture and nature in reasserting the primacy of nature, thus finally reconfiguring a non-hierarchical relationship between them. The manner of this resolution recapitulates the manner in which a revisionist preoedipal narrative deconstructs the evaluative imbalance between the authority of the paternal voice and the priority of the maternal and reconfigures them on a non-hierarchical ground.

What *Balyet*, *Fire and Hemlock*, and *Wise Child* have in common is that they describe the ritual initiations of young women who are quite consciously portrayed initially as children of patriarchy. They begin as products of societies in which the female body, sexuality, and subjectivity are cultural constructions of male-dominated discourse. Their authors take their young heroines through rites of passage, from puberty and adolescence to young adulthood: they separate from a society where the preoedipal mother is negatively defined by patriarchy, and cross into liminality and undifferentiation, where the *sacra* they receive are communicated to them

through an unrepressed feminine subjectivity (either in the form of sacred objects, “dramata,” or instruction). In the reintegration phase which marks the closing of liminality, they experience the “fostering of *communitas*, a direct, spontaneous and egalitarian mode of social relationship, as against hierarchical relationships among occupants of structural status-roles” (Turner 1982:202). Jo, Polly, and Wise Child each, at least implicitly, passes through menarche, yet no explicit references to menstruation are made by any of these three authors. From this we must conclude either that Wrightson, Jones, and Furlong have fallen victim to the same old taboos that have constrained their predecessors (and some of their contemporaries) or that they have deliberately rejected old hierarchies and demystified menstruation, relegating it to the same status as any other human bodily function. As members of a generation that saw the publication of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* as well as that of *The Curse*, I suspect they recognize menarche as an indicator of the onset of change, but view it mainly as incidental to the process of transformation itself. Each of these writers emphasizes that the first test of maturation involves owning one’s own body and subjectivity in the face of competing claims (that is, claiming one’s place in nature), and that the second test involves the revaluation of coming into one’s own and assuming a role in the community (that is, claiming one’s place in culture).

To the extent that these novels are representative of the genre, one might claim that young adult fiction uses patterns of initiation to shift the terms of the discourse to the consequences and responsibilities of maturation and adulthood that young women face—that is, to the inner necessities of maturation as well as the private and public conflicts confronting the fully generational adult. In so doing, they turn the discourse away from the judgmental and hierarchical postures of male-dominated discourse (vestiges of which are apparent even in *Jane Eyre*, especially in the “Red Room” passage, as well as in much of the critical debate surrounding that chapter), and focus on the tensions between the inner-life and the outer—between the noumenal and the phenomenal, and between preoedipal and oedipal.

Where masculine discourse casts conflict in terms of oedipal strife and seeks to suppress the body, *Balyet*, *Fire and Hemlock*, and *Wise Child* are created by women writers who direct their young heroines toward a recognition of themselves as generational adults by repositioning their voices in their bodies, retrieving the voice from the cultural text and allowing biology and subjectivity to produce self-defining, self-authorizing revisionist texts grounded in cosmogonic mythological models, which are not, ultimately, culture-bound—at least not in relativistic anthropological terms. Myerhoff describes the importance of this in contemporary life to a refounding and revisioning of both culture and its constructions of gender:

... what is critical ... is the *active* relation to ritual. Instead of having rites performed on us, we do them to and for ourselves and immediately we are involved in a form of self-creation that is potentially community-building, providing what van Gennep would call regenerative by revitalizing old symbols from the perspective of the present. (1982:130-31)

These novels are dramatic re-enactments of liminality that include a revitalization of the old symbols and rituals (and not merely reports of it such as those that might be found in more traditional and two-dimensional folkloric representations). It is through this re-enactment that the recovery of the bifurcated project is accomplished.

### Conclusion

The recovery of the bifurcated project is important both to initiatory rituals as well as to literary production because it is revisionary of both. The connection between initiation and narrative production is fairly straightforward. The connection with what may be called "literary" is a little more complex.

Start with initiation. The ritual function of initiation is two-fold: mythologically, it opens sacred time and space to allow for the initiate's immersion in a participation mystique; and psychologically, it is counter-phobic, offering the initiate some assurance of safe passage between life-stages. In both cases it ameliorates suffering—"suffering" in the sense of "enduring" pain and fear, but also in the sense of "allowing" them. What is "phobic" is the fear of the unknown. The initiate is in a liminal stage between life and death where the outcome is uncertain. Her suffering is the suffering that attends the death of illusion—illusions about her past, present and future as well as about the nature of existence. Many of these illusions are born of ignorance, of simply "not knowing," while others are the result of being caught, or at least contained, in the intricate web of influences that are part of one's upbringing. The influences are indeed culturally determined and culturally specific (the product of secondary relations) but what is transcultural is that they do have a common origin in primary experience; what they are created in response to is ab-original, and their appeal is directly to what is subjective.

The "successful" literary reenactment of initiation is the one that manages both to socialize the protagonist while, at the same time, deconstructing the network of regressive fantasies of which the society is



comprised. The narrative accomplishes this by refounding the psychological and affective ground of the individual—that is, one’s “coming to oneself” and one’s becoming a participating member in the community are, by necessity, one and the same process.

To this end, the “literariness” of the text is measured by its success in effecting and reporting a psychological, social, and mythological transformation in the initiand—*anything less is simply an indoctrination*. What prevents this process from degenerating into mere socialization is the participation enabled by folkloric representation. As I argued at the outset, myth provides the dynamic precedent for this participation, while ritual directs the shape of its narrative structure. The result of this participation is the transformation of consciousness, a process that involves a reconfiguration of primary relationships. What the three examples of female initiation in young adult fiction I have examined here have shown is that this reconfiguration entails a simultaneous “letting go” of primary attachments and a “coming into” one’s own along with the recognition of one’s own agency as a source of primary relations. The recovery of the bifurcated project means a recovery, for protagonist and reader alike, of our own agency both within and without the text. It means, too, that revisioning the literary text is also necessarily a re-visioning of the human ground of the literary project.

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