

## ENCOUNTERS WITH THE SACRED Rod Jones' Novel *The Mothers* (2015)

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**Abstract** – This essay focuses on Rod Jones' latest novel, *The Mothers* (2015), in connection with the sacred archetype of the Great Mother, belied and betrayed by the patriarchal Australian social conventions the author describes with depth of feeling, realistic and historical detail. *The Mothers* is a feminine saga presenting the interconnected lives of four women of different generations, living in Melbourne, from 1917 to 1990. This essay will show how, in spite of the failure and refusal of patriarchal *dominator* society to protect maternal *partnership* relationships, the Archetypal Mother is a relevant spiritual force in most of the women in Jones' narrative, and in the autobiographical figure of David, the writer-protagonist-narrator of the last part of the novel. The book follows these women's *Songlines* with a delicate, thorough and compassionate voice, which also vigorously and resolutely denounces the sorrowful and sad plight they are condemned to, under an insensitive and cold dominator order. Patriarchal society repudiates the sacred feminine in order to control and rule under a hierarchical, absolutist male power. The novel confirms Jones' maturity and sensitivity as a writer who, with grace and deep understanding, can balance feeling, without falling into sentimentalism, or realism, without the trappings of the documentarist. The novel also successfully expresses the poetry and authenticity of life, while narrating in vivid detail everyday realities.

**Keywords:** Archetypal Mother; The Patriarchal Predator; The Pregnant Daughter; Women who Run with the Wolves.

*You are born to one mother, but if you're lucky, you will have more than one. And among them you will find most of what you need". Your relationships with todas las madres, the many mothers, will most likely be ongoing ones, for the need for guidance and advisory is never outgrown, nor, from the point of view of women's deep creative life, should it ever be (Pinkola Estés, 181).*

### 1. Methodological Foundations

The methodological foundations of this essay draw upon Riane Eisler's work, which the international *Partnership Studies Group*<sup>1</sup> applies to the study of world literatures, languages and education. I employ the words *partnership* and *dominator* according to Eisler's *Cultural Transformation Theory*<sup>2</sup> (1987, xvii ff.), a theory showing how our cultural paradigms are

<sup>1</sup> Founded in 1998, the Partnership Studies Group (PSG), University of Udine, is an international research group, coordinated by Antonella Riem, which studies world literatures in English according to Riane Eisler's Cultural Transformation Theory. See: [http://all.uniud.it/?page\\_id=195](http://all.uniud.it/?page_id=195).

<sup>2</sup> Riane Eisler is a social scientist and author whose work on cultural transformation has inspired scholars and social activists. Her research has impacted many fields, including history, economics, anthropology, psychology, sociology and education. She has been a leader in the movement for peace, sustainability and economic equity, and her pioneering work in human rights has expanded the focus of international organisations to include the rights of women and children. Eisler's 1987 bestseller *The Chalice and the*

constructed by the stories we are told, for the leading narratives of our society shape our frame of mind, culture and belief-systems (Eisler 1987, 75-77). Eisler argues that in order to transform our societies, we need to align our stories to a partnership paradigm. In this context, the word partnership refers to: 1) the capacity to create harmonious relationships with the “Other”, 2) the cultural model governed by the principle of *linking* (rather than *ranking*, typical of the dominator paradigm). According to Eisler, a “dominator model is what is popularly termed either patriarchy or matriarchy – the ranking of one half of humanity over the other” (1987, XVII) and is characterised by “technologies designed to destroy and dominate”, symbolised by the *Blade* (1987, XX). In a partnership paradigm, represented by the *Chalice*, “social relations are primarily based on the principle of linking rather than ranking”, and “beginning with the most fundamental difference in our species, between male and female – diversity is not equated with either inferiority or superiority” (1987, XVII). Difference is positive, creative and fruitful rather than problematic and is an opening towards manifold different interconnected stories.

Other important foundations for my interpretation of Jones’ *The Mothers* are some key feminist texts dealing with feminine archetypes and values; in particular, Jean Bolen’s *Goddesses in Every Women* and Pinkola Estes’ *Women Who Run with the Wolves*, which offer an interesting archetypal background in order to analyse Jones’ characters and themes.

## 2. Women’s Progress

Rod Jones’ interesting journey as a writer started with the great success of *Julia Paradise*, a novel that sets the goal of his psychological and ethical reconstruction and reconnection to the past, both personal and historical. I read his subsequent novels<sup>3</sup> as steps in this historical, fictional and partly autobiographical healing journey of self-discovery that finally brings the author to create this delicate and sensitive novel, where he tackles with loving care the theme of unmarried motherhood in the 1950s in Australia.

In the novel, Rod Jones searches for his partnership voice, while facing and narrating his own personal experience as an adopted child, who meets his birth mother around 1988,

*Blade: Our History, Our Future*, was issued in 23 foreign languages. See: <http://www.rianeeisler.com/> and <http://www.partnershipway.org/>. The third Italian edition, with a new special epilogue by Eisler and a glossary on partnership language by Stefano Mercanti, was issued by Forum University Press, Udine, in 2011: [http://www.forumeditrice.it/percorsi/lingua-e-letteratura/all/il-calice-e-la-spada/il-calice-e-la-spada/libro\\_view](http://www.forumeditrice.it/percorsi/lingua-e-letteratura/all/il-calice-e-la-spada/il-calice-e-la-spada/libro_view). She is also famous for her second book *Sacred Pleasure. Sex, Myth and the Politics of the Body*, New York, HarperCollins, 1995, Forum University Press, Udine, reissued in 2012 the translation with a new preface and glossary: *Il piacere è sacro. Il potere e la sacralità del corpo e della terra dalla preistoria ad oggi*: [www.forumeditrice.it/percorsi/lingua-e-letteratura/all/il-piacere-e-sacro/il-piacere-e-sacro/libro\\_view](http://www.forumeditrice.it/percorsi/lingua-e-letteratura/all/il-piacere-e-sacro/il-piacere-e-sacro/libro_view).

<sup>3</sup> Rod Jones’ *Julia Paradise* (1986), was a success, set in 1927 Shanghai, it was translated and published worldwide, and was recently issued as Text Classic (2013). It won the Fiction Award in the South Australian Premier’s Awards in 1988, was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award and was runner-up for the Femina Etranger Prize in Paris. Jones’ second novel, *Prince of the Lilies* (1991), is set in Greece and it intersects Minoan archaeological interests with contemporary Greek life. *Billy Sunday* (1995), Jones’ third novel, set in America, won the 1995 Age Book of the Year Award for Fiction and the 1996 National Book Council Banjo Award for Fiction. His fourth novel, *Nightpictures*, set in Venice, is a subtle and disturbing exploration of complex psychological states. The book was shortlisted for the 1998 Miles Franklin Award and published in France as *Images de la Nuit* (Albin Michel). Jones’ fifth novel, *Swan Bay*, (Actes Sud), published in France as *La Baie des Cygnes*, deals with the isolated life of a former writer, abandoned by his wife, who lives by the sea. When a young woman arrives in the bay, they develop a tender friendship. The geographical, psychological and cultural width and depth of his novels, shows Jones continuous search for meaning in life and his profound interest to investigate the recesses of the human soul.

after the Australian law changed, enabling adopted children to have access to their biological parents' names. At the ending of the novel, David, who is in part Rod's alter ego, meets his biological mother during a public reading of one of his stories: "He was making public his most private and intimate feelings about being lost in life. He had to put on a mask, armour to do it. But he was calling to her. He was calling to his mother" (p. 327). This silent, desperate calling is akin to what Pinkola Estés defines "the exile of the unwanted child" (p. 172), who, like David, does not align to 'normality', who is different, other, strange, who does not conform to the accepted norms of dominator society. The grief of rejection is all there, in the anger and violence that finds an outlet in David's fights, quarrels, political rebellion, and the refusal of social conventions. Of course, in a dominator society that keeps her limited and prisoner, the mother can only be an "ambivalent mother" (Pinkola Estés, p. 175). In order to survive, she complies and bends to those in power, she acquiesces and exposes the child (especially if a girl) to all kinds of 'desired' transformations, that may span from being adopted, and marrying according to conventions, to the extremes of violence, military life, war, sexual mutilation, torture, bending of the feet, stoning, death:

It is not uncommon in punitive cultures for women to be torn between being accepted by the ruling class (the village) and loving her child, be it a symbolic child, creative child or biological child. This is an old, old story. Women have died psychically and spiritually for trying to protect the unsanctioned child, whether it be their art, their lover, their politics, their offspring, or their soul life. At the extreme, women have been hanged, burned, and murdered for defying the village proscriptions and sheltering the unsanctioned child. (Estés, p. 176)

The four mothers of Jones' novel will run some risks, but in most cases will be unable to protect their 'unsanctioned child', and, because of their own isolation and cultural conditioning, will submit to the patriarchal dominator pressure.

Covering three quarters of a century and various generations of one family, the novel is composed of five parts (and seven sections)<sup>4</sup>, each devoted to the lives of the four Mothers in the novel: Part One: Alma, Footscray 1917; Molly, Brighton 1925; Molly, Footscray 1928; Part Two: Anna, North Fitzroy 1952; Part Three: Molly, Essendon 1958; Part Four: Cathy, Fitzroy 1975; Part Five: Anna, Cockatoo, 1990. The narrative follows the interconnected lives of the four protagonists, signalled by their names, while their lives travel across places and years. The suburbs where their lives occur are relevant, for they build an accurate historical map of Melbourne across the years; they depict and immortalise spaces and buildings that have long disappeared now, in a sort of authorial memorabilia of points of reference for eyes and heart, which no longer exist. These places, marked by a specific year, create an inner journey, an archetypal map and chronology connected to the heroine's progresses – or lack of progress, in the compulsive repetition of abandonment, loss, grief and loneliness. It is not, of course any of these women's fault; actually, their resilience in the face of hardship and social exclusion is strong. With the relevant participation of patriarchal male oriented religions, dominator society despises and condemns women as the source of all evil. If they are not 'protected' by a man, if they are unmarried mothers, or their husbands abandoned them, their 'fall' and society's refusal are complete.

The novel opens *in medias res*: Alma is sitting in a park with two small children. In spite of her mother's advice to accept the situation, Alma decided to leave her adulterous husband, after he had taken one of his lovers home. This is how her mother responds to her request for help: "Her mother wouldn't even let her them in the door. 'You've made your bed,' she told Alma, 'now go and lie in it'" (p. 4).

<sup>4</sup> On the novel see also: Fuhmann 2015, Pierce 2015, Sullivan 2015, Rubbo 2015.

Alfred, a young man in the park, notices Alma and the children and takes them home to his mother: “My mother will know what to do” (5). Alfred’s assertion proves the absolute, if unconscious, faith on the true ancient power of the mother, which still surfaces as a natural statement of an immemorial truth, in spite of the patriarchal repressive power that openly denies it. Indeed, Mrs Lovett ‘lovingly’ accepts Alma in the house and helps her, but, when Alma falls pregnant of Alfred, the neighbours’ gossip becomes unbearable and she cannot but send Alma away: “You cannot imagine how much it would pain me to see our family’s disgrace on public display” (43). Mrs Lovett is unable to love unconditionally, thus responding fully to her name’s implications. She is not strong enough to be indifferent to social stigma, possible exclusion from the neighbourhood or derision of ‘her’ family, from which sadly she excludes Alfred’s lover, Alma, and their daughter, Molly.

Later on, when Molly is seven and Alfred has stopped giving Alma some scanty money for their keeping, Alma has to place Molly into Brighton’s Melbourne Orphan Asylum. In the application, we read this annotation: “Father of above child not married to mother. Mother not receiving any assistance from him, and in the child’s interest desires to sever all connection with the father, so that the child may grow up quite ignorant of her illegitimacy” (81-82). This is Alma’s only defence and main concern: Molly must remain ignorant of being an ‘illegitimate child’ in order to be protected from society’s malignant eye. Molly’s initial experience of course is of utter solitude and desolation, but after some time she gets used to her friends in the orphanage and to their routine, until Alma comes with Bill Williams, her new partner, to take her home: “Molly was going home to her family. But she was also leaving her family” (101). No sense of homecoming for her, but another separation, another fracture in her habits and self-confidence: “There were times when Molly felt that she didn’t really belong either at school or at home. Maybe this feeling came from living in the orphanage – she couldn’t be sure” (103). She finds a new home, in Footscray, the same place where her mother Alma had started from, eleven years before. Molly is unaware of her past and she thinks her father is Teddy and Olive’s father. An unknown man follows her and we come to know it is Alfred, who is now married. Since his wife cannot have children, Alma fears he may want to take Molly back. This time, however, Alma, who now feels ‘protected’ by Bill’s presence, reacts with determination: “I’ll never give up Molly!” She yelled again, louder. ‘Do you hear me? You’ll never get Molly!’” (129). This is how Molly finds out that her father is Alfred. When she grows up Molly meets a nice and decent man, Percy, and they get married. Both have a good job, in spite of the war (we are in 1940, now).

In Part Two, we meet a new young woman, Anna, apparently not connected with the women in part one. Anna is in “a situation” (142), therefore, her parents take her in a “home for girls”, for “‘a spell, Anna,’ Mum said. ‘It’s all for the best’” (141). However, it is not a spell and it will be for the worst, a permanent source of suffering and regret for her whole life, and that of her child and of all the other characters involved. This is the bleakest part of the novel. Jones has drawn on some testimonies and on his own biological mother’s memories of the Haven, the Salvation Army’s home for unmarried mothers in North Fitzroy, where he was born. As was usual in the 1950s, he was adopted shortly after his birth: “I suppose the question we have to ask is: what does a six-week-old baby feel? [...] An abrupt sensory jolt? A period of adjustment to a new life? We just don’t know.” (Sullivan, p. 2).

In this “house of shame” (150), the terrible Salvation Army’s *sisters* psychologically (and physically) torture the pregnant girls, telling them horrible things such as: “God hates pregnant girls. God hates unwed mothers. God wants your baby to go to a good home” (157), and making them work like slaves, knees on the floor, till the last days of their pregnancy. Therefore, in spite of her determination to resist, sadly Anna cannot but give in, and her child Kim is taken away from her, adopted by an unknown couple: “For a moment

Kim materialised again on her knee, his precious warm weight, the smell of his skin and his hair, a living spirit in this cold carbolic world. And then the smell went away too, and she knew then for certain that he was really gone, that he wasn't coming back" (206). Unexpectedly, however, he will come back, once the law on adoption changes and he can finally look for his biological mother, as the author himself did. This can possibly explain David's sense of deep loss and grief that spurs him to become a passionate rebel against any convention.

Later on in the novel (Part Three, Molly, Essendon 1985 pp. 209-39), we find it is Molly and Percy who had adopted the little Kim, and they had renamed him David. Molly's extreme protection of her adopted son brings him to isolation and depression and on the verge of suicide; these feelings mirror Molly's sense of powerlessness and loneliness: "Molly looked on, powerless. Something dark crossed her mind: she had lost her husband and her mother and now she was losing her son" (p. 232). Then, all of a sudden, David is transformed, coming out of the cocoon, he becomes someone else, a smart and attractive young man:

When David came out of his retreat and went back to school, he was a different person. Girls, Parties. Beer. These were his priorities now. He was not so different from other boys, after all, thought Molly, reassured. (232)

Molly's reassurance that David is not 'different' from the other boys is again the typical defence of a feeble mother against society's stigma for anybody who does not conform to the norm. Without a strong mother, who is able to stand up and fight for herself and her children, there cannot be a strong child. David's transformation is only superficial, deep down he still is that lost soul needing protection, and he tries to find it, like many other young men his age, in repeating the same dominator pattern that does not allow a man to express the depths of his feelings. When Molly feels defeated, she tells him that he was adopted:

She had been getting her courage up for this all day. Even now she had made her decision, she found it difficult to speak. Finally, she blurted it out. 'I didn't want to tell you. But you have a right to know.' In this way, David found out he was adopted. (234)

In Part Four, the story repeats itself. Cathy is pregnant of David, and the conventions on unmarried pregnant girls still hold: "Cathy wore a gold ring that passed as a wedding band. Her belly had not yet begun to show" (239). They are the protagonists of the last part of the novel, where all the loose ends come together in a final, if partial, reconciliation. David, a strong believer of the values of the 1970s, rebelling against dogmas and institutions, in his immaturity, superficiality and egotism, does not realise that with Cathy he is repeating the same pattern of other men within Australian patriarchal society and macho culture, whose values he seems to refuse. He is reiterating the same dominator model, introjected by women and men alike, that ranks men over women, rather than linking them one to the other in a partnership loving and caring relationship. Thus, intimacy becomes sexual exploitation, and when the result is pregnancy, it is the woman's 'problem'. Rod Jones admits that there is "an awful lot of me" in David, with his anger and barely contained violence: "he is not very far from the kind of troubled young man I was, probably right up into my 50s" (Sullivan p. 3).

Part Five, the shortest and the more intensely poetical, tells of the meeting between David and Anna, his biological mother, who now has a family of her own. David/Kim writes her a letter, asking if they could meet. Anna is shocked and afraid at first, and this is what she tells Eric, her husband:

I've locked him away for thirty-seven years. I had to, so that no one could ever make me suffer like that again. I can't think of him as he must be now. To me, he's still Kim, the baby he was that day they took him away. Do you understand that, Eric? My mind wouldn't let him grow up. But perhaps now I have to. (p. 317)

When David calls her on the phone, they have a polite conversation, she enquires about his life, marriage, children, house, as if they were old friends needing to catch up. However, underneath this apparent tranquillity and the confidence in David's voice, she feels in him a "certain unhappiness", which is also her own:

No one knew what it had been like to be forced to give up her own child. Because she had relinquished him, there would always be that tear in the tissue of the universe. Anna already felt the impossibility of ever knowing him. She could tell that there was a certain unhappiness in him. Behind his voice, so full of poise, yet on edge, she sensed a man who was lost – a man who will always be lost. Anna knew already she could never really be part of his life. (319)

However, Anna, will gather her strength, write to him and go to the public reading he has invited her to, so that they could meet. Her letter is full of pathos in its simplicity, openness and love. She describes her guilt and sense of loss, her gratitude to David's adoptive parents, and her normal life, with the constant presence of her child Kim, but only in her own private space, in a "sacred site, that place in her heart where the baby still existed. There he had never grown older by a single day" (322).

### 3. The Patriarchal Predator

Mostly, the men in the novel are superficial, egotistical, foolish and vain, unreliable, completely indifferent to the destiny of their women and children, save when they may need their service, some sort of psychological support or sexual relief. Even worse, men can be aggressive, physically or psychologically violent. Indeed, most of this society – older mothers, fathers, families and communities, which are subject to a dominator patriarchal paradigm – is unable to support pregnant women and their children, to corroborate the caring role that would be necessary for the life of children, women and men alike. The patriarchal predator who sets the rules is akin to the officer who, in the film *Sophie's choice*, asks Sophie, a prisoner in a concentration camp, to choose which of her two children will die or survive. If she refuses to choose, both her children will be killed. This is dominator culture at its worst and its aberrance and madness are obvious. However, there are subtler psychological ways of killing the free psyche, teaching how to give up one's soul aspirations, to submit, to let go of one's inner joy, courage, force and hopes that leads to silent or overt depression and inner spiritual dearth and death. This is what the novel powerfully describes:

One of the least-spoken of oppressions of women's soul lives concerns millions of unmarried mothers or never-married mothers throughout the world [...] who, in this century alone [XXth], were pressured by cultural mores to hide their condition or their children, or else to kill or surrender their offspring, or to live a half-life under assumed identities and as reviled and disempowered citizens. (Pinkola Estés, 178)

Pinkola Estés calls this man-type the "natural predator" (pp. 39-49), a negative and menacing force originating from all patriarchal dogmas we introjected in our psyche, stemming from our personal experience or a subconscious memory of feminine submission

and violation. The natural predator, a sort of inner Bluebeard (the Nazi officer of the film), appears in women's dreams as prowler, rapist, robber, bandit, and as animal or beastly groom in fairy tales. It has a powerful voice that inwardly repeats to women the usual dominator singsong: "you cannot escape, I have you, you will die, you will never make it, you're a failure, stupid, useless". In order to fill the inner void derived from an aggressive appropriation of the Great Mother's sacredness, the dominator, patriarchal *mind* acts in a sort of madness, an alienation giving origin to a diseased, insatiable and voracious urge to submit, possess and exploit others, especially women, children, slaves and servants, all those who are 'inferior'.

The male characters of the novel have minor roles, they do not act or participate very much, they are in the background. However, at the same time, it is mainly their decision that counts. Like angry, uncaring and indifferent Greek Gods, they have the power to decree other people's destiny, without any apprehension or concern for the consequences on those who have to submit and pay tribute to their absolutist will.

Alma's husband, Frederick Fairweather, appears at the beginning of the novel as someone who "owned a timepiece" (p. 3), while "Alma did not" (p. 5). This simple notation already shows the privilege of being a man who 'owns' his time, while she 'owes' her time to her husband, children and family. He is a great admirer of the "playboy Edward VII" (p. 4), certainly a prototype of patriarchal (regal) power and he imitates his womanising attitudes. Alma's marriage had not been happy, but when he arrives, drunk, with another woman, Alma decides to leave him. She is only twenty-four, however, and in spite of her assertive decision, has nowhere to go. In a typical reaction, her inner natural predator takes over and blames her: "'What's wrong with me?' she thought. 'I can't even keep my husband'" (p. 9).

Alfred, who seems a more caring person when they meet, soon shows his natural predator side in wanting to sexually exploit her without being able to face his mother and to stand up for Alma when she gets pregnant.

Anna's father indifferently takes her to the Haven, the home for girls in her 'situation', and her lover Neil, in spite of the promises they had made to each other, is unable or unwilling to keep them. Even if "there was a purity in their love that others would not have seen" (p. 172), he soon announces his engagement with someone else.

Eric, Anne's husband, and Percy, Molly's husband, seem to be the exception; they are nice, protective and caring men, who can stand by their women through thick and thin.

David too, as we saw already, has traits of the natural predator in him. Possibly, only after having met his biological mother and healed his emotional wound, he will be able to be more trustful of his inner feminine voice, less aggressive, more open to encountering the sacred in himself and others.

In commenting about his idea of manhood and men in Australia, Jones explains why most men in the novel are so emotionally distant and cold: "I think Australian men have always been scared. A lot of bullshit macho Australian culture is a refusal to deal with our own internal lives... lots of men dropped dead young because they didn't deal with their feelings" (Sullivan p. 3). A healing potion for these dis-eased men can be found in the hands and wisdom of the ancient Archetypal Mother.

#### 4. The Archetypal Mother Betrayed

The Archetypal Mother is a figure representing wisdom, strength, soul-power; she coincides with the Wild Woman: "If you have ever been called defiant, incorrigible, forward, cunning, insurgent, unruly, rebellious, you're on the right track. Wild Woman is close by" (Pinkola Estés, p. 198).

Under patriarchal dominator rule, this multifaceted archetype has been betrayed, obscured, and divided into the multiple goddesses Jean Bolen describes in *Goddesses in Every Women*<sup>5</sup>. Bolen focuses on archetypal feminine figures named after Greek goddesses, and speaks of three “virgin” goddesses (that is independent of men): Artemis presiding over hunting and Moon cycles, Athena over Wisdom and Crafts, Hestia over the Hearth and Temple. Then Bolen speaks of three “vulnerable” goddesses: Hera, goddess of marriage, Demeter, of crops, and Persephone (or Kore, the maiden) queen of the subterranean world. Last is the Alchemical goddess of Love, Aphrodite, who is complete in herself, a remainder of the ancient Triune Goddess. Bolen’s goddesses are remnants of the ancient feminine trinity of Virgin, Lover/Mother, Crone that we also find in Pinkola Estes’s work. According to her, a woman must never abandon the ‘wild mother’, for if she does:

a woman abandons her own deep nature, the one with all the knowing in it, all the bags of seeds, all the thorn needles for mending, all the medicines for work and rest and love and hope.

The dominator patriarchal society in Jones’ novel has already silenced and exiled the wild mother.

Apart from Alma, who is already a mother, the other women all start out as virgins, which in the original sense “means undefiled, pure, uncorrupted, unused, untilled, untouched and unworked on ‘by man’” (Bolen 35); and it also means “that exists wholly separate from him, in her own right [...] not that she is physically and literally virginal” (Bolen 35). This archetype can be found when a woman rebels against dominator constrictions and limitation, expressing ambitions that are not usually encouraged by traditional patriarchal societies; they may aspire to independence, to work, to express their creativity through art, poetry, dance. Because a dominator society, characterised by rigid ranking of men over women, completely neglects these aspirations, these women find their feeble voice mostly acquiescing into a traditional and ‘sanctified’ relationship with a man:

For generations women accepted the role of legitimizing humans through marriage to a man. They agreed that a human was not acceptable unless a man said so. Without that ‘masculine’ protection, the mother is vulnerable. (Pinkola Estés, 178)

Jones’ husband-less mothers, who are of course also daughters without fathers or with absent or feeble fathers, are linked to the three vulnerable goddesses, that personify the traditional roles of women – wife, mother, daughter, as more acceptable and tolerated in a patriarchal dominator society, because of the qualities of submission and frailty they represent. In mythology, “these three goddesses were raped, abducted, dominated or humiliated by male gods.” (Bolen, p. 132). This is Alma, Molly, Anna and Cathy’s fate in the novel. Out of a strong desire for intimacy, warmth, wellbeing, sharing (all partnership values), they fall in love, make love, and fall pregnant. This is when society declares their ‘fall’, without any possibility for redemption. The etymology of falling in love and falling pregnant lays the stress on the biblical ‘fall’, on falling prey to the devil’s temptation. These ‘mothers’ thus become vulnerable goddesses, harassed by patriarchal dominator society, and also by other women who are subservient to dominator values, for they can survive only by being complicit with those in control. They all feel

<sup>5</sup> Bolen believes that an understanding of these inner archetypal patterns and their interrelationships offers positive alternatives that can take both women and men beyond limiting patriarchal dichotomies.



dry, fatigued, frail, depressed, confused, gagged, without inspiration, without animation, without soulfulness, without meaning, shame-bearing, powerless, chronically doubtful, shaky, blocked, unable to follow through. (Pinkola Estés, p. 11)

For what concerns the elder mothers of the novel, Alma and Alfred's mothers may seem different because of their different reaction to the situation, the first showing her absolute refusal, and the second reacting with initial warmth and love. However, both mothers belong to the vulnerable archetype of the wife within patriarchal marriage. Indeed, they are both complicit with the norm and turn their anger against the younger more vulnerable woman (Alma and Molly). Alma's mother is more akin to Hera, in her conviction that "a woman is nothing without a husband" (Bolen, p. 152). When Alfred's mother, Mrs Lovett, accepts Alma and her children in the house, she is practicing Pastor Goble's preaching: "charity begins at home" (p. 7). She reacts at first with care, giving material and spiritual support, and, in this sense, she is connected to Demeter, the maternal archetype, provider of food and spiritual sustenance: "In her mythology, Demeter was the most generous goddess. She gave humanity agriculture and harvests [...] and provided the Eleusinian Mysteries". (Bolen, p. 174). When she sends the pregnant Alma and her children away, however, it is her darker or shadow aspect that becomes manifest: "When grieving Demeter stopped functioning, nothing would grow, and famine threatened to destroy humankind. Similarly, the destructive aspect of Demeter is expressed by withholding what another person needs." (Bolen pp. 175-6).

Kore/Persephone has two aspects, that of the young unknowing maiden, lacking any sense of danger and believing the natural predator, and that of the powerful Queen of Hades, who guides others in their inner journey across the most hidden recesses of the psyche. Anna responds to the Kore archetype, the young virginal child-woman-daughter whose father abandons her in the hands of a natural predator, be it Hades, God of the underworld, Bluebeard, a fascinating young man, or the Salvation Army's "Home for unmarried girls". The natural predator of dominator societies will violently initiate her to sexuality – often raping her, in mythology and in reality, or anyway deceiving and betraying her innocence and inexperience with false words and promises of love.

Molly is the lost Kore too, when she is abandoned and alone in the Orphanage, but also the resolute Hera in marrying a good decent husband with whom she will have a loving relationship. Being a childless woman, though, is as unacceptable as being an unmarried mother. Therefore, Molly and Percy, in order to fulfil the requirements of dominator patriarchal society, adopt Kim/David.

Alma is an angry Hera when she leaves her husband, and again an inexperienced Kore when she accepts Alfred's approaches, a lost depressed one when she falls pregnant of him, and a powerful Demeter when she puts her life and family back together with her new partner.

It seems that under patriarchal dominator constrictions, these women cannot express the fuller positive potential of any of the Goddess' archetypes, for the affirmative life-process of the psyche has been diminished, belittled and denied, relegated into the dark obscurities of the underworld.

However, the creative, luminous and expansive aspect of the Psyche is always ready to come at the slightest call.

## 5. Women and Men: the Wild Inner Psyche/Life

The wild inner psyche and life of the feminine is present in the novel not only in the women's stories, but also in the subtle, caring, compassionate, understanding, and benevolent narrator's voice. There is a heartfelt opening towards the sacred of these simple lives, which, in spite of all sorrows, are full of kindness and nobility. What stays more powerfully in the reader's mind is not so much a sense of grief for the suffering, but a sense of warmth and compassionate participation, an elation because of the simple but elevating and spiritual power of loving, caring and forgiving, which is the ultimate message of the book. This when the wild woman is powerfully active and present:

The Wild Woman carries the bundles for healing; she carries everything a woman needs to be and know. She carries the medicine for all things. She carries stories and dreams and words and songs and signs and symbols. She is both vehicle and destination. (Pinkola Estés, p. 12)

When asked how he found the appropriate voice for his women characters, Jones replies: "I drew on my feminine side, in a way I've always done in all my books. Categories like male and female are imposed on us, and certainly there are biological differences, but we're not in any essential sense only one thing" (Sullivan, p. 2). Jones' feminine side is in tune with the power of the Wild Woman, because

Stories are medicine. [...] They have such power; they do not require that we do, act anything – we need only listen. The remedies for repair or reclamation of any lost psychic drive are contained in stories. Stories engender the excitement, sadness, questions, longing and understanding that spontaneously bring the archetype, in this case the Wild Woman, back to the surface. Stories are embedded with instructions which guide us about the complexities of life. (Pinkola Estés, pp. 15-16)

Jones' novel brings his readers the medicinal remedy for grief and loss while instructing and guiding them towards reconciliation and understanding. It also responds in an insightful manner to our society's problems and tensions, giving voice to a deep human desire for peace, love and harmony, a yearning to go beyond the dominator system that enslaves the world, and find again our ancestral *partnership* roots. Reconfiguring a partnership society, we could live once more in what Eisler also defines a *gylanic* system<sup>6</sup>, we could consciously and daily create harmony and peace; we could re-integrate and heal the fracture deceitfully created by patriarchy with its stereotypical definitions of male and female traits.

David's gift to his mother Anna is this gylanic understanding and the resurrection of her primeval wild inner self. Meeting him and sensing his rebellious, hot and wild nature is a revelation for her: "Oh. Then he really was a wild man, both fierce *and* reserved" (331). His inner wilderness is a positive value for the Wild Woman. It shows he is connected with the Triune Goddess in all her forms and manifestations, and it also represents his creative and positive integration of 'masculine' and 'feminine' elements in his psyche. Noting these aspects in David, activates an awakening in Anna, she revives the forgotten "spirited, adventurous girl who had fallen in love with Neil" (332). She feels that girl in herself is coming back to life; she remembers her wild passions, her visions, her desires:

<sup>6</sup> The neologism *gylany* [adj. *gylanic*] is composed of the prefix *gy-* (*gyne*, woman) and *an-* (*andros*, man) linked by the letter *l* for *lyen* (to resolve) or *lyo* (to set free) to indicate that the female and male halves of humanities are linked rather than ranked (Eisler 1987, p. 105).

Her past had surged back – the part of herself she had to forget. Now, it was as though the girl who had gone to sleep just to get through those experiences at the Haven – did she remain half-asleep all those years – had suddenly opened her eyes. (333)

When talking about his writing the phrase that Jones often uses is “from the back of the mind” (Sullivan, p. 3), that is in his heart/instinct, rather than in his rational mind. This is in tune with the Wild Woman’s energy, because she is “patroness to all painters, writers, sculptors, dancers, thinkers, prayermakers, seekers, finders – for they are all busy with the work of invention and that is the Wild Woman’s main occupation. As in all art, she resides in the guts, not in the head” (Pinkola Estés, pp. 12-13). In a similar way, through the power of his narrative and presence, with his passionate creative and artistic energy, his alter ego David is positively infectious for his mother. He helps her in healing the young girl she was, for in order to survive the terrible psychological tortures she suffered in the ‘Home’, Anne had to freeze her soul, almost to death.

Ever since what had happened to her at the Haven, something had always held her back, kept her from taking risks, kept her locked into an exaggerated sense of her obligations to others. Now she was coming back to life, or at least coming to a different life. She felt she had the right to want things for herself again. (334)

Now, however, having healed the inner fracture, she can resuscitate her girl-self:

Anna was fifty-eight, a wife and a mother, a stalwart of the community. She had built a solid life. But that wasn’t all of her. I’m not one person, Anna thought, none of us is. All the secret feelings I’ve kept inside – they are all the different people I am. Already she was planning her trip. She would go to the travel agent next morning. Eric would have something to say about that, of course. Eric would not want to go to Europe. But, with him or without him, she was going to travel. (333-34)

This is the Wild Woman’s voice in Anna. She is ready now to manifest Aphrodite, the Alchemical Goddess of love and beauty, in her life. This Goddess is guided by a life-drive leading her to positively and creatively express her longing for intimacy, communication, enthusiasm, that can be both physical or/and spiritual at the same time. In a partnership society, there is no separation between above and below, matter and spirit, night and day, male and female. They spin together in the wheel of the Tao, where Yang is constantly weaved into Yin, and vice versa. Physical, psychological, emotional or spiritual spheres constantly engage in the spiralling dance of life. Aphrodite’s spirit can be the birthmother of a partnership society:

Whenever Aphrodite consciousness is present, energy is generated: lovers glow with well-being and heightened energy; conversation sparkles, stimulating thoughts and feelings. When two [or more] people truly meet each other, both receive energy from the encounter and feel more vitality than before, regardless of the content [...]. (Bolen, p. 229)

As it happens in the personal case of Anna, this glowing and revivifying energy can also reform cultural, social, political and economic structures. It is the joyful energy of love and care for the other that, in spite of life’s hard moments, can always find a lesson to learn, an urge to move on, to give voice to the wild woman, to be in bliss and contentment, happy, vigorous, gentle, strong, passionate, caring, forgiving. Fully alive, with no dogmatic or conventional norms restricting the soul’s power.

## 6. Concluding remarks

This essay showed how, in spite of the failure and refusal of patriarchal dominator society to protect maternal partnership relationships, the Archetypal Mother, together with other archetypal energies, is a relevant spiritual force in most of the women in Jones' narrative, and in the autobiographical figure of David, the writer-protagonist-narrator of the last part of the novel. The book follows these women's *Songlines* with a delicate, thorough and compassionate voice, which also vigorously and resolutely denounces the dreadful and tragic plight they are condemned to, under an insensitive and cold dominator order. Patriarchal society repudiates the sacred feminine in order to control and rule under a hierarchical, absolutist male power. The natural predator is unveiled in all its menacing and ominous power, the author is alerting his readers to grasp this figure in the appropriate way, to detect when this inner negative patriarchal voice is active and where it comes from, in order to transform it through the fire of awareness.

Furham notes how, "behind the surface branding of verism, one can sense an ever so subtle gesture toward the sacred. For Jones there is still the glim of holiness in every maternal determination" (2015). Indeed, the novel confirms Jones' maturity and sensitivity as a writer who, with grace and deep understanding can balance feeling without falling into sentimentalism, or realism without the trappings of the documentarist. Jones also successfully expresses the poetry and authenticity of life, while narrating in vivid detail everyday realities. He writes of a spirituality that can come to life in a dynamic feminine partnership, reconciling opposites, through care and openness towards the other. Mother, daughter, son, husband, lover, writer...all the roles played in the cosmic dance of life are present in Jones' *The Mothers*. At the end of the novel, David's mother Anna tells herself "she would look out for his next novel in the shops" (334). I think many of Jones' readers will do the same, eager to encounter again his partnership, earthly and compassionate vision of the sacred.

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