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## “A PROGRESS THAT THREATENS ALL LIFE”: NATURE VS. NURTURE IN DUNCAN WILLIAMSON’S “MARY AND THE SEAL”

**ABSTRACT.** The paper first discusses two documentaries by Donna Read, *Signs Out of Time* (2004) and *Goddess Remembered* (1989), that focus on the pacific tradition of the female centered settlements on the territories of modern Eastern Europe in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. Read depicts significant findings of a world-renowned archeologist Marija Gimbutas who claims that a peaceful image of Old Europe embodied in the omnipotent Great Mother changed radically towards the end of the third millennium when violent Indo-European nomads came from Russia and shattered the matriarchal utopia of equality and natural harmony. These tribes introduced the principles of hierarchy and violent male-rule. Read’s and Gimbutas’ findings are further developed and examined in the studies by Riana Eisler and Erich Fromm who also claim that conspicuous material aggrandizement of patriarchal culture severely damaged a blissful matriarchal bond between man and nature. These theoretical insights are applied to Williamson’s comprehension of nature vs. nurture issue in “Mary and the Seal” (1997). In portraying a tender relationship between Mary and the seal, as well as its tragic and totally unnecessary shooting, contemporary patriarchal culture is brought to a trial. The mere existence of the bond between Mary and the seal, an embodiment of an idyllic matriarchal unity between man and nature, testifies to the prevalent need for the return to its substantial but

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long-forgotten values. The theoretical insights of Graves, Althusser, Freire, Fiske and Miller will also be used in the interpretation of the story.

KEYWORDS: nature; nurture; matriarchy; patriarchy; progress; civilization.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE GREAT SHIFT

In her documentaries, *Signs Out of Time* (2004) and *Goddess Remembered* (1989), Donna Read takes us back to the prehistoric times when people believed in the supreme power of the matriarch that was symbolically called the Earth Goddess, the Great Mother, the Mother of All Living. In accordance with the natural cycles, she was perceived as the deity who could both create and destroy life. However, no one was afraid of death since all living creatures believed that they could be reborn again. Through this animated journey, with the help of a world-renowned archeologist, Marija Gimbutas, the world of peaceful and closely connected cultures that lived on the territories of modern Eastern Europe in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages is thoroughly depicted. After this blissful period, according to Read, the violent world of male supremacy is what followed. Whereas in the matriarchy “the power to give and nurture was supreme” (Read, 1989), our civilization rests on the remnants of the irretrievably broken bond between man and nature that originated in the patriarchal period. Unfortunately, aggressive patriarchal conquerors have replaced peaceful matriarchal nurturers:

Today we build monuments to what we call progress, a progress that threatens all life. Millions are made by it, millions live by it, and the conqueror has replaced the nurturer as a symbol to be respected. The natural world we once revered, we now destroy. We’ve long forgotten the spirit of the Earth Goddess. (Read, 1989)

In *Signs Out of Time* (2004), Read focuses on the depiction of a new origin story enforced by Gimbutas – that at the very beginning of Western civilization lay cultures that were long lasting and peaceful. The purpose of this documentary is to illustrate the concept of matriarchy and female role at the very beginning of civilization. The archaeological research Gimbutas conducted demonstrated that in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages the settlements on the territories of modern Eastern Europe were created by nations that had extraordinary culture and art in which no evidence of organized

warfare was found. Furthermore, according to Gimbutas, in that specific period, all Europe was a peaceful culture without weapons. It was a female-centered culture and this prehistoric society rested on egalitarian principles – there was no evidence either of male or female dominance and no struggles for power and authority were recorded whatsoever.

This peaceful image of Old Europe altered radically towards the end of the third millennium. Gimbutas claims that the great change occurred between roughly 4,000 BC and 3,500 BC when violent Indo-European nomads came from Russia and shattered the matriarchal utopia. Peoples from the Russian steppes, whom Gimbutas calls Kurgans, swept across Europe in three great waves of invasions over several thousand years. Hierarchical, male-ruled, these invaders worshipped a belligerent sky god and brought a new patriarchal religion. New patriarchal gods clashed with old matriarchal traditions. This collision of cultures imposed the transformation of matriarchal myths and system of values.

A similar rendering of the prehistoric period is depicted in *Goddess Remembered* (1989), the first sequence of a three-part series that includes *The Burning Times* (1990) and *Full Circle* (1993). This documentary features the women from the Canadian Women’s Spirituality Movement talking about the ancient times when people believed in the Great Mother. Through their conversations, they link the loss of goddess-worshipping societies with contemporary environmental crisis.

The main idea that these women discuss among themselves is that in prehistoric times the fertility of the mother was connected to the fertility of the Earth. However, a period of transition occurred when “around 10,000 BC people began to cultivate. The agricultural revolution changed everything. Especially the relationship we had to the Earth. No longer did people just accept what nature provided; now, we sought to control the awesome forces of the natural world.” (Read, 1989)

The transitional period Read mentions, represents a crucial topic in Riana Eisler’s influential study *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (1987). Eisler, who thoroughly approved of Read’s findings and carried Gimbutas’ theories further, claims that after the aforementioned transition, the female became defined as “a mere nurse, tending the growth of the seed planted by its true parent – the male” (1987, p. 78). Eisler transfers Read’s and Gimbutas’s findings to the Golden Age of Ancient Greece and problematizes the

role, position, and function of women in this patriarchal culture. Among other examples of the female position in the patriarchal society, the role of Athena was also redefined. Once the goddess of wisdom and love, she became the goddess of war after the historical shift to patriarchy. She was born from the head of her father Zeus and openly, even proudly, claimed that no mother gave her birth. Eisler connects this episode with Read's documentary and agrees with its main conclusions: for men it was the beginning of historical dominance and for the woman it was the end of their utopian experience (1987, p. 78).

In accordance with Read's and Gimbutas' conclusions, Eisler postulates a veritable golden age of feminism prior to what we usually know as written history. She asserts that patriarchy is built on the reversal of the system of values – the Great Mother, a primary symbol of the divine source of being, associated with peace and compassion, is marginalized and then entirely discarded, while a masculine war god usurps her place.

Eisler chooses the opposed symbols of chalice and blade in order to point to two different sets of values and models of society. Whereas the chalice is linked to the partnership model of society, the blade is a symbol of the dominator model of society that is based on patterns of supremacy and is at its core belligerent and hierarchical. The chalice thus points to egalitarian, peaceful, matri-focal, nurturing values, while the blade implies a certain hierarchical order that ranks individuals according to their sex, race and class. This order is further maintained under the threat of violence, as Eisler informs us, and is linked with a male god and the glorification of the ability to take life, in contrast to the partnership model's sacralization of women's capacity to give life through birth. Eisler sincerely believes that since partnership societies existed in the past, they might be developed again in the future. At the beginning of her book, she probes her readers with rather important questions to make them aware that a utopian egalitarian society is not just an irrelevant pipe dream, but can verily be recreated:

Why do we hunt and persecute each other? Why is our world so full of man's infamous inhumanity to man – and to woman? How can human beings be so brutal to their own kind? What is it that chronically tilts us toward cruelty rather than kindness, toward war rather than peace, toward destruction rather than actualization? (1987, p. xiii)

Eisler claims that this is not a natural state and proves this point by stating that Neolithic art does not portray scenes of battles, warriors, or “violence-based power” (1987, p. 20); there are no heroic conquerors or indications of slavery. On the contrary, this art

with its striking absence of images of male domination or warfare, seems to have reflected a social order in which women, first as heads of clans and priestesses and later on in other important roles, played a central part, and in which both men and women worked together in equal partnership for the common good. (1987, p. 20)

By the fifth millennium BC there began a pattern of destruction of Neolithic cultures by invasions, producing what Eisler refers to as a “mounting chaos” (1987, p. 43) reflected in the appearance of slavery, oppression of women, warfare, extreme usage of weapons.

The one thing they [the invading cultures] all had in common was a dominator model of social organization: a social system in which male dominance, male violence, and a generally hierarchic and authoritarian social structure was the norm. Another commonality was that, in contrast to the societies that laid the foundations for Western civilization [the goddess-based societies], the way they characteristically acquired material wealth was not by developing technologies of production, but through ever more effective technologies of destruction. (1987, p. 45)

The shift in social structure was apparently accompanied by a change in the types of technologies developed, from life-sustaining to war-related, from the chalice to the blade. Eisler opts for the advantages of the matriarchal society and enthusiastically asserts that our society can be hopefully transformed back to the partnership model.

In the same vein, another cultural critic that vividly depicts the clash between matriarchy and patriarchy is Erich Fromm in *The Forgotten Language* (1951). He gives us an analysis of the Oedipus trilogy and its main theme – the conflict with paternal authority. The roots of that struggle go back to the ancient collision between the patriarchal and matriarchal systems of values:

Matriarchal culture is characterized by an emphasis on ties of blood, ties to the soil and a passive acceptance of all natural phenomena. Patriarchal society, in contrast, is characterized by respect for man-made law, by a predominance of rational thought, and by man’s effort to change natural phenomena. (1951, p. 207)

In the Oedipus trilogy, Oedipus, Haemon and Antigone are representatives of the matriarchal principle, whereas Laius and Creon respect the patriarchal codes of behaviour. The idea of the universal brotherhood is rooted in the matriarchal principle. Quite the contrary, the patriarchal principle includes a hierarchical order and obedience to the male figure that can be perceived from Creon's words that Fromm cites:

Yea, this, my son, should be thy heart's fixed law – in all things to obey thy father's will. 'Tis for this that men pray to see dutiful children grow up around them in their homes. (...) But disobedience is the worst of evils. (...) Therefore, we must support the cause of order and in no wise suffer a woman to worst us. Better to fall from power, if we must, by a man's hand; than we should be called weaker than a woman. (1951, p. 224–225)

The female was thus, according to Fromm, systematically linked with disorder, weakness, even malaise. Mother was no longer seen as a nurturing parent, but, as in Eisler's study, had had a rather sporadic role of merely giving birth, whereas children were properly nurtured by their fathers that maintained the superiority of the patriarchal system of values.

Fromm finds examples of a destructive shift to patriarchy in different periods and in geographically different locations. For instance, he mentions the Babylonian myth of Creation where sons challenge the Great Mother and finally defeat her. Then, he also emphasizes that the assertion of alleged male superiority continued to the period of Christianity as well – Eve was born from Adam's rib and woman turned out to be just a mere product of man, the way Athena was born from Zeus's head. Fromm asserts that the first social structure has wrongly been perceived as patriarchal and further claims that a common mistake is that it coincides with the beginning of Western history. However, there is a whole group of scholars, Read, Gimbutas, Eisler among others, who fervently oppose such a belief by offering material, particularly archeological, evidence in favour of the partnership model of society.

## BOND BROKEN: WILLIAMSON’S “MARY AND THE SEAL”

In his influential study, *The White Goddess* (1993), Robert Graves stands in line with the previously mentioned scholars who plead for the symbolic return of the matriarchal utopia. Graves validly emphasizes that this process would nowadays be inconceivable without the help of artists. Art, or to be precise, poetry (since Graves was a poet himself) represents:

a warning to man that he must keep in harmony with the family of living creatures among which he was born, by obedience to the wishes of the lady of the house; it is now a reminder that he has disregarded the warning, turned the house upside down by capricious experiments in philosophy, science and industry and brought ruin on himself and his family. ‘Nowadays’ is a civilization in which the prime emblems of poetry are dishonoured. In which serpent, lion and eagle belong to the circus-tent; ox, salmon and boar to the canner; racehorse and greyhound to the betting ring; and the sacred grove to the saw-mill. In which the Moon is despised as a burned-out satellite of the Earth and woman reckoned as ‘auxiliary State personnel’. In which money will buy almost anything but truth, and almost anyone but the truth-possessed poet. (1993, p. 14)

Here Graves raises the question of the use and function of poetry (or arts in general) today in comparison to its use and function in the prehistoric (matriarchal) period. He sadly mentions the sacred animal consorts and followers of the Goddess of All Living, as well as the Goddess herself and underlines their imposed monstrosity as a by-product of the dominant (contemporary) patriarchal culture. The sacred animals of the prehistoric period and woman as a matriarch have experienced a great cultural shift: once worshipped, feared and obeyed, they have gradually been demonized, turned into monsters and finally become completely marginalized and depreciated by modern culture.

Similarly, in the story by a contemporary Scottish writer, Duncan Williamson, “Mary and the Seal”, the seal represents an emanation of prehistoric Goddess, who “originally emerged from the primeval waters” (Eisler, 1987, p. 111). Water as an archetypal symbol of the fluidity of the female escapes social restraints and thus represents a potent threat to the stability of the human world. This

is one of the reasons Mary prefers deep waters where the seal resides to the uninventive routine of the human world.

Williamson's story commences with a description of a little unspecified island off the West Coast of Scotland where an old fisherman, his wife and their daughter lived a humble but thoroughly contended life. The timeframe of the story is intentionally missing as well as the precise location of the Scottish isle in the tradition of old Gaelic folk tales typical of the Scottish Western Isles. The whole narrative pattern of Williamson's story revolves around the manner of expression characteristic of Scottish folk tradition (simplicity of language, constant repetitions, frequent allusion to Gaelic heritage, insertion of Gaelic catchphrases), atypical of contemporary literary production. One of the messages that the story purposefully conveys from the very beginning is that it is not Williamson's genuine creation but that he simply wrote it down in the manner of his literary predecessor, Walter Scott.<sup>2</sup>

Though the timeframe in the story remains unspecified, it is obvious that the plot depicted refers to Scottish Gaelic tradition, when the bond between man and nature was stronger since it entailed a give and take reciprocity of both parties: being a fisherman, Mary's father had a certain insight into natural phenomena that he had to obey and respect in order to survive. In return, nature rewarded him and his family for his loyalty and reverence with its bountiful abundance and they always had enough food on the table.

However, the story also shows a degrading change from the blissful, even utopian period, when the feminine aspect of the "generative, nurturing and creative powers of nature" was worshipped (Eisler, 1987, p. 43) to an age in which the power to dominate, control and destroy became the norm, a change from idyllic natural domain to social nurture practices. This shift is alluded to

<sup>2</sup> The most renowned Scottish bard from the 19th century, Sir Walter Scott is largely accountable for laying the foundations of the Scottish national identity. His collection of ballads, *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders* (1802-1803), proved to be an early indicator of his interest in Scotland and history from a literary standpoint. Namely, the mere fact that Scott recognized the importance of gathering and publishing national folk tales and ballads, mostly in an archaic and obsolete version of Scottish Gaelic, within a single volume, testifies to his life-long dedication to creating a unifying national myth of Scotland as a country whose inhabitants' main features reflect the unified opposites of its landscape – being romantically stern and wild, picturesque and awe-inspiring, benevolent and dangerous.



in Williamson’s story through the description of Mary’s coming to maturity. The problems started when Mary turned sixteen.

Namely, Mary continued with doing all the chores expected of her but at this age she began developing a “strange” daily routine. Every evening, after her work being done, she would borrow her father’s boat and go for a sale to a little island that lay about half a mile from where they dwelt. She would spend some time on the island and then joyously came back home and every morning she would continue with her working routine. Her parents did not interfere into her activities after her work was done, after all “Mary’s spare time was her own time; when her work was finished she could do what she liked. Till one day” (Williamson, 1997, p. 47).

Overhearing some women from the village gossiping her daughter and her peculiar habit of avoiding any kind of socialization (such as ceilidh dances<sup>3</sup> and social visits), Mary’s mother got terribly upset. Her daughter has unconsciously become a social transgressor. Mary’s awkward practice of going to an island all by herself has put a veil of mystery and suspicion around her. Numerous questions started piling up about her daughter’s odd behaviour and in order to preserve an untainted image of her family in the community, Mary’s mother made her husband follow their daughter one evening to the island to unveil her mystery.

At first, Mary’s father was rather reluctant to do such a thing; he did not want to meddle into his child’s personal affairs, but since his wife’s pressure was growing stronger every day, he finally decided to follow his daughter. He borrowed his brother’s boat and soon caught up with Mary on the island. There he witnessed a miraculous revelation: “Here was Mary with a large seal, a grey seal. And they were having the greatest fun you’ve ever seen: they were wrestling in the sand, carrying on and laughing, the seal was grunting and Mary was flinging her arms around the seal!” (Williamson, 1997, p. 51)

<sup>3</sup> Ceilidh is a traditional Scottish folk dance. Dance music is played across the country at dances, Highland balls, weddings and other ceremonious occasions. These dances include jigs, waltzes and reels, and are normally done accompanied by a group of musicians, a dance band or ensemble. The typical band includes six members, including one fiddle, two accordions, a piano or keyboard and bass and drums. However, this setup can vary considerably, and there is no strict fixed band setup in Scottish Folk music. Appreciated by the entire world, the bagpipes are a vital part of this tradition and their popularity ensures that the traditions of the old Scottish Folk music will remain forever.

Relieved, Mary's father came back home to tell his wife about a strong bond existing between his daughter and the seal, probably as a result of Mary rearing the seal up from a young pup. However, this story just further deepened his wife's anxiety and fear since it perfectly fitted into superstitious sagas about strange sea-people taking humans away, changing shapes and enchanting them. The only plausible option that could explain the obvious affection between Mary and the seal was that Mary had been enchanted by these frightening creatures in the seal's shape. Therefore, with the idea to save her daughter, as well as her reputation in the village, she insisted on her husband shooting the seal the next morning.

Being incapable to oppose the will of his wife, he performs what is required of him and after killing the seal, he sorrowfully admits that "he felt queer, funny—as if he had shot his wife or his daughter. A sadness came over him... He felt that he had done something terrible... a feeling of loss was within him, a terrible feeling of loss—that something he had done could never be undone" (Williamson, 1997, p. 53–54). Although his emotional outburst after the tragedy shows that he has not lost the ability to feel the consequences of breaking the genuine bond with nature, he intuitively perceives that once lost, this bond cannot be recovered again. Mary's tragic end is symbolically portrayed through her father's description:

And he looked again, then – all in a moment up come two seals, two grey seals, and they come right out of the water, barely more than twenty-five yards from where he stood! And they look at him. They look directly at him – then disappear back down in the water. And he had this queer feeling that he was never going to see Mary any more. (Williamson, 1997, p. 56)

However, it is rather debatable whether Mary's death is tragic, although it is undoubtedly a great tragedy. In his influential study, *The Educated Imagination* (1963)<sup>4</sup>, Northrop Frye claims that "the important categories in life are what you have to do and what you

<sup>4</sup> One of the most inspiring definitions of imagination has definitely been coined by Frye in this study. Here he claims that imagination represents "the power of constructing possible models of human experience" (1963, p. 22) that enable us to "recapture, in full consciousness, the original lost sense of identity with our surroundings" (1963, p. 29). Of course, Frye's initial desire in raising these issues was to identify an archetype behind the creation of myth and literature, as well as to merely dwell on the relevance of imaginative ability in the process of cultivating the threatening natural world and transforming it into modern civilization, or, better to say, humanizing it.

want to do — in other words, necessity and freedom” (1963, p. 25). Mary is a strong individual who despite the omnipresent influence of the community has remained loyal to her beliefs. Once society, represented in the character of her own mother, makes her succumb to the norm, she willingly leaves it, remaining thoroughly true to herself.

It is striking that though Mary did whatever was expected of her, the people from the village felt that it was insufficient. She was a responsible pupil, polite in conversation and obedient daughter but this was not enough. She had to be controlled, suppressed, and finally manipulated. Since she is a teenager, Mary is supposed to behave recklessly as all teenagers. However, by isolating herself from others, Mary manages to escape supervision and control which her mother, and the rest of the people from the village, cannot accept. The fact that Mary has been taking her father’s boat and spending time on the island on her own did not bother her mother in the past because then Mary was perceived as “a good subject”

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In order to find valid answers to the aforementioned questions, Frye tells us a story about a man, shipwrecked on an unidentified and uninhabited island in the South Seas, the sole survivor who, due to a rationally inconceivable natural catastrophe, finds himself on an intimidating quest to recreate the lost civilization. Constantly wavering between reason and emotions, reality and desire, Frye’s shipwrecked outcast ultimately experiences three indispensable levels in his cultivating activity. The most primitive level is that of consciousness and awareness, in which a difference between man and nature is most vividly present, whereby the language of self-expression (based mostly on adjectives and nouns used for naming the unknown natural surroundings) is primarily used. Then, there is the level of social participation that coincides with the occurrence of the language of practical sense (e.g. the verbal expression of teachers, preachers, politicians, advertisers, etc.) and last, but not, least, is the level of imagination that actually produces literary language. Frye insightfully claims that “they’re not really different languages, but three different reasons for using words” (1963, p. 22– 23).

Therefore, unfortunately prompted by the unexpected loss of his world and creatively guided by the imaginative vision of a desirable, future civilization, Frye’s exile gradually transforms the outside alien environment into a home. However, the fortunate movement from an initial state of insufficiency and frustration to a subsequent condition of fulfilled desire is only possible if all three levels of human activity exist. Frye, of course, emphasizes the paramount importance of the third level of the human mind in which the final reconciliation between desire and reality is successfully achieved with the indispensable guidance of the imagination that ultimately results in the creation of works of art (essentially literature, reflecting Frye’s personal interests). Frye indirectly suggests that it is a regrettable fact that nowadays modern civilization abounds in examples of a supreme imaginative faculty reduced to its crude adversary – the imaginary (false, phony, unreal) and its commercial trivialities.

(Althusser, 2014, p. 269). However, when her behaviour began to be talked about by other villagers, she immediately became “the bad subject” (Althusser, 2014, p. 269), who had to be forcefully made accept all social norms of proper conduct. Mary was allowed to be different as long as this did not influence other members of society to follow her example.

In the same vein, John Fiske says that “the individual is produced by nature, the subject by culture” (2004, p. 187) in *Culture, Ideology, Interpellation*. With the loss of the bond with nature, people have become mere subjects of the dominant culture. Nobody understands, or pretends to understand, Mary’s difference from the others. Instead, they want to put her back on the supposedly right track, not aware that uniformity is a culturally imposed phenomenon. Fiske also makes the distinction between “theories of the individual” which concentrate on the acceptance of natural diversity among individuals, and “theories of the subject” which concentrate on people’s common experiences in a society. (2004, p. 187) In Mary’s patriarchal community, theories of the subject prevail and for this reason the residents of the village tend to include Mary in local dances and parties so that she becomes a part of their communal experience.

Furthermore, patriarchal laws have become rooted so deeply that even women have embraced them, betraying their archetypal feminine role. Mary’s mother Margaret betrays her traditional role of a supportive nurturing mother. This shows her utter inability to love and understand Mary and her personal choices. However, since in their patriarchal community conformity comes before happiness of an individual, her mother intentionally breaks this natural bond, thus losing her daughter forever.

Hence, Mary’s mother represents a new generation of women who, as a consequence of being oppressed, have internalized the apparatuses of the oppressors so that they as “the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors” (Freire, 2005, p. 45). The fact that Margaret is quite satisfied to spend her life performing her house chores shows that she is completely detached from nature and thus unable to comprehend Mary. In other words, she completely embraces and identifies with the female role of a proper housewife artificially imposed on her by the patriarchal community. Her statements of Mary’s supposed enchantment show that she perceives Mary’s natural escapades as something that will ruin her. But while she is afraid that

she will lose Mary because of her strong bond with the seal, it is actually after the shooting of the seal that Mary is lost. The fear that is provoked by the stories about sea-people taking humans with them, which have existed for three generations in a row, has the purpose to prevent the return to the state of living in harmony with nature and undermining a destructive social order in which distancing oneself from the natural surrounding has become a social norm. She never asks Mary about her personal life and how she spends her free time. She never talks to Mary in order to understand why she enjoys spending time with the seal so much nor does she ever explain that there are certain expectations of her. Instead of symbolically linking with her daughter, she uses the patriarchal strategy of ranking; so, she places herself above other family members. At the same time, she leaves no space for the conduct different from socially expected. Whereas the mother has completely internalized the requirements of the community and tries to make Mary do the same, Mary avoids them by symbolically becoming the seal herself.

Another important issue that this story raises is what culture requires and expects of children and whether they are allowed to pursue their individual urges and creative impulses. Children are being conditioned to accept their future roles without giving them any conscious thought. They will eventually fit into the ready-made artificial world in which they would become mere consumers rather than creators. This is also the idea that Adrienne Rich, in her collection of essays *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (1995) discusses: “... our desire itself is taken away from us, processed, labelled and sold back to us before we have had a chance to name it for ourselves.” (1995, p. XIV) Thus, children are gradually brainwashed into accepting the officially proclaimed values underlined by nothing more profound than a desire for profit and material well-being attained at the cost of rejection of one’s genuine self, that is, the seminal concept of human nature.

Astonishingly modern as some means of brainwashing seems to be, the essential logic behind them has not changed for centuries, the burning issue in Williamson’s story is based on the nature vs. nurture dichotomy. If the child is the father of man, as William Wordsworth claims in his *Ode: Intimations of Immortality*, then the return to nature vs. nurture issue remains essentially relevant for understanding and condemning omnipresent patriarchal patterns and strategies of manipulation.

This dichotomy raises a significant issue of the generation of cruelty in patriarchal culture that is straightforwardly portrayed in Williamson's story through the act of shooting the seal. This issue was exceptionally relevant to a contemporary playwright Edward Bond who warns his readers that each successive generation of innocence destroyed is likely to result in more and more appalling perversion of humanity. Therefore, he attempts at pinpointing the origin of violence since it can be stopped if properly understood. In his preface to *Lear* (1971), he claims:

There is no evidence of aggressive need, as there is of sexual and feeding needs. We respond aggressively when we are constantly deprived of our physical and emotional needs, or when we are threatened with this; and if we are constantly deprived and threatened in this way – as human beings now are – we live in a constant state of aggression...Our society has a structure of a pyramid of aggression and as the child is its weakest member it is at the bottom. We still think we treat children with special kindness and make special allowances for them, as indeed most animals do. But do we? Don't most people believe they have a right, even a duty, to use crude force against children as part of their education? Almost all organizations dealing with children are obsessed with discipline. (1971, p. 3–6)

Thus, the child is born with immense creative potentials that are very soon silenced and put under social control. Instead of offering the child a glimpse into, as Trilling puts it, "what the self is and what it might become" (1967, p. 96), instead of offering the child emotional reassurance and protecting its vulnerability, the parents usually offer social morality, which is itself a form of corrupted innocence, or as Bond would say, "a threat, a weapon used against their most fundamental desire for justice, without which they are not able to be happy or allow others to be happy" (1971, p. 7) This gradual perversion of the child's inborn instinct for justice is directly portrayed in Williamson's "Mary and the Seal".

In spite of the fact that Williamson, among many contemporary artists, presents in this short story the irreparable consequences of the abuse of children, it is still sanctioned and "held in high regard...as long as it is defined as child-rearing" (Miller, 1990, p. 282), as Alice Miller would say in her study *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in the Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence* (1990), where she also claims that:

All children are born to grow, to develop, to love, to live, and to articulate their needs for their self-protection. For their development

children need the respect and protection of adults who take them seriously, love them and honestly help them to become oriented in the world. When these vital needs are frustrated and children instead abused for the sake of adults’ needs...then their integrity will be lastingly impaired. (1990, p. 281)

Therefore, instead of forcing the prefabricated notions of society upon children, instead of teaching them how to become perfectly fitting cogs in the machine, how to prostitute what is best in them, the very core of their humaneness, the society and parents should simply allow them to follow their natural impulses, support them and instruct them as to unequivocally follow their creative urges. Such a drastic change of attitude may bring to an end “the perpetuation of violence from generation to generation.” (1990, p. 283)

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CONCLUDING  
REMARKS

The scholars mentioned in this paper emphasize in their respective works that the first phase in the development of civilization was related to the matriarchal period of natural abundance and peace and that warfare appeared at some later stages. Namely, the matriarchal society was egalitarian – it worshipped the Great Goddess and oneness with nature; on the contrary, the patriarchal society directly opposes nature and imposes rules – it uproots people, disconnects them from their natural surroundings, culture and system of values they represent, they are aggressively squeezed out of their humanness. As a result, the vital bond between man and nature is irretrievably lost. Instead of the sanctity of natural bonds, the obedience to destructive patriarchal authorities has become the norm and every kind of disobedience against social norms is punished in diverse ways. In the prehistoric matriarchal period, power originally had the meaning of the power of love, power of creative imagination; now it has the meaning of force, progressing toward destruction, as Read validly claims in her documentary *Goddess Remembered* and defines it as a “progress that threatens all life.” (1989)

Being aware of the harmful consequences of modern culture’s material aggrandizement, Williamson insightfully opts for the ending of the story in which Mary recaptures the lost bond with nature by becoming one of the seals. Thus, the author here focuses not on material progress but on his personal creative alternative. He unquestioningly shows that imagination has “the power of constructing possible models of human experience” (Frye, 1963, p. 22)

that help us “recapture, in full consciousness, the original lost sense of identity with our surroundings” (Frye, 1963, p. 29).

Another proof of this statement can be found in an open-ended manner he finishes his story. Namely, in the last part of the story, he introduces the idea of himself being a mere mediator conveying the important messages of Scottish Gaelic heritage to modern generations:

That was a Gaelic tale from the Western Isles...told by Mr. Neil McCallum, a crofter...I can still hear his voice in my ears...And when I tell you the story, I try to get as close as possible to the way that he spoke to me. Do you understand what I mean? (Williamson, 1997, p. 56)

Viewed from this perspective, it becomes obvious that Williamson focuses on the significance of the story itself and not on its supposed authorship. The ending question thus carries a potent message to future generations: the story is there to be repeated over and over again, until its crux is properly understood. And above all, it becomes a proper illustration of the relevance of the artistic quest Grave’s truth-possessed poet (1993, p. 14) willingly aspires to.

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МИЛЕНА М. КАЛИЧАНИН

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У НИШУ

ФИЛОЗОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

СТУДИЈСКА ГРУПА ЗА АНГЛИСТИКУ

КАТЕДРА ЗА ЕНГЛЕСКИ ЈЕЗИК

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САЖЕТАК

„НАПРЕДАК КОЈИ УГРОЖАВА ЖИВОТ“: ПИТАЊЕ ПРИРОДЕ  
И ОДГОЈА У ПРИЧИ ДАНКАНА ВИЛИЈАМСОНА „МЕРИ И ФОКА“

Окосницу рада чине документарци Доне Рид, *Знакови изван времена* (2004) и *Незаборављена богиња* (1989), који се заснивају на истраживању мирнодопске традиције матријархалних насеобина на територији данашње Источне Европе у периоду неолита и бронзаном добу. Ридова се у њима позива на закључке археолога Марије Гимбутас која је доказала да се мирољубива култура старе Европе отелотворена у свемогућој Великој Богињи драстично променила на крају трећег миленијума када су насилни индоевропски номади дошли из Русије и уништили матријархалну утопију једнакости и природне хармоније. Ова агресивна патријархална племена су функционисала на принципу друштвене хијерархије. Налази Ридове и Гимбутасове се даље у раду повезују са идејама Рајане Ајслер и Ерика Фрома који у својим студијама такође тврде да је уочљив материјални напредак патријархалне културе знатно оштетио идиличну матријархалну везу између човека и природе. Наведени теоретски увиди се примењују у анализи приче „Мери и фока“ (1997) Данкана Вилијамсона и његовом виђењу питања природе и одгоја. Аутор доводи у питање темеље савремене патријархалне културе осликавањем брижног односа између Мери и фоке, као и трагично изнуђеном и надасве непотребном жртвовању поменути животиње. Сама чињеница да постоји нераскидива спона између

Мери и фоке, која је у причи приказана као отелотворење идиличног матријархалног јединства човека и природе, иде у прилог тезе о неопходности повратка суштинским, давно заборављеним егалитарним вредностима. Осим већ поменутих критичких увида, у анализи приче заступљене су идеје Грејвза, Алтисера, Фреира, Фискеа и Милерове.

Кључне речи: природа; одгој; матријархат; патријархат; напредак; цивилизација.



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