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**ON THE DIVINE FEMININE: READING FAY WELDON'S PUFFBALL THROUGH  
THUNDER: PERFECT MIND**

KUTSAL DIŞİL ÜZERİNE: GÖK GÜRLEMESİ: KUSURSUZ ZİHİN İLE  
FAY WELDON'IN KURTMANTARI'NI OKUMAK

*Züleyha Çetiner Öktem\**

**Abstract**

Focusing on gynocentric issues, Fay Weldon's *Puffball* is a text open to many types of feminist readings but one that has yet to be explored is a metaphysical reading of the novel focussing on the divine feminine. Although the novel seems to portray everyday characters, the allusions to biblical, mythical, and mystical elements allow for this type of an analysis. The ebb and flow between the protagonist Liffey and antagonist Mabs, who are experiencing various stages of womanhood, portray two very different types of mothers. Yet, in tune with Neumann's Great Mother archetype, both women ironically complement each other through these contradictions. The transformations Liffey and Mabs undergo inherently balances the text offering a dualistic yet unified approach. This unification through contradictions is most illustrative in the ancient gnostic text dubbed *Thunder: Perfect Mind*, where a divine feminine voice describes herself through clashing images. By reading *Puffball* through the lens of *Thunder*, it becomes possible to see how opposing forces may be considered as aspects of a whole. In this vein, this paper suggests that Weldon's *Puffball* resonates with ancient gnostic discourses specifically with the *Thunder* text where otherwise discordant aspects are fused in the image of the divine feminine.

**Keywords:** *Fay Weldon, Puffball, Gnosticism, Thunder: Perfect Mind, Great Mother*

**Öz**

Kadın merkeziliğine odaklanan Fay Weldon'ın *Kurtmantarı* adlı romanı birçok feminist okumaya açık olmasına rağmen henüz kutsal dişillığe odaklanarak metafiziksel açıdan incelenmemiştir. Roman her ne kadar olağan karakterlerle

\* Öğr. Gör. Dr. Ege Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, ORCID: 0000-0001-7401-0437.

örülmüş gibi gözüксе de dini, mitik ve mistik öğelere olan göndermeler nedeniyle bu tür bir analizin yapılması mümkün kılınır. Kadınlığın farklı dönemlerinde olan başkahraman Liffey ve karşı karakter Mabs'ın arasındaki gelgitler birbirinden çok farklı iki anneyi tasvir eder. Fakat, Neumann'ın Yüce Ana arketipiyle uyumlu bir şekilde her iki kadın da bu tezatlıklar sayesinde ironik bir biçimde birbirini tamamlar. Liffey ve Mabs'ın geçirdikleri dönüşümler metni dengeleyerek düalistik fakat bütüncül bir yaklaşım sunar. Tezatlıklardan yola çıkarak varılan bu bütüncül yaklaşımı kutsal dışıl bir sesin kendini karşıt imgelerle tanımladığı *Gök Gürlemesi: Kusursuz Zihin* adıyla anılan antik gnostik metinde de yansımaları görmek mümkün. *Kurtmantarı*'nı *Gök Gürlemesi* ışığında okuyarak karşıt güçlerin nasıl bir bütünün parçaları olabileceğini görmek mümkün olur. Bu bağlamda, bu makale *Kurtmantarı* romanının antik gnostik söylemlerle, özellikle *Gök Gürlemesi* metniyle, yüklü olduğunu önererek ahenksizmiş gibi görünen yönlerinin kutsal dışıl imgesinde nasıl birleştiğini irdeler.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Fay Weldon, Kurtmantarı, Gnostisizm, Gök Gürlemesi: Kusursuz Zihin, Yüce Ana.*

## Introduction

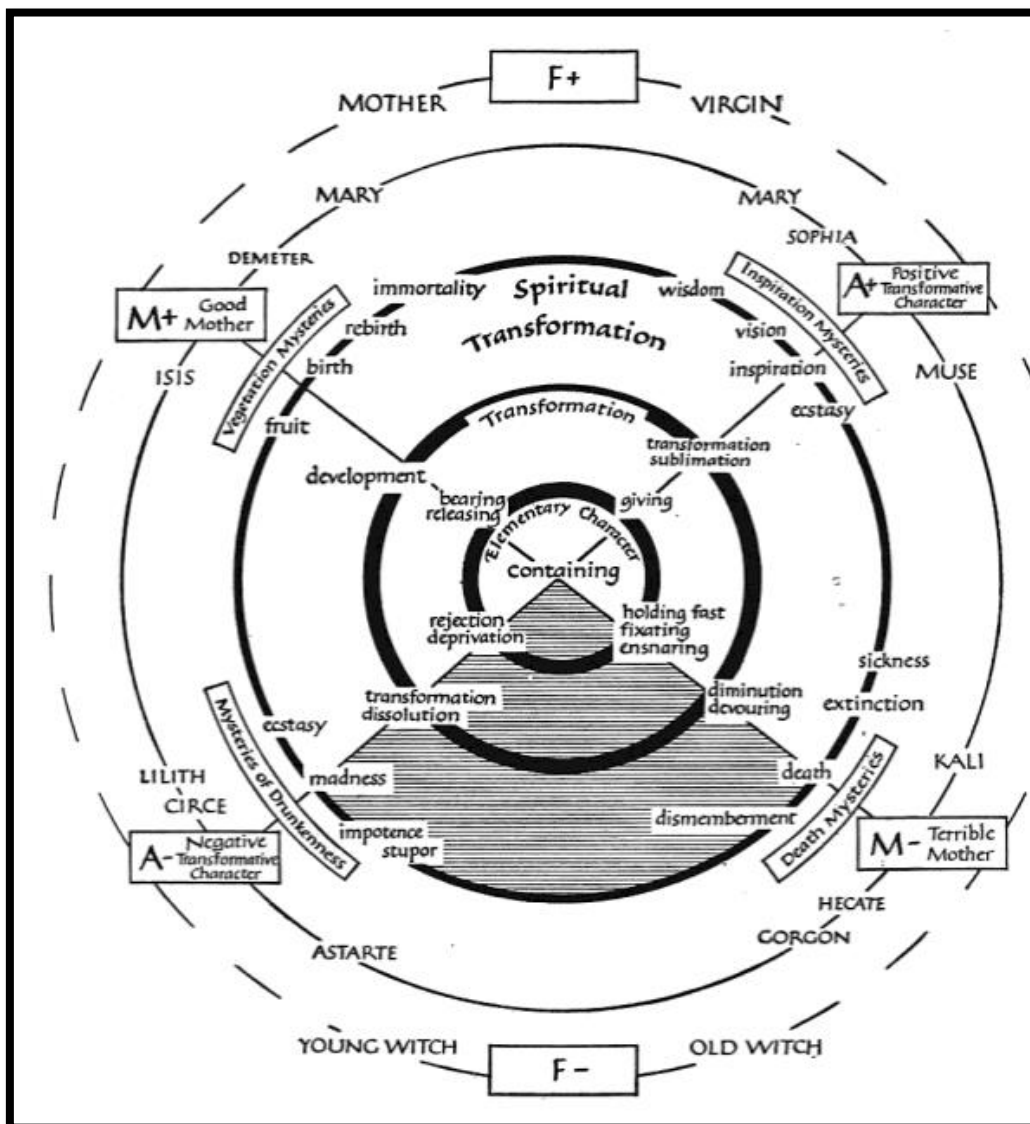
Fay Weldon's *Puffball* is a narrative based on the juxtaposition of opposites: the country versus the city, waxing and waning mothers, mobile and stationary men, the inside and outside workings of the female body. Although the novel closely explores the inner biological and outer psychosocial experiences of its protagonist Liffey, it is also about the antagonist Mabs. Liffey's gradual transformation into an autonomous mother figure, representing the Good Mother archetype with her nurturing and protective aspects, is counterbalanced with Mabs' regression into the devouring and decimating Terrible Mother. Furthermore, Liffey's transformative process from ignorance to self-knowledge and Mabs' retrogression from overconfidence to submissiveness also balances the novel where both women complement each other through these contradictions. In a similar fashion, *Thunder: Perfect Mind* is also composed on the juxtaposition of opposites. The *Thunder* text, however, presents clashing images not as separate entities but as aspects of a single divine feminine figure culminating in an image that may be defined as the all-encompassing Great Mother.

The concept of the Great Mother, as a primordial image, features the amalgamation of conflicting traits: she is one that nurtures, nourishes and yet also the one who devours and annihilates. This image of the Great Mother is inherent in almost all world cultures as "[t]he concept of the Great Mother belongs to the field of comparative religion and embraces widely varying types of mother-goddess" (Jung 75). Considering the Great Mother to be a derivative of the mother archetype, Jung points out that as with all other archetypes "the mother archetype appears under an almost infinite variety of aspects" (81). These multifarious facets of the mother archetype may range from the positive (loving mother) to the negative (terrible mother) (Jung 81-82). Likewise, for Neumann "[t]he wicked, devouring mother and the good mother lavishing affection are two sides of the great uroboric Mother Goddess" (*The Origins* 39), which implies the existence of a cyclic unity in this seeming duality, an idea he will further explore in detail in his monograph dedicated to Jung entitled *The Great Mother*. In this work,

Neumann draws attention to the various manifestations of the Archetypal Feminine or the Great Mother through a structural diagram (see Figure).

In the centre of Neumann's schema lies the elementary character of the feminine which acts as a container, as a vessel that encapsulates. From this initial position, the body as vessel either releases or fixates, gives or deprives leading to the second sphere, a space of transformation. In this sphere, on the axis of the mother archetype, there are positive elements of development that lead to the Good Mother (M+) and negative elements of devouring of the Terrible Mother (M-). Between the Positive Transformative Character (A+) and the Negative Transformative Character (A-) lie sublimation leading to the Inspiration Mysteries and dissolution that ends in the Mysteries of Drunkenness. The third sphere is the sphere of spiritual transformation where the Good Mother (representative of the Vegetation Mysteries) offers rebirth and immortality, whereas the Terrible Mother (representative of the Death Mysteries) causes dismemberment, extinction, death and sickness.

**Figure:** Neumann's Schema III of the Archetypal Feminine of the Great Mother.



The purpose of Neumann's schema is to provide a translation of "the numinous dynamic of the archetypal development into quasivisual terms" (*The Great Mother* 64) where the "arrangement of opposites is in itself symptomatic of the ambivalent character of the archetype" (*The Great Mother* 65). Nevertheless, Neumann's schema of the Great Mother (or rather the functional spheres of the feminine) will be utilised as a frame of reference in analysing Weldon's *Puffball* through *Thunder: Perfect Mind*.

### **On the Divine Feminine in *Thunder: Perfect Mind***

Discovered accidentally in 1945 at Nag Hammadi and possibly dating back to second- or third-century Alexandria, *Thunder: Perfect Mind* is considered to be "one of the most unusual revelation discourses in ancient literature" (Williams 257). Sharing affinities with the Isis aretology inscriptions and Mediterranean riddles, *Thunder* is an extraordinary gnostic text where a series of paradoxical statements define the nature of the divine feminine, of "the divine energy underlying all existence, human and divine" (Pagels xxiv).

*Thunder* first constructs an image of the divine feminine and then immediately dismantles it through a series of clashing statements: "For I am the first and the last. I am the honored and the scorned. I am the whore and the holy. I am the wife and the virgin. I am <the mother> and the daughter. I am the limbs of my mother. I am a barren woman who has many children. I have had many weddings and have taken no husband" (*Thunder* 372). The feminine persona continues "I am a midwife and a woman who does not give birth. I am the solace of my own birth pains. I am bride and groom, and my husband produced me. I am the mother of my father and the sister of my husband, and he is my offspring" (373). In the following "I am" segment the speaker resumes: "For I am knowledge and ignorance. I am shy and bold, I am shameless; I am ashamed. I am tough and I am terror. I am war and peace" (373). The divine feminine further states, "I have been hated everywhere and loved everywhere. I am the one called life, and you have called me death. I am the one called law, and you have called me lawless. I am the one you pursued, and I am the one you seized. I am one you have scattered, and you have gathered me together" (374-5). In these lines the feminine revealer defines herself through antithetical and even paradoxical self-proclamations which strengthen the notion that she is an all-encompassing figure that simultaneously embodies, and yet does not, both the negative and the positive, fluctuating not between them but being both and none: hers seems to be a transcendent stance of dichotomies. According to Olsen "[b]y perpetually affirming opposite qualities, it is established that the divinity is beyond all such categories and yet manifests or permeates them completely" (90). On another note, through these statements *Thunder* achieves "a shift between crystallization and disintegration that evokes and then exploits predictable forms, and brings everything it names into question. Little is stable; no form or identity is fixed in *Thunder*" (Taussig et al. 39). The contradictory "I am" proclamations of the divine feminine voice, however, may be viewed as an all-encompassing feminine figure that purposefully defies specific categorizations. In relation to Neumann's schema, this figure belongs to all spheres on all axes. In order to comprehend the nature of *Thunder's* persona,

then, one must reconsider the boundaries of classifications and definitions as this “text is an excellent example of a religious polemical stance against the power of names, labels, designations” (Buckley 97). Furthermore, as a revelatory, salvific narrative, *Thunder* reconceptualises the notion of salvation as it “does not conform to the more familiar ‘Gnostic’ image of a transformative movement or ‘conversion’ from blindness to vision, deficiency to fullness, or ignorance to gnosis”; on the contrary, it “presents an understanding of salvation that comes through the interpretive process of grappling with the language of the text and confronting the paradoxical nature of the divine within the antitheses of ignorance and gnosis, weakness and power, shame and honor, death and life” (McGuire 425).

Composed over two millennia ago, *Thunder: Perfect Mind* shares affinities with *Puffball*. The two texts are similar in nature as they are ground in contrastive images of the feminine; however, as seen above, the divine feminine voice in *Thunder* provides a unity, a composite image that entails the amalgamation of opposites in a single body whereas in *Puffball* these images are portrayed through separate female characters. Reading *Puffball* through the lens of *Thunder*, therefore, alters the way we perceive the female characters in *Puffball* permitting us to view these opposing forces, especially Liffey and Mabs, as a complementary pair functioning in unity.

#### **Fragments of Mother Goddess(es) in *Puffball***

Fay Weldon’s novel is mainly set in Somerset, a village with mythical connotations that stands in stark contrast to the city of London. In brief, this village is a rural area with rolling hills where a Londoner couple Liffey and Richard, decide to settle down to raise a family. Somerset is about twenty miles from London making it difficult for Richard to commute; hence his decision to stay with friends in the city and come home for the weekends. Liffey’s closest neighbours are Mabs and Tucker, a country couple that feel threatened by the city folk. Mabs, in particular, makes it her personal mission to put Liffey in her place, and once Liffey becomes pregnant, Mabs’ malevolent behaviour towards Liffey escalates.

The story opens with the subtitle “In the Beginning” creating a biblical setting within the mind-set of the reader; however, disorientation immediately follows as the next lines are “Many people dream of country cottages” (Weldon 1). Although this split in the narrative, from the divine to the mundane, disorients the reader, it also hints that this novel is about bridging opposites. So, dreaming of a country cottage suddenly becomes a reality for Liffey; yet this dream comes with a price. Liffey must transform from lover to mother. Liffey agrees to her husband Richard’s wish of having a baby; however, she was unaware that “[a] trap closed round her” (1). This introduction, based on juxtapositions, sets the tone and permeates the whole narrative, fluctuating between the divine and the mundane, dreams and reality, girlhood and womanhood, freedom and confinement. One of Liffey’s other dreams was writing a book as she so persistently and childishly puts it that if they lived in the country “and had a bit of peace and quiet, I could really get down to writing my novel” (Weldon 4). Once settled down in Honeycomb Cottage, however, Liffey quickly crosses it off her to-do-

list. It seems that at this point everything related with the city and civilisation is slowly eradicated from Liffey's life as living close to the Tor gradually brings out her true nature, diminishing the superficial image she had previously woven around herself. In the Neumannian context, Liffey oscillates between the Inspiration Mysteries and the Vegetation Mysteries; by agreeing to become pregnant, the latter becomes a source of power from which she draws energy.

The feminine power Liffey increasingly gains may be explained through the location of the cottage as it undoubtedly presents an ancient source of influence: "The cottage stood on rising ground, at a point where smooth fields met the wooded hillside. It looked across the plains to Glastonbury Tor, that hummocky hill which rises out of the flat Somerset levels, and is a nexus of spiritual power, attracting UFOs, and tourists, and pop festivals, and hippies, and the drug squad" (Weldon 2). Although Weldon's description of the Tor somewhat diminishes the place (describing it as a Neopagan hot spot), Glastonbury Tor represents a natural sacred landscape that is in tune with both Liffey and her counterpart Mabs. The Tor is also a significant site well known in Arthurian lore for being the location of the Holy Isle of Avalon, believed to exist on the same location of Glastonbury, albeit through the mists, marking Avalon as the home of the Mother Goddess. The dualistic aspects of the Great Mother as both nurturing and annihilating in relation with this location have been the groundwork for many ancient myths and tales. As Kathy Jones writes in her introduction of *The Goddess in Glastonbury*:

From time immemorial, the Isle of Avalon, in the Summerland (Somerset, England), has been home to the Goddess. This ancient sacred place is the legendary Western Isle of the Dead. Dedicated to an awesome and powerful Goddess, this Island lay far to the west in a shining sea. People were called here to die, to be transformed and to be reborn. By tradition, a group of nine, thirteen or nineteen Maidens or Faerie Queens live, some say even today, upon this mysterious Western Isle. Skilled in healing and the magical arts of creation and death, they are the Keepers of the Mysteries of the Goddess. Their names come to us as those of Goddesses—Anu, Danu, Mab, Morrighu, Madron, Mary, Arianrhod, Cerridwen, Rhiannon, Epona, Rigantona, Bride, Brigit, Hecate, Magdalena, Morgana, Gwenhwyfar, Vivien, Nimue. (3)

Considering that Glastonbury Tor itself is the embodiment of the Goddess with her dualistic aspects: life/death, good/evil, young/old, the entanglement of Liffey (as mother-to-be) and Mabs (as mother) is plausible. The basic life/death aspect of the Great Goddess may be resembled to the relationship between Liffey and Mabs as they seem to be playing out the roles of Good Mother and Terrible Mother, fulfilling the eternal dance of balance. Both aspects realise each other leading to the formation of the whole. Similar to the Yin-Yang concept of Chinese philosophy and metaphysics, Liffey and Mabs complement one another and are a part of each other's lives without really understanding the full implications of their unification; one's existence is dependent on the other; one cannot truly function without her counterpart:

Despite their initial juxtaposition, Liffey and Mabs are in fact from the beginning of the novel identified with each other. In the first chapter they are both compared to horses [...]. This comparison not only underlines their connection with the animalistic,

corporal aspect of their being, but also their relation to the earth goddess Epona, or Rhiannon, the incarnation of the great goddess from Celtic mythology. This initial juxtaposition sets out the pattern for the whole story which centres on the relation between the two women, their similarities and differences and the mutual influence they exert on each other. (Madej-Stang 116-117)

The Celtic Mother Goddess, unlike many western mother goddesses such as Hera in Greek mythology or Frigg in Norse mythology whose roles as mother goddesses are limited, is not fragmented and has many aspects merged within herself; furthermore, “[t]he nature of the Celtic goddesses has often been described as multi-functional and indeed this helps to account for the absence of goddesses associated with one single area of concern. However, it is possible to account for the complex nature of the supernatural figures by means of a multi-layered rather than a multi-functional model which avoids the over-emphasis on the survival of myth and allows for development in later cultural contexts” (Wood 131). Analysing Liffey and Mabs within a multi-layered context, then, by taking into account not only their interactions with one another but also with others, such as other mothers, the men in their lives and their relationship with their children, would prove beneficial.

The major interaction of concern is obviously that between Liffey and Mabs. Once Liffey settles into her new home, she finds a friend in Mabs, mistaking Mabs’ inquiries for friendly concern. The way Mabs views Liffey, however, is someone she can control and manipulate. The contrastive yet similar aspects between the two characters are vividly described as: “Mabs stood in the middle of [Liffey’s] kitchen as if she were a tree grown roots, and she, Liffey, was some slender plant swaying beneath her shelter, and they were all part of the same earth, same purpose” (Weldon 50). The shelter Mabs offers, however, is of the suffocating kind, the kind that denies sunlight and leaves one to die. Considering Liffey to be an insolent city girl Mabs asks her mother for some of the special potion which she mixes into the food Liffey consumes and instructs Tucker to ‘visit’ Liffey as she needs to be “taken down a peg or two” (15). Although no one in Somerset openly claimed that Mabs was a witch, her mother Mrs Tree, was renowned for being “a herbalist, in the old tradition” (24), Mrs. Tree’s enemies “said she was a witch, and even her friends recognised her as a wise woman” (25). This recognition sets Mabs and Mrs. Tree apart, not just generationally but as certain mother types: although both are considered to be “witches” Mrs. Tree’s wisdom would enable her to be categorised as Good Mother which would implicate Mabs as Terrible Mother. Nevertheless, Mrs. Tree’s wisdom belongs to the old tradition of woman-as-healer as indicated in the passage below:

On moonlit nights, even now, she would switch off the television and go gathering herbs – mugwort and comfrey, cowslip and henbane, or any of the hundred or more plants she knew by sight and name. She would scrape roots and strip bark, would simmer concoctions of this or that on her gas-stove, at home with distillations and precipitations. The drugs she prepared – as her mother’s before her – were the same as the local doctor had to offer: psychoactive agents, prophylactics, antiseptics, narcotics, hypnotics, anaesthetics and antibiotics. But Mrs Tree’s medicines served, in overdose, not just to restore a normal body chemistry, but to incite to love and hate, violence and passivity, to bring about increased sexual activity or impotence, pain, irritability, skin disease, wasting away, and even death. (25)



Since “[s]uch knowledge passed from mother to daughter” (Weldon 25), it was assumed that Mabs was also a witch through her heritage and name as well as by her proximity to the Tor. Moreover, “[n]ot only is the action of *Puffball* presided over by Pucklike forces and set in a magical environment (beneath the gaze of Glastonbury Tor), but the name of Liffey’s new neighbor, Mabs, is rich in supernatural associations” (Dowling 91). Mabs’ power indeed seems to be connected with the land, especially with the Tor: “Mabs, as the counterpart to, and the completion of Liffey is the main witch figure in the story. Her magic is connected with the fertility cult constituting part of the goddess religion. This image is further stressed as Mabs lives in the shadow of the Glastonbury Tor” (Madej-Stang 120). According to Neumann’s schema, the witches (both young and old) belong to the negative aspects of the feminine. Fluctuating between the Mysteries of Drunkenness and the Death Mysteries, these archetypes are associated with ensnaring, fixating, depriving, dissolving, dismembering and death. With this correlation, Mabs is portrayed as a domineering woman able to manipulate and negatively influence Liffey, and others around her as well, for her own gain. She orders her husband Tucker, for example, to rape Liffey as “Liffey was to be proved a slut, like any other” (Weldon 52). By pushing Tucker towards Liffey, Mabs justifies her cruelty in that Tucker should do it “at Mabs’ behest, rather than on his own initiative, sometime later” (52). This remark, however, is indicative of a growing sense of insecurity on Mabs’ part. The more Mabs and Liffey interact, the more Mabs begins to gradually lose her influence over Liffey, especially after Liffey becomes pregnant.

Mabs views Liffey as a young and fertile mother figure capable of creating life within her body, thus destroying Mabs’ chance of doing the same. This later becomes an obsession on Mabs’ part where she consistently cries out that she is unable to conceive because Liffey has stolen her baby as the child Liffey is carrying might well be Tucker’s (Weldon 179, 274, 275). Mabs believes that they are connected as she senses the moment Liffey becomes pregnant (128) causing her to become even sterner towards the children she already has; moreover, “Mabs knew, too, that there are only so many babies to go round, and that if Liffey was pregnant, she would not be” (160). Unaware of Mabs’ ill-wishes towards her, Liffey’s transformation begins with the arrival of her baby’s spirit: “She felt a presence: the touch of a spirit, clear and benign. She opened her eyes, startled, but there was no one there ... ‘It’s me,’ said the spirit, said the baby, ‘I’m here. I have arrived. You are perfectly all right, and so am I. Don’t worry.’ The words were spoken in her head: they were graceful, and certain. They charmed” (172). The baby’s spirit, as a spark of inner knowledge, protected Liffey against any serious harm Mabs consecutively devised. On the other hand, Mabs felt that time was on her side and she “comforted herself with the thought that perhaps all she need do was wait, and the baby would leave of its own free will, and natural justice would be served” (213). Although Mabs knew everything about Liffey, little did she know that “Liffey’s baby had spoken to her; settled clear and bright inside her and promised that everything would be all right. That Liffey, now, had powers of her own: that Mabs could no longer have nature all her own way: that forces worked for Liffey too, and not just Mabs. Winter winds were on Mabs’ side, and frost, and



lightning and storms. Liffey loved sun, and breeze, and warmth; and they loved her. And spring was coming" (176). Subsequently, with the arrival of spring we sense that Mabs' reign will come to an end and it will be Liffey whose mood will determine the outcome of events.

Another indication of Mabs' retrogression is when she realises that her daughter Audrey has bloomed into a young woman, "and Mabs' raised fist fell as she felt for the first time the power of the growing daughter, sapping the erotic strength of the mother" (Weldon 115). From the very beginning, Mabs is infatuated with being pregnant, not being a mother (she prefers to physically and mentally abuse her children), but with the various stages of being pregnant. Mabs not only associates pregnancy with feminine power but she also equates being pregnant with being young and not being able to conceive anymore would mean she is aging. This in return would suggest that Mabs is on the verge of replacing her own mother Mrs Tree. Here there seems to be fear of transforming from Young Witch to Old Witch, a separation from the Mysteries of Drunkenness into a submersion of the Death Mysteries. The fear of transforming into the Old Witch and thus symbolically supplanting the Mother could be associated with the relationship Mabs has with her mother: it is neither healthy nor productive. Actually, it may be Mrs Tree's attitude towards Mabs that makes her vindictive and domineering in the first place. Mrs Tree overpowers Mabs and considers her to be a snivelling daughter too old to have babies; in fact she stresses that Mabs has more than enough children and is unable to look after them (218). The Old Witch as an archetype of the Terrible Mother embodied in Mrs Tree suggests that she metaphorically devours and tears Mabs apart. In return, Mabs continues to re-enact the role of her mother when dealing with others. The only period that allows her to shift from Terrible Mother to Good Mother is during pregnancy, and even then Mabs is more infatuated with the initial sphere, the Elementary Character of Containing (see Figure).

In Liffey's case, her mother Madge was the assertive one in their relationship until Liffey's baby arrived in the womb. The mother-daughter relationship was tentative at best as Madge "had never married, nor wished to, and Liffey was not so much a love child as a gesture of defiance to a straitlaced world. Madge had thought to bear a warrior son, but had given birth to Liffey instead" (Weldon 31). When Madge was visiting her pregnant daughter, Liffey found the strength to inquire about her father which had always been a forbidden topic. The little fragile Liffey who had always chirped and fluttered around Madge was gone and as Liffey waved goodbye to her mother she "knew that the parting was for ever. They would see each other again, no doubt, but that small part of Madge which had been mother had been firmly swallowed up by the rest, and ceased to be mother" (227). After Madge's visit, her hold on Liffey as well as the fear Liffey had continuously felt around her dissipated, further empowering Liffey. Another similar interaction occurs when Liffey's in-laws visit her. They had never really liked Liffey and somewhere in Mrs Lee-Fox's heart was the hope that they would be divorced and she would have her son all to herself again. During this visit, however, Mrs Lee-Fox encloses her most inner secret: that Richard's father is not really his biological father. The wine they had consumed "contained a distillation of the seed of a flower known locally as 'Tell-the-Truth' and had been given to Liffey and Richard by Mabs on the grounds

that, one way or another, it was bound to cause trouble” (253). In spite of this, Mabs unknowingly empowers Liffey who in the end forms some sort of understanding with her mother-in-law as Mrs Lee-Fox says “all women are sisters under the skin” (254) after revealing her innermost secret to someone whom she despised. By correlating her story to Liffey, Mrs Lee-Fox openly suggests that the baby is not Richard’s and that Liffey has cheated on him; yet more to the point she says that she did her “best to raise Richard properly” (254) but Richard was a constant reminder of her own infidelity that she would rather forget. In both of these instances, Madge and Mrs Lee-Fox, much like Mabs and Mrs Tree, seem to contain the negative aspects of the Great Mother: while Madge swerves towards the Negative Transformative Character (A-) through deprivation and rejection, Mrs Lee-Fox embodies the Terrible Mother (M-) through attempting to fixate Richard who on the surface is accepted while secretly rejected and whose relationship with the maternal figure is complicated.

The implicit, unarticulated complications Richard has with his mother seem to trickle down to his relationship with Liffey as well as other women. Living in the city for most of the week and only coming up to the cottage on most weekends creates a detachment from Liffey. With Liffey in the country, the London scene offers Richard the life of a bachelor. His sexual entanglements with Bella, his wife’s friend and hostess; Helga, the au pair living at Bella and Ray’s home; and Miss Martin, his secretary, provide an unattached experience of sexual and physical release. Through this experience “Richard discovered that he was critical of his wife, that he jeered inwardly at her absurdities, and felt the desire to mock what had once entranced him. He blamed Liffey for the loss of his love for her. Richard had been to bed with Bella” (Weldon 94). Oddly enough, Richard has paradoxical views of Liffey where he sees her as childish and weak yet at the same time as a divine feminine figure:

Richard wanted Liffey to be the mother of his children. He wanted her, for that reason, to be separated out from the rest of humanity. He wanted her to be above that sexual morass in which he, as male, could find his proper place but she, as wife and mother, could not. He wanted her to be pure, to submit to his sexual advances, rather than enjoy them: and thus, as a sacred vessel, sanctified by his love, adoration and respect, to deliver his children unsullied into the world. It was for this reason that he had offered her all his worldly goods, laying them down upon the altar of her purity, her sweet smile. And he wanted other women, low women, whom he could despise and enjoy, to define the limits of his depravity and his senses and thus explain the nature of his being, and his place in the universe. (113-114)

Richard’s paradoxical perception of Liffey as both divine and human is an allusion to the Virgin Mother. This allusion to the Virgin Mother, however, is an illusion: “Weldon employs the Madonna myth to remind us that cultures have shaped us, but also call into question the validity of the power we still afford this myth in modern life. (...) Weldon presents the myth in all its glory in *Puffball* and does so parodically” (Cane 189). On the other hand, “*Puffball* celebrates motherhood, affirming female biology and the mystery of giving birth, while showing how mothering, too, can be self-serving” (Faulks 36). From a Neumannian perspective, Liffey once again operates between the Vegetation Mysteries and the Inspiration Mysteries, between the Mother and the Virgin.

Once Liffey's child is born and Mabs realises that the baby boy resembles Richard rather than Tucker, she relinquishes her power and submits herself first to the doctor (a figure of patriarchal authority) and his insistence that homemade medicine and home treatments must cease (depriving her of potions and such) (Weldon 339); and secondly to Tucker: "certainly as Mabs lost power, Tucker gained it. He knew it: he was rough with Mabs now; he told her what to do: he shouted at her if she behaved badly to the children. He recognised that she was deflated, that although she still stared at the Tor, the clouds around its summit neither reflected her will nor shadowed her intent" (340). Only after the knowledge that she had erred in Liffey's case does Mabs fully surrender to those around her, causing her to lose any remnants of power she had left. After yielding her authority she becomes pregnant, which also aids in her becoming docile: she was always loving when pregnant. With Mabs' docility, Liffey becomes more assertive, maintaining the balance between them.

### Unity through Gnosis

Gilles Quispel notes that scholars such as Hermann Usener, Albrecht Dieterich, and Wilhelm Boussett who were interested in popular religion, mysteries, syncretism and Gnosis "found that God very often had been experienced as a Woman, [as] Mother Earth" (14). They explored the fundamental religious patterns (or archetypes) of religious thought. Among these, Dieterich found basic forms of religious symbolism that are characteristic for all human beings. Aware of this literature and closely following these scholars, Jung considered the archetypes as the language of life itself, as universal symbols of all humans from all times. Jung conceptualised that the soul had an inbuilt tendency toward self-realisation. Quispel considers the discovery of the Self to be the core of Gnosticism; he views Gnosis as "an experience, inspired by vivid and profound emotions, that in short Gnosis is the mythic expression of Self experience" (15). In this vein, the divine feminine voice in *Thunder: Perfect Mind* constructs a template which *Puffball* unwittingly follows. The interaction of Liffey and Mabs expresses opposing forces of the Great Mother archetype and through various experiences these two women actuate their roles in the great round of the uroboric mother.

Liffey's profound experience and subsequent transformation occurs the moment her baby's spirit arrives. Through the connection she establishes with her unborn child Liffey gains reflective sense of self-awareness; furthermore, "[t]he emotional emptiness of the world of [Liffey's] childhood and youth finds its counterbalance in the deep spiritual and physical link she feels with her child. Her pregnancy is in fact described in the same terms as examples of magical behaviours presented in the novel, making pregnancy itself the source and manifestation of the magic of the fertility goddess" (Madej-Stang 119). As an allusion to the mysteries of the womb, Hall writes "Matriarchal consciousness, or the awareness of the world from the mother's point of view, proceeds from a state of pregnancy or total intersubjectivity. There are always two things happening at once, two meanings—life of mother and child-in-utero are inseparable, senses intermingle" (88). The fertility of the mother, in this sense, is not only bound to the Vegetation Mysteries but also to the Inspiration Mysteries where in the

sphere of Spiritual Transformation lies wisdom inspired by Sophia. What is happening physically (in the body) is as significant as what is happening mentally (in the mind); both occurrences carry equal weight: “despite her portrayal of difference, Weldon is not making a determinist argument about the effects of these differences, nor is she trying to simply switch the values associated with the traditional and gendered mind/body split. Instead, she seeks to unify the concepts. Inner and outer Liffey cannot exist on their own. They are integrated in Liffey herself, and breaking them up like Weldon does in *Puffball* emphasizes that this dichotomy is a construction” (Reisman 50). From the particular to the universal, *Thunder* also purports that these dichotomies are simply constructions and that true meaning lies in comprehending the whole.

### **Conclusion**

All in all, reading Weldon’s *Puffball* through the lens of *Thunder: Perfect Mind* enables a more unified view of the women that are portrayed. Rather than discordant opposites, Liffey and Mabs continuously construct each other as their own narratives ebb and flow together culminating in the divine feminine in both her magnificent (i.e. nurturing) and her horrific (i.e. devouring) aspects. As the narrative weaves back and forth between the divine and the mundane, ignorance and knowledge, naivety and experience, the unconscious workings of the physical body and the conscious mind, and so on, these dualisms actually fashion unification rather than disparity. From this perspective, *Puffball* resonates with ancient gnostic discourses as well as Neumann’s Great Mother Archetype where the juxtapositions, the seemingly contrastive images are actually parts of the whole. Specifically coupled with the *Thunder* text, then, *Puffball*’s women encapsulate elements on both ends of the spectrum, on both ends of the seesaw, almost in deliberate defiance of fragmentation and dichotomies.

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