

MIDWIFE AT THE REBIRTH OF THE GREAT GODDESS: AN ORGANIC INQUIRY

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The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Communication.

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For Grace

“I seek her, yet, when I kneel before her, it is I who am found.
We have all left home to find home.” –Meinrad Craighead

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I use organic inquiry as a method to understand the transformative process when studying the collective history of the Great Goddess. The study shines a light on the history of the ancient Great Goddess, the impact of the invention of the alphabet, and how the written word influenced women's roles and the role of the Divine Feminine as seen through the lens of Leonard Shlain, and additionally, the artistic work of contemporary mystic Meinrad Craighead. The transformative impact of the study is explored through the use of stories as a tool for reclaiming connection to a grounding, creative source. Conclusions are that a sense of wholeness can be lost when a woman loses the tethering balance of both right and left-brained integration and this disconnect can be overcome by seeking connection through telling of personal stories.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
ONE	INTRODUCTION	1
	In the Beginning	4
	Structure	5
	Organic Inquiry	5
	Literature Review	8
	Opening My Mind	8
	The Goddess	9
	The Role of Images	10
	Goddess Cultures	11
	A Return to Shlain	12
	Women’s Stories	14
TWO	MY STORY	16
	At My Beginning	16
	My Spiritual Story	18
	My Process	20
	Transformation and Organic Inquiry	23
THREE	THE STORY OF THE GODDESS	26
	Personal Lens	26
	Snapshot: Another Side	26
	Great Goddess Introduction	29
	Her Beginning	29
	Goddess Images and Symbols	33
	Understanding the Symbols	37
FOUR	THE STORY OF THE WRITTEN WORD	41
	Personal Lens	41
	Snapshot: The Power of the Word	42
	The Waning of the Great Goddess	43
	Impact of the Written Word	39
	Brigid	47
	Gutenberg to Zuckerberg	49
	Photography and Further Technology	50
	Television, Computers and The Internet	50

FIVE	THE STORY OF MEINRAD CRAIGHEAD	52
	Personal Lens	52
	Snapshot: Communion	52
	Introduction of Meinrad Craighead	55
	Early Years	52
	Taking Holy Orders	61
	Leaving Monastic Life	63
	God The Mother	64
SIX	FINAL FOCUS	71
	Post Script	74
	And In The End	74
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	76
	APPENDIX	80

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

My God lived a little longer than Jesus, but not by much. My parents died in a plane crash before I knew who I was, and with that, all early grounding sense of the Divine vanished. The process has taken forty-two years, but this thesis provided the catalyst for reconnection to my earliest Source.

Growing up, the only model I had for God—the patriarchal male god or God the Father—was my Dad. Dad was a head football coach and everyone in my world listened to what he said. His job was linear, analytical, forceful—it involved leading columns of men up and down the battlefield with a goal of crossing the line. Some of my earliest memories are sitting with my mother in the stands watching the men at work and I knew it was our role to support them. Mom cheered and yelled and I mimicked her. Mom was capable and lively, but there was no doubt that Dad called the plays in our family.

The left-brained, patriarchal system was adhered to in the Wilson household with precision. The structure of our life followed four distinct seasons—football seasons. First and foremost was autumn, which meant games every week for the whole family. Next, winter and spring had Dad away from home, recruiting and planning for the next battle season. Finally, summer was the time to gear up and prepare with focus on the upcoming games. Those seasons gave form to our life, and I trusted that, while there would be periods of time when Dad wasn't available, he was watching over us.

With Dad in charge, we followed and supported him. In an interview for the women's page of the local paper my mother was asked if she was a football fan and she replied, "I'm a Ben Wilson fan." We all were. I loved being his little girl and hearing how I looked like him. I wanted people to

see the connection between the man in charge and me. While sitting in the stands waiting for the game to start I would ask my mother in a loud voice, “Where’s Daddy?” I hoped that everyone around us would understand I was the beloved child of the man about to call the plays.

Away from the football field, I don’t remember spending much time with my father. He was remote and barely accessible. Life at home was typical of the 1960s. Mom stayed home and took care of me until I started school, and then she went back to school herself to get her teaching certificate. She was active in the Girl Scouts organization and she joined committees at church. We went to the Methodist church every Sunday and it was here that I learned about Jesus and came to understand God as a man watching over us, much as Dad did—only grander. I believed God to be benevolent and supportive, but you had to follow his rules or else you would be punished.

Mom was loyal to my father and supported his life’s work faithfully, but she was the constant and accessible nurturer to me. It was Mom who gently showed me the way and taught me the rules. Mom was the one who provided my security and assurance that all would be well. For comfort she could sooth and pat, and when I was sick, give me saltine crackers and 7-up. She taught me to be brave and stand up for myself. She showed me how to be kind to everyone around us and appreciate our differences. My mother embodied the right-brained values of tolerance, caring and respect.

She opened the world up to me and delighted in helping me see the beauty of nature. She prepared me for the messy miracle of birth by waking me up one night so I could witness our cat laboring to deliver three little kittens. And I vividly recall Mom leaping around the bedroom with a broom trying to pin a bat that had entered an open window. She impressed me by getting the bat into a mayonnaise jar lined with black paper so I could take it to school.

And it was Mom who taught me about death. When the runt of the litter died she wrapped the kitten in a cloth so we could have a fine funeral, burying the bundle in the side yard.

My father was the Head Coach and everyone had to listen to him. Dad was the quintessential patriarchal man. I perceived my father as godlike; however, in retrospect, I see my mother was, in fact, the generative force that created my world and held it together. I never would have associated her mothering with God—until now.

I was ten years old when they both died and far too young to understand the reverberating impacts of the loss. In the wake of this traumatic rending, I felt oddly untethered from life, as if I had become a spectator of my own life, watching from the sidelines.

This thesis took me on a journey of discovery. . I began by studying the history of communication technology, wondering if Leonard Schlain was correct in his assertions that the emergence of the alphabet, and eventually print, broadcasting, photography, and the Internet have affected the way we think and perceive our world as it relates to our conceptions of God. From there, I was led to explore the collective history of the Great Goddess and the contemporary artistic expressions of Meinrad Craighead as a possible manifestation of what Schlain posits—that today's plethora of visually based technologies are ushering in a return to the kind of right-brain thinking that is more accepting of matriarchal values Surprisingly, in studying the collective history of the Great Goddess I saw my own story as a daughter, woman and mother reflected. As I labored to bring this bloody, messy thesis to birth, I found myself midwifing so much more. As I attended my personal rebirthing of the Great Goddess in the 21st century, I have found my Mother, and myself.

In The Beginning

Brigid, the Celtic goddess turned Catholic saint, was said to have the gift of sight. Considered the patron goddess of divination, the particular form of divination ascribed to her, known as the Augury of Brigid, is used to foretell the coming season and to discern information at long distance. She would curl her hand into a tube and, looking through it, she could see the location of a lost animal, check on the health of a distant loved-one, or peer into future events (Matthews, 1996). One marvels at such an ability! I wonder just how far into the future did Brigid's sight reach?

I have often thought about Brigid while working on this thesis and have chosen to use her as a guide and interpreter. Brigid is one of the very few goddesses of old that managed to survive the invention of the alphabet and become absorbed by the church. She is still very popular and particularly in Ireland, still worshipped.

This thesis examines the role of the ancient Great Goddess in history, the subsequent end of goddess worship with the invention of the alphabet, and a modern look at goddesses through the lens of artist Meinrad Craighead. In immersing myself in the history of the goddess throughout time, I realized I was being transformed.

My Goal for this Work

The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate the interconnectedness that occurs between us when we tell our own personal stories. Incorporating the story of the goddess, with Brigid as a guide, I resisted the urge to withdraw into academic abstraction, where personal connection can get lost in the pursuit of universal truth. I chose instead to offer the reader a chance to share in the truly transformative process of intimate stories.

We only know about ancient goddesses because of symbols and images and the stories we use to explain them. When the alphabet was invented, it changed the way we think and tell stories, and affected the existence of the Goddess. More recently, technology has dramatically changed the ways we can express ourselves, but increasingly at the cost of personal connection. We need to know and understand each other and ourselves; this is best accomplished through story.

Structure

Each section of this thesis examines the story of the goddess through a different lens. The first section of the thesis is my own history and the examination of the transformation that took place during the writing of this thesis, followed by three sections each offering a perspective of the goddess' changing role in society: The Story of the Goddess, The Story of the Written Word, and The Story of Meinrad Craighead. I begin each section with a brief discussion and a biographical story, providing a personal lens of the corresponding research. The use of my personal vignette is a tool for expressing the transformative role of each historic story, and is an important aspect of the organic inquiry. I have also included a photographic image with each story as a symbolic acknowledgement of the image's return to importance.

Organic Inquiry

Originally designed as a thematic analysis of prevalent themes found in the online discussions of the works of Meinrad Craighead, this research provided a transformative opportunity wherein the thesis itself transmuted along with the researcher. As the study explored the role of holistic, right-brained processes involved with the evolution of the goddess, the study became an inclusive, integrated research thesis. What ultimately emerged is an organic inquiry (O. I.), as seen in transpersonal research, that engages the whole person—both researcher and reader.

Organic inquiry is a qualitative research method specifically appropriate to transpersonal topics and to human experience. Developed about twenty years ago, its pioneers have written that the method “acknowledges that every research study has an inherent and expanding nature which may be realized through subjective and intuitive methods...[and] rather than aiming at generalized and replicable results, organic inquiry seeks to present the data and analysis in such a way that the individual reader may interact with it and be personally transformed” (Clements, Ettlign, Jenett, & Shields, 1998, para. 3).

As a research method, organic inquiry includes five elements:

1. Preparation- During the preparation process researchers recognize and follow the conscious and unconscious signs and open up the mind.
2. Story - The researcher’s story becomes the foundation to explore additional stories.
3. Chthonic- Organic research has a chthonic, or underground, aspect as methodology evolves and changes during the research because of synchronicities, dreams, intuition, or other manifestations of inner knowing.
4. Relational- personal stories become branches that connect to the main story.
5. Transformational- Organic research transforms the researchers, co-researchers, and the readers, so far as each is willing to engage in both the conscious and unconscious aspects of the work and so far as each is willing to be changed through involvement.

Drawing from traditions of cognitive archaeology, transpersonal psychology, and eco-psychology, this mixed-methods approach can be thought of as a movement towards a more holistic or integral archaeology. Other research methods include organic elements—for example, ethnography, field studies, oral history and narrative methods, and grounded theory—but O.I.

incorporates a much stronger emphasis on the organic and an “emphasis on releasing egoic control during certain research phases” (Braud, 2004, p. 20).

Initially a study of the subdued Great Goddess and her role in the electronic age as technology provides a holistic framework for her re-emergence, this thesis turned to narrow in on the deeply spiritual paintings of artist Meinrad Craighead. Next, in analysis of the prevalent themes found in online blogs discussing the works of Craighead, comments Craighead made about her own work and my own interpretations of Craighead’s work, the research process evolved yet again, and this new model emerged. This is not, however, a traditional progression of study resulting in any well-worn format. The structure of O.I. contains an inherent framework, and tools (methods), plus “an even greater need for maturity, critical thinking, mindfulness, and discernment than found in many other forms of research” (Braud, 2004, p. 21).

As a researcher, I have been deeply transformed by this thesis. Not only do I have a new sense of self due to study of the history of the goddess movement, but I also have a different perspective on the world around me. My role in my own life has shifted to a different spiritual level that has required a great deal of inner reflection and soul searching. The stories of Meinrad Craighead unlocked stories of my own and I developed a swell of longing and hope that the reader might experience a similar transformation. Early into my exploration of the Great Goddess and her diminished role in society, I realized a sense of responsibility that this information was not just for me, but for those who would learn from reading this study and also for a particular future reader. As my personal connection to the path developed and strengthened I could see that there is a responsibility to pass the story of my search forward—particularly to my granddaughter Grace. The holistic outlook collapses time and I now see my role as simultaneously honoring the ancient Great Goddess, recognizing the goddess in myself, and mirroring that grace to Grace. What a fabulous,

rich opportunity! I invite the reader to also fall into the open-minded embrace of knowledge and time without limits. I will lead you along the journey that I made and point out the guideposts that propelled me on the journey. I trust you will proceed with an open heart and mind and welcome transformation if it comes your way.

Literature Review

Before moving on to the next chapter's topic, the remainder of this one explains further how I have learned from, and been transformed by, some of the literature I have read in completion of this thesis. While not an exhaustive list of books, essays, and research reports I have been exposed to in this process, these works represent those that have been most important in this journey.

Opening My Mind

I first learned of the once mighty Goddess brought to her knees by the invention of the alphabet when I read Leonard Shlain's account in *The Alphabet Versus The Goddess*. It was the first time that I had ever understood that the Goddess was actually real and not some vague subject of mythology and fairy tales. Until then I had tacitly accepted the patriarchal view without question. However, I felt a curtain of awareness begin to part within me when I read Shlain's description of patriarchy as built around a religion that "features an imageless Father deity whose authority shines through His revealed Word, sanctified in its written form" (Shlain, 1998, p. 7). Throughout his book Shlain thoroughly supports his idea that "when the importance of the image supersedes the written work, feminine values and egalitarianism flourish" (Shlain, 1998, p. 7). This idea led me to seek out the Goddess. I was very intrigued by the Great Goddess, and the idea that she might still exist surprised me. I wanted to know if Shlain's Goddess had truly existed and to explore this idea: If the

use of images depicting the Goddess increased feminine values and egalitarianism, then what role does the image-rich, holistic Internet play in the perception of the Goddess today?

The Goddess

There has been a great deal written about early history and religion and I have chosen to focus on the work of scholars that *embrace* the role of the much-loved Goddess. I searched out sources that helped me to understand the story of the Goddess and how that story impacted my own story. One of the first sources that helped me to ground myself in the early history of the goddess was Merlin Stone, professor and art historian who wrote the 1976 landmark exploration of the Goddess, *When God Was A Woman*. In this work Stone highlights the ancient worship of the Great Goddess, and the impact of the newer religions that eventually suppressed women's rites and rights. Stone points out, "Archaeological, mythological and historical evidence all reveal that the female religion, far from naturally fading away, was the victim of centuries of continual persecution and suppression by the advocates of the newer religions which held male deities as supreme" (Stone, 1976, p. xiii). I was seeing how the Goddess ultimately lost her power. This helped me to understand why I had not learned about her while growing up.

Merlin Stone explains why the Goddess gets very little mention by researchers by pointing out that archaeologists and researchers were predominantly men. These men would provide a "cursory mention of the goddess" as a precursor to a very long dissertation about the male gods and deities that replaced her. Stone states, "Most misleading are the vague inferences that the veneration of a female deity was a separate, minor, unusual or curious occurrence" (Stone, 1976, p. 21), which helps to explain why there appear to be many goddesses with a lot of different names. The archaeologists were usually focusing on a geographic area and never made connections across societies in different locations, an action which might have shown the over-arching characteristics of

all the goddesses as being the same Great Goddess. Stone encouraged me to seek out the feminist story of the Goddess when she explained why today we are not aware of the Goddess. I felt a deep resonance within when Stone asks this simple question of her readers:

For people raised and programmed on the patriarchal religions of today, religions that affect us in even the most secular aspects of our society, perhaps there remains a lingering, almost innate memory of sacred shrines and temples tended by priestesses who served in the religion of the original supreme deity. In the beginning, people prayed to the Creatress of Life, the Mistress of Heaven. At the very dawn of religion, God was a woman. Do you remember?" (Stone, 1976, p. 1).

My answer was—surprisingly—"yes." I eagerly explored the images of the Great Goddess, realizing that the role of the image was an important aspect of understanding the goddess in history and possibly helping to identify her now.

The Role of Images

For further exploration I turned to cultural historian Elinor Gadon, author of *The Once and Future Goddess*. Gadon's research focus is on the analysis of myth and image in their cultural context and this provides an excellent source for understanding the role of image while tracing the history of the goddess. Gadon is in agreement with Stone's stance that while she had many names and appears differently, ultimately the goddess is "one supreme reality" (Gadon, 1989, p. xii). Gadon explains, "Only after the patriarchal Indo-Europeans overthrew the cultures where the goddess had flourished from earliest times and imposed the worship of their sky gods was her identity fractured into the myriad goddesses, each with an all-too-human personality" (Gadon, 1989, p.xiii). Gadon reminds us that it is the victors of the invasion that end up writing the history and subsequently

“Goddess religion has been portrayed as heretical, bad, ‘of the devil,’ the alien other” (Gadon, 1989, p. xiv).

I began to recognize my own sense of disconnection from any sort of source or anchor that tied me to the people around me. I had always just assumed the sense of disconnection was due to my own abandonment issues, but now I realize there was something much deeper and more fundamental at cause. Gadon explains that women really have been forcibly removed from their true selves, due to the fact that our psychological selves have been severed from our true natures (Gadon, 1989).

Goddess Cultures

I was very happy to discover the work of Lithuanian archaeologist Marija Gimbutas. Searching for information on early goddesses reveals many references to mythological gods and goddesses; it was much more challenging to locate information relating directly to research of the ancient goddess culture that did not relegate the goddess to an insignificant part of history. Marija Gimbutas began studying the Kurgan, hierarchical peoples of Eastern Europe. By tracing the linguistic and archaeological trails back in time she became more interested in those peoples that the Indo-Europeans had assimilated: the Old Europeans. Her study of the Old Europeans and their culture begins with her 1974 book *Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe*, followed by the subsequent publication of *Language of the Goddess* (1989), *The Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe* (1991), and her final book *The Living Goddesses* (1999).

Marija Gimbutas was considered quite controversial as she produced new and original ideas and put them forth with a strong conviction. Plus, “she was a voracious reader as well and her ideas were presented with a clear knowledge of the data and of the hypotheses of others” (Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 1999, p. xix). Gimbutas was professor of archaeology at UCLA for many years

and is considered a world-class specialist in the Indo-European Bronze Age. Gimbutas focused on images that were uncovered in the sites she studied. She included the Old European life cycle presented in graphic references. She points out the difficulty of studying the earlier, Upper Paleolithic culture due to the limited number of artifacts:

The artifacts from this earlier time period lose their contexts, and for the entire Upper Paleolithic we have only about three thousand figurines. For Old Europe, with its great outpouring of religious art...we cannot possibly tabulate them accurately. Total Old European figurines number one hundred thousand or more” (Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 1999, p. 4).

The work of Gimbutas proved to be invaluable in my telling of the story of the Goddess. She pointed out that while the Indo-European invaders were ruthless, their invasion did not completely wipe out the culture of the goddess-worshipping Old Europeans. In some ways there was an amalgamation of the two cultures, which is what allows us to recognize the culture of the goddess as being present today. Gimbutas states, “Old European religion and customs remained a strong undercurrent that influenced the development of Western civilization...cultures still worshiped Old European divinities, although they adopted a hierarchical social structure. The Mycenaean of Greece, Etruscans of central Italy, and Celts of central Europe, Britain, and Ireland exemplify this case, as do the Baltic, Slavic and Germanic cultures to a certain degree” (Gimbutas, *The Living Goddesses*, 1999, p. 129).

A Return to Shlain

When exploring the demise of the Goddess, Leonard Shlain’s *The Alphabet Versus The Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image* turned out to be one of the most comprehensive and detailed sources I found. This book so intrigued me from the start, as I have mentioned, that I

decided to use it as the backbone for my understanding of why the goddess virtually disappeared. Shlain's explanation of the impact of the written word clearly explains how our brains changed to adapt to the linear source of information in writing. Starting out as a pioneering surgeon, Shlain chose to expand his breadth of understanding and wrote a book, *Art & Physics*, where he looked at art as "being the language of image and metaphor" and at physics as "the language of numbers and equations" (Shlain, 1998, para. 1). In writing *Art & Physics* Shlain delved deeply into the theory of how humans communicate. Shortly after publication Shlain went on a Mediterranean archeological site tour. "At almost every shrine we visited, our guide told us, 'This used to be a shrine dedicated to the goddess, and then for unknown reasons, unknown persons reconsecrated it to a god.' Suddenly, I was contemplating the overwhelming archeological and historical evidence that all early peoples worshipped some manifestation of the goddess" (Shlain, 1998, para. 1). It was this realization that led to the research contained in *The Alphabet Versus The Goddess*.

Shlain points out the difference between literate and illiterate persons. He shows how the alphabet was simple enough for ordinary working people to master and how literacy not only changed our cultures, but also changed us physiologically. In an online presentation Shlain reveals what affect the alphabet had on society:

I suggest that a culture adopting an alphabet would denigrate right hemispheric values because the alphabet is a left hemispheric mode of reception. And this right hemispheric denigration would manifest in two principal ways: Women's rights would be taken away; and images would be declared abominations. The first book ever written in an alphabet was the Hebrew Bible or the Old Testament. And the most important passage was the Ten Commandants. The first commandment is the most revolutionary sentence ever written. It states: 'I am the Lord thy God there is no other.' The second prohibits us from making

images. Thus, there is a profound rejection of any goddess influence and a ban of representative art” (Shlain, 1998, para. 12).

This understanding reinforces the importance of image throughout the history of the Goddess. It helps to explain why the rise in technology, and particularly graphics-rich Internet content, has led to a renewed interest in the Goddess. Women in particular are feeling a reawakened recognition of their connection with the Goddess and are trying to reconcile themselves with what was lost. I know that I struggled with a changing self-perception throughout the research. The process was interesting, as it did not follow a linear line of careful unfolding, but was more of a jerky, uncomfortable mix of feeling unsettled and cheated, along with pride as my own identity and that of the Goddess came into proximity.

Women’s Stories

It was very helpful to learn of the many different stories of women who were on a similar path as my own. I was grateful to read Raine Eisler’s *The Chalice & The Blade*, Patricia Reilly’s *A God Who Looks Like Me* and Sherry Ruth Anderson & Patricia Hopkins’ *The Feminine Face of God*. It was in this last book that I found a description of Meinrad Craighead’s personal journey. I had found Meinrad Craighead’s art early in my study of images of goddesses and she became an important part of my study.

Meinrad Craighead is an American artist from Arkansas who spent fourteen years as a Benedictine nun in England before leaving the monastic life and returning to America. It is her paintings that inspired me like nothing else. Craighead’s paintings are the images that I personally connect with and that connect me to the goddess. Her comprehensive retrospective, *Meinrad Craighead, Crow Mother and the Dog God*, is an invaluable source of rich fodder as I hunger for new

visual references and beautifully written essays and meditations on the Goddess. The story of Meinrad Craighead is of great inspiration for me and I accessed these additional works, when mining the gems of Meinrad: *The Sign of the Tree* (1979), *The Mother's Songs* (1986) and *The Litany of the Great River* (1991).

CHAPTER TWO

MY STORY

At My Beginning

In the beginning I was born from that watery, chthonic world into the grateful arms of my parents. They had been married for twelve years without producing their own baby, and I feel quite certain that I was the answer to some heart-felt prayers. All indications point to me being the source of great pride and wonder for my family. Cherished, longed-for and beloved, I was the family blood, the future incarnate. I was given a royal name—Elizabeth Ann—and my earliest memories are of love. I grew in accordance with the seasons as there was nothing to alter my natural growth as an adored child.

As a young child I possessed the natural gifts of the goddess. I was bright, lively, compassionate, loved to dance and sing. I played in the dirt and climbed trees, planted seeds in Dixie cups and ordered them to grow. An excellent student, I did very well in school. I knew wonder and hope and I trusted that it would always be so. And it was so, for a while.

I lost my power and adoring worshippers, as did the Great Goddess of ancient times, although in a more dramatic way. My parents were killed in a plane crash when I was ten years old, and with that loss I entered my own dark period. I felt my role and place in life shift to one where I was far less important and certainly no longer revered. Sent to live with distant relatives I had only met once before, I was stripped of my power and my voice. This time in my life mirrors that of the Great Goddess when she succumbed to the strong arm of patriarchy and the alphabet turned all eyes to the written page. I was under the control of court documents and court appointed guardians. I went where I was told to go and did what I was supposed to do. I knew first-hand how it felt to have love stripped away and to lose all sense of security. I became quiet. Desperate to keep what

little I still had, I would do anything to fit in and be accepted and so I followed the rules and did my best to be good.

I hoped to get married as soon as I could. I hungered for the grounding sense of home and belonging that I thought would come with marriage. So at twenty years old I walked down the aisle of an ancient church in England and turned my life over to a man. He was a good man and he cared for me very much. He endeavored to provide me with a secure home and at such a young age I felt that I was finally safe. I could not see that this security was based on his ideals and desires and that it might not be a healthy choice for a goddess in exile. I learned the rules of patriarchal life and followed them as best as I could.

My first reminder of my earlier life came to me when I had my first baby. Here was a situation where I could exert those ancient creative powers! Being a mother, for me, was an intuitive adventure, both wonderful and terrifying. I gloried in the role as the caregiver and nurturer. I gave life to this baby and then proceeded to bring the world to him, and excelled at this role. But I missed not having a mother of my own to guide and encourage me forward. I intuitively knew I was answering an ancient, primal call and was powerfully compelled as a mother. My second child, another boy, assured me of my place in the grand life order. I began to grow in confidence as a woman.

Looking back at that time as a young mother I see changes were taking place that would eventually open my life up completely. After living in England for twelve years, our family moved to live in the United States. Although I felt I still had no guiding force in my life, I was in a position to begin to put down roots and grow on my own. I found a career that gave me more confidence. I worked in an office with a large group of women who offered support and friendship. This chapter of mine is similar to the changes that occurred to the goddess with the arrival of the press and

technology. There was an outward growth in all directions for the goddess as women became more independent and feminism was in its infancy. Women were on the move historically and so was I.

One part of me that really revealed itself at this time was my creativity. I began to *create*. I learned calligraphy, I started knitting, I needlepointed, I made collages and created hand-made graphic images and greeting cards. I think of the art I produced and know I was feeding an ancient hunger to create beyond procreation. For me being creative is a healing activity, one that is based on a deep sense of longing to return home. Not to the home of my childhood, but to that clear place of wholeness that is both spacious and lush. There is no activity that brings me more connectivity than being creative. It allows me to change and to change the world around me.

My Spiritual Story

From the time of the plane crash until the last few years, God did not have much of a role in my life. I had learned so young about disasters and how they are described as ‘Acts of God’ and I simply accepted that description. As I matured I understood God as a force in life, but there was no real meaning or use for me. I experienced tragic loss and the subsequent upheaval and knew what it meant to feel powerless. As I grew I learned to grab control of the things I could, but because I felt helpless I also tucked in and allowed my life to be blown wherever God would decide to blow, believing resistance to be impossible. The result of my childhood experiences: I became uptight, safe, and a serious under-achiever.

However, I held great respect for the role that God played for other people. I just never had any calling to try to define God or make any room for worship. I simply could not find a place to relate to God in my life. With time I did come to take little risks and expansions that led to a search for a possible spiritual meaning. These little successes compounded and I began to move out into the world. I became aware of a deep dissatisfaction within, so I began experimenting and trying ways

to feel fulfilled. I signed up for workshops and hired a professional life coach. I read every self-help book that I could lay my hands on. I meditated and chanted and prayed. I went to church. But I always felt dissatisfied and unfulfilled. It slowly dawned that the answer was not an external one when, standing in front of the large self-help section of a mega-bookstore I thought, “There is nothing in any of these books that I don’t already *know*.” But I still had no satisfactory answers.

I put any sort of spiritual growth or searching on hold for ten or fifteen years. I did not read specifically spiritual materials or look to increase my understanding or appreciation of God. Having a spiritual aspect to my life just did not seem relevant. Over time my life changed dramatically. I got divorced. I chose to move 1500 miles away to a city where I knew very few people. Without really understanding why, I went into a sort of seclusion. I kept my world small and had contact with very few people. Keeping quiet and to myself felt like cool water to my soul after a very dry and arid period. I learned to quilt and found wonderful solace in piecing together small bits to create something new and beautiful. I began to attend church again, the Christian Science church of my youth. What I was most drawn to was the very simple ritualistic act of showing up each week.

After three years of much solitude I slowly started to emerge into the world. I finished my bachelor’s degree online and then was presented with an opportunity to do graduate work in communication. In my first graduate school class Professor Keith Williamson gave a presentation and mentioned Leonard Shlain’s book *The Alphabet Versus The Goddess*. I was very intrigued with his description of a book that explained that the decline of Goddess worship occurred because of the invention of the written word. That description caught my attention and I added the book to my rather lengthy Amazon wish list. At the end of the semester my son serendipitously chose that book for me as a Christmas gift and I read it right away. I was hooked.

The book stirred something in me that I had never felt before. Something deep and primal was awakened as I read the explanation of how the right and left sides of the brain favor different skills and how their development impacted the different roles of men and women in society. I suddenly felt a connection to ancient women and, as the book traces women's role and the Goddess through history, I felt broken open. I looked at all women in a new light, but more importantly, I started to see myself differently. I felt a new respect for the role I play as a descendant of the amazing women and Goddesses of history. I wanted to know more.

My Process

This thesis was first designed to explore the predictions made by Leonard Shlain in *The Alphabet Versus The Goddess*, written in 1998:

Since World War II, the technologies of information transfer have transformed the foundations of world culture and, in the process, helped to balance feminine and masculine. Iconic information proliferated through the use of television, computers, photocopiers, fax machines, and the Internet have enhanced, and will continue to enhance the positions in society of images, women's rights, and the Goddess (Schlain, 1998, p. 428).

In the fourteen years since publication of Shlain's thesis, the Internet has exploded across the globe, creating a virtual Indra's Net, the Buddhist metaphor for *interconnectedness*. Indra's Net suspends a multifaceted jewel at each vertex that reflects all the other jewels, much as the Internet creates interconnections for computer users, that reverberates with the slightest touch and enables the many parts to interact with the whole. The role of women and the Goddess have certainly been affected by technology and especially by the connectivity of the Internet.

“It is not mere coincidence that the most explosive feminist movement in the five-thousand-year history of patriarchy occurred during the first television generation,” Leonard Shlain states. “And what a movement—bold, courageous women of every age, color, and class altered the gender equation permanently. The meteoric rise of the image, resulting in an infusion of right-brained values into culture, was like a booster rocket that propelled the women’s movement into stable orbit” (Shlain, 1998, p. 411).

I wanted to know if the power of the new women’s movement continued to hold its course. And if so, then what impact has this new culture had on the Great Goddess herself? According to Shlain the Internet ushered in an era of holistic, rounded and inclusive thinking, the very mentality that venerated the Goddess in the first place. And if McLuhan was correct, computers move people away from singularity and individualism to the inclusive “global village.” I had a very limited idea of the Goddess before reading Shlain’s book and I was fascinated to discover the connection I felt with her. Shlain probably could not know how vast the Internet would become in such a short period of time and I wanted to know what effect this expansion was having on the Goddess.

To start my process, I learned everything I could about the earliest Goddess of Paleolithic and Neolithic time. I needed to know her history—what life was like when she was revered and ultimately, why it ended. I was amazed to discover the powerful role of symbols and images in worship of the Great Goddess. I felt stirred by the importance of natural cycles, the moon, the maid, the mother and the crone. A deep source was touched in me as the Great Goddess came into focus. I needed to know if that Goddess was gone forever or I could find her *now*.

I started with simple Google searches. I tried to find something that made sense to me, something that made the connection of the Great Goddess of Paleolithic times to a modern day goddess of similar stature. A search for Goddess on Google returned 153 million responses in .20

seconds, but no clear direction for my hunt. I next ‘Googled’ Great Goddess and received 8 million responses, a somewhat less overwhelming response, but not at all precise. I was most attracted by the entry halfway down the page of Great Goddess images. My eye was immediately drawn to the powerful images. I was reminded of Leonard Shlain pointing out, “The computer has carried human communication across a threshold as significant as writing, and cyberspace’s reliance on electromagnetism and photographic reproduction will only lead to further adjustments in consciousness that favor a feminine world view” (Shlain, 1998, p. 411). Here I found beautiful, graphic evidence of Shlain’s predicted use of the image to enhance the position of the Goddess. There are an astounding variety of images available and many focused on particular physical aspects of the Goddess very similarly to Paleolithic and Neolithic artists.

Eventually I came upon the goddess images of Meinrad Craighead and the whole study shifted course. Her art immediately captured my attention and I felt personal connection and identification with the images. Learning about Meinrad as a person, studying her art and reading her accompanying texts gave me a perspective of the Goddess today that I had never considered before— a goddess that is relevant, real, and accessible.

Meinrad proved to me the importance of the image and gave me a visual reference that I could truly understand. Meinrad is significant in her own right. She comes from the first generation to grow up with television. She was raised with a strong sense of connection to her own matrilineal line, being very close with her mother and grandmother as a child. When she embraced the Catholic religion she accepted the associated patriarchal life wholeheartedly. For fourteen years she lived as a Benedictine nun, but she eventually felt she had to leave the church to continue her work as a layperson. She is still deeply spiritual, living a life filled with divine rituals and embracing the power of the feminine all around her.

Covering all the material about the history of the goddess and the story of Meinrad Craighead led me to interpretations of the works that Meinrad has posted online. These conversations and stories offered a chance to see the current impact of the goddess via the Internet. These twenty-seven images were the key to my personal connection with this thesis and the evolution into an organic inquiry. It was important for me to write my personal interpretations of the symbolism and meaning and then, drawing upon themes of my interpretations, compare them with Meinrad's and online bloggers'. At this point the thesis took another shift and became the organic inquiry of transformation. I became transformed through this study and I wanted to share and inspire others to do the same.

Transformation and Organic Inquiry

This study has taken place over many, many months and transformation has occurred during that time, but not smoothly. Transformation came in spurts with long periods of silent reflection in between. Particular parts of the study inspired change and others elicited quiet waiting. I learned historically significant facts, gained a new perspective of women and experienced myriad emotions. I was fascinated with the idea that Shlain proposed—that the demise of the Great Goddess was mainly due to the invention of the alphabet. His book, *The Alphabet Versus The Goddess*, was the instrument that launched this journey, without doubt. To finally understand the role of right-versus-left brain thinking and how that has evolved gave me a whole new perspective on the role of men and women. It now makes perfect sense how men became the hunters and women were the gatherers; their brains are wired to work that way. I can easily see how men began to rise to power along with the development of the alphabet. Suddenly words could be made to stand still. The Word became all-important and under the control of men. Over thousands of years men used that power to control what they could, and that included women. The church expanded into a worldwide

structure that furthered the divide between men and women, gave a format for fear, and pointed out the separateness of the individual.

The role of the Gutenberg Press came to have a much greater meaning. I learned how change began to occur when the press was invented; even though it was slow, the tide was beginning to turn. With the press, not only could words be cheaply reproduced but also messages could be shared so easily with mass production. This technology was the beginning of the return to the image and to the goddess. Shlain explains how the strength of the image and symbolism is a strength in the right-side of the brain, and all technology, from the invention of the Gutenberg Press to the recent Mark Zuckerberg invention of Facebook, has been re-activating the side of the brain that adored the Goddess.

My study of the goddess on the Internet, looking through websites devoted to goddess oils, goddess statues made in resin and painted in pretty colors, goddess robes, goddess vacations and goddess passion eventually led me to discover Meinrad Craighead. One of the aspects of organic inquiry is the insight of bodily wisdom. My initial encounters with Craighead's work stirred distinct physical reactions. My eyes were completely drawn to her online images. My heart pounded with a sense of recognition, knowing this was an important discovery for me. When I first watched the DVD about Meinrad's life and work, I held my breath in awe and then I cried with a sense of relief. Here was a real person who seemed to be living out the ancient life of *honoring* Our Mother in every sense of the word. I felt intensely inspired.

This process of study led me to a curious place, a precipice of a study with no clear direction of what it meant and where to go. I followed the examples of those that I had recently studied. I prayed. I created rituals and I prayed again. I meditated and asked for the Great Goddess for guidance, I entreated all angels and any bored spiritual entities looking for a job to *please* help me! As

I studied and listened I learned to be very quiet and still to receive messages. If there is truth in bodily wisdom, then stopping activity and allowing time to convey the message makes sense. Throughout this part of the process I knew, at some deep level of understanding, that this was deeply important to me. As much as I longed for it to be over I knew that, like the pregnant vegetation goddess, I would have to wait for birth and regeneration.

I recently settled down to quietly meditate and ask, yet again, for guidance regarding the message I needed to tell here and quietly the message appeared, “This is your story.” At first I did not understand, and then the message became crystal clear. The transformation that has occurred, the changes that have taken place in me, the long journey of discovery have led me right back to the beginning. The long arc of evolution has, in fact, curved right back in on itself. This is MY story. I am living out the very story that I have been studying. I am the holographic piece that reflects the whole and this is where the reader takes part, for this is YOUR story too.

CHAPTER THREE

THE STORY OF THE GODDESS

Personal Lens

Worship of the Great Goddess is part of human history that received little or no attention in history books of my childhood. Only through this project did I begin to see the connection between human and nature as an important metaphoric portal for accessing and interpreting our personal history and source. The ancient goddess saturated the life that surrounded people, in the everyday natural objects they could see and the symbols she inspired. This life source, nature, our Mother Earth, is still offering a sense of belonging, and providing a grounding and interconnection to everything past and present for those who are awake to her.

SNAPSHOT: Another Side

The last trip I ever took with my mother was when I was nine years old.

I recall she had taken me to see My Side of the Mountain when it came to Wichita, even though the showing was on a school night. The movie is about a boy who doesn't like living in a city apartment and longs to try living in the woods. He leaves home and heads for the mountains, makes a home in a tree, and befriends a peregrine falcon. He battles cold and fire and intruders, all successfully. We both loved the movie.

My mom had an independent, carefree spirit, so by the time we got home from the theater, her wheels were turning. My father was out of town on business and my brother was at boarding school, so I'm guessing she felt there was no reason not to have an adventure of our own. Mom loved camping and hiking and generally all outdoor activities. She was involved in Girl Scouting for over twenty years. Perhaps the movie reminded her of her loves. That same night we packed the car and headed west to the Colorado Rockies.

Over forty years later, I recollect only two highlights from that trip in 1969.

I remember being tightly packed with other tourists into a small, open elevator and lowered into what seemed like the center of the earth at a gold mine in Cripple Creek, Colorado. The descent was very slow, deep and surprisingly cold.

Pikes Peak, a nearby mountain that soared to a height of 14,000 feet, presented a striking contrast. I wish I could say I remember some particulars about Pikes Peak – especially because I know how much my mother loved the mountains – but my memories are confined to the gift shop. My mom sprang for an unexpected treat, an old-timey newspaper with a headline that exclaimed, “Elizabeth Wilson Climbs Pikes Peak.” Like most kids, I loved seeing my name in official looking print and kept that newspaper for many years.

Those are the only actual memories I have of that trip. They aren’t much to go on, but now I love to think about that journey and what the entire experience reveals.

I love knowing that my mom was independent and wise enough to know that going on an impromptu adventure was more valuable than what I would have learned in the classroom. When deeply inspired she took decisive action without needing to ask anyone's permission. What a legacy!

Within a year of our trip, Mom and Dad died in a plane crash in that same mountain range. Now I love reflecting on how that last trip of ours seems like an important message from her to me.

Looking back from the perspective of a woman who is now older than her mom ever was, and a mother herself, I can see more layers of significance. Surely one of the best ways to get a child’s attention is to suddenly take them out of school for an adventure, so it's little wonder that this memory is indelible.

Now in this story I can read her love of the mountains and feel how she'd missed them since our move to Kansas. I can access her love of nature and the earth and understand how it could motivate her to take me on an unforgettable trip to teach me the importance of our natural world.

I am deeply moved when I realize the import of Mom taking me deep into the earth's core and up to the peak of a soaring mountain. The legacy I carry to this day is a sound appreciation of all that nature can teach and the awareness that I feel closest to my mother when I am outdoors.

Together we went from the belly of Gaia to the top of Mt. Olympus. In an oddly precognitive way, she managed to condense a lifetime's worth of heights and depths into a single symbolic experience.



Great Goddess Introduction

Who were the ancient goddesses and how did we come to worship them? This section examines the story of the goddess and her art from the Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic eras, the time when the goddess reigned supreme. The Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic times, roughly from 10,000 B.C. to 3,000 B.C., were ages before the written alphabet existed, so history of the goddess has been gathered through archaeological exploration of sites and the recovered artifacts.

To create significance in their lives, the people of that time focused on birth, nurturing, growth, death, and regeneration, as well as the developing areas of crop cultivation and animal husbandry (Gimbutas, 1999). As these people studied the natural world around them they forged a strong link to the Great Goddess. The Great Goddess was an important aspect of all their activities and provided a source of understanding and sacredness to their world. There are thousands of images and figurines that tell the story of the Great Goddess and the impact she had on the people of these early times. The powerful images and symbols continue to carry a potency that is still easy to identify today.

Her Beginning

If it is fair to say that the term *civilization* refers to a time of artistic creation, peaceful living, values based on non-material things and a sense of freedom, then Neolithic Europe was a civilization in the truest sense of the word. In the 5th and early 4th millennia B.C., Old Europeans (as they are called) had large, populous towns, temples several stories high, homes with four or five rooms, professional pottery makers, weavers, copper and gold metallurgists, and other artisans producing a wide range of goods. There were trade routes that allowed for the exchange of items such as obsidian, shells, marble, copper and salt (Gimbutas, 1991). This time period of Old Europe

was from between 6500 B.C. to 3500 B.C., and during those three thousand years the inhabitants enjoyed a long period of uninterrupted peaceful living.

The dates for these periods are constantly being updated and revised as technology improves, so for reference we will consider the Upper Paleolithic Age to be from 30,000-10,000 B.C. and the Neolithic Age, or the New Stone Age (considered the last part of the Stone Age), to range from 7000 B.C. to 3000 B.C. The Neolithic Age ended with the use of metal tools in the Copper and Bronze Age, which later developed into the Iron Age. The Neolithic Age was a time of increased farming, raising animals and crops in permanent locations instead of a nomadic, opportunistic existence (Gimbutas, 1991). Marija Gimbutas, famed Lithuanian-American archeologist, focused on the study of the Neolithic Age and helped to unearth a great deal of information about the goddess in a process that combined linguistics and mythological interpretation. Gimbutas believed Neolithic sites in Lithuania and across Europe pointed to long-term, stable egalitarian societies with women at the center materially and spiritually (Marler, 2003).

In the time leading up to the Old European and Neolithic eras was the gradual settling of people as they developed the domestication of plants and animals, allowing people to stop hunting and gathering. This slow development of settling took place between 9000 B.C. and 6500 B.C. One of the best sources of information regarding life in this time period comes from excavations of the 7th millennium B.C. town of Çatal Hüyük in south-central Turkey. Çatal Hüyük was excavated in the 1960s by archaeologist James Mellaart and this work completely revolutionized the interpretation of Old European and Neolithic artifacts. The excavations revealed a stable, orderly settlement that existed for more than a thousand years. Çatal Hüyük is the largest known town of the early Neolithic period and it is estimated that up to 7,000 people lived there at one time (Gimbutas, 1991). Other important sites have been excavated and researched in Italy, the Balkans and central Europe.

Neolithic artifacts have also been uncovered in Asia Minor (ancient Anatolia, modern Turkey), the Near East, and to a much lesser extent, in western and northern Europe.

Excavations revealed complex societies with a growing level of sophistication. Items uncovered from this time include tools, cooking implements, needles for sewing as well as small, portable art objects. There are beads and pendants made from bone, ivory, and even shells, which must have been highly prized as the locations were far from the ocean (Gadon, 1989). Evidence shows that along with planting crops and caring for animals, the inhabitants wove cloth, baked bread and created pottery.

Study of the archeological finds exposes the lives and beliefs of the Neolithic peoples. Goods were handed down through the female line of the family, forming a matrilineal society, with women economically stable and able to inherit property. This led to greater respect for women and greater female autonomy. Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas relates social respect for the female to religious respect for women and subsequently the worshiping of goddesses. She states that the Old European matrilineal societies therefore honored both mortal females and female deities (Gimbutas, 1999).

Since the Neolithic people enjoyed a stable life that did not require traveling and hunting for food, there was more time for developing a cultural life. Religion focused on the cyclical wheel of life the people observed in their daily activities. In Old Europe, religion was founded on birth, nurturing, growth, death and regeneration as well as crop cultivation and the raising of animals. The people were conscious of untamed natural forces, as well as wild plant and animal cycles, and they worshipped goddesses, or a goddess, in multiple forms. The goddess appeared in numerous forms during many cyclical phases to ensure that life progressed smoothly. She revealed herself in a

number of forms throughout many facets of life and is depicted in complex symbolism (Gimbutas, 1999).

The earliest excavations and archeological studies were conducted at a time when early scholars considered religion of the Neolithic Age irrelevant. However, Gimbutas believes that to ignore the spiritual nature of these people is to ignore the totality of their culture because she felt that in those days, secular and sacred life were one and indivisible (Gimbutas, 1991). It is now established that in that age, religion was life and life was religion. Earlier studies fall short of the full truth when referring to the worship of a Goddess not as a religion but as a “fertility cult,” and to the Goddess as an “earth mother.” While the fecundity of women and the earth was obviously important for survival, then as now, the characterization is far too simplistic. It would be like characterizing Christianity as a death cult because the central image in its art is the Crucifixion (Eisler, 1987).

The religion of this age was completely interwoven with nature. The people saw themselves at one with the animals and not a separate species. They believed that everything was nurtured by the life force that emanated from the earth itself (Gadon, 1989). The earliest human intuition of the sacred was that the earth was the source of all life. Although we have no written record of the thoughts or words of these people, the art reveals a wealth of information about their spiritual nature. The best way to understand the information revealed in the art is to study it through a combined variety of fields. Archaeologists must not remain scientific materialists forever, neglecting a multidisciplinary approach. A combination of fields—archeology, mythology, linguistics, and historical data—offers the possibility of apprehending both the material and spiritual realities of prehistoric cultures (Gimbutas, 1991).

Goddess Images and Symbols

A combined lens of study shows that Old European society was organized around a communal temple guided by a queen-priestess, her brother or uncle, and a council of women as the governing body. Evidence from burial grounds suggests that there was not a hierarchical separation between the sexes, implying a condition of mutual respect. The primary graves for both sexes contained similar symbolic goods, including items of regeneration. Excavations of buildings and their contents elucidate daily life, and excavation of the burial sites reveals the historic attitudes about death and life. The evidence that overlaps both daily life and spiritual beliefs is in the excavated artwork. Study of the art explains what the people believed regarding the Great Goddess. And what is found everywhere—in shrines and houses, on wall paintings, in the decorative motifs on vases and in sculptures—is a rich array of symbols from nature—all associated with the worship of the Goddess (Eisler, 1987).

According to the great variety of images found, it was the sovereign mystery and creative power of the female as the source of life that developed into the earliest religious focus. The Great Mother Goddess who gives birth to all creation out of the holy darkness of her womb became a metaphor for Nature herself, the cosmic giver and taker of life, ever able to renew Herself within the eternal cycle of life, death and rebirth (Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 1991).

The Old Europeans worshiped the full circle of birth, death, and rebirth in the form of a 'Great' Goddess. There was not a division between 'good' and 'bad' fragments. The Goddess was one and many, a unity and a multiplicity. For example, the hybrid bird-and-snake goddess was the Great Goddess of life continuum, the goddess of birth, death and rebirth; she was the creator and the destroyer, the maiden, the crone, and the goddess in the prime of life who mated with the young

god in *beiros gamos*, the ‘sacred marriage,’ and gave birth—again and again—to creation (Gimbutus, 1999).

As early as 25,000 B.C., the Great Goddess is symbolized on rocks and pieces of bone or horn, which provide evidence of the life-generating Goddess who represents one source while pictured in many forms. Archaeologist James Marshack points out that the Goddess was conceived to explain the forces the early people observed in human and animal life, and like all symbols, the image of the Goddess was capable of expressing more than one reality at the same time. She was both the sacred female and sacred nature (Gadon, 1989). The Goddess depicted in art provides a wealth of information. Without written language to provide us with their stories, the art itself forms symbolic communication, and Neolithic art is a language or shorthand that symbolically expresses how people in that time experienced and shaped their reality (Eisler, 1987).

The Goddess portrayed in Neolithic art is sophisticated and complex. She personifies every aspect and every phase of life, death and regeneration. Artists from many areas used a variety of symbols and images to represent the Great Goddess. Represented are the life-sustaining elements of sun and water, for instance, the geometric patterns of wavy forms called meanders (which represent the flowing water) found on an Old European altar from about 5000 B.C. in Hungary. There are the giant stone heads of bulls with enormous curled horns painted on the walls of Çatal Hüyük shrines, terra-cotta hedgehogs from southern Romania, ritual vases in the form of does from Bulgaria, egg-shaped stone sculptures with the faces of fish, and cult vases in the form of birds. Serpents and butterflies (symbols of metamorphosis), are added to the list that identify the transformative powers of the Goddess (Eisler, 1987).

One of the most interesting aspects about Neolithic art is what it does *not* contain. There are no images that depict battles or fighting or images of slavery. The notably absent themes include

images of “noble warriors” or signs of “heroic conquerors” dragging captives around in chains. There is also a lack of lavish “chieftan” burials that appear in later civilizations like Egypt. These omissions are seen as further evidence of the peaceful society and egalitarian lifestyle of the Neolithic peoples (Eisler, 1987).

The ability to fire pottery was developed in about the seventh millennium B.C., and this new craft allowed a medium for expressing religious ideals. Most archeological discoveries are small in size, usually just a few inches long, simply because the smaller items have the better chance of surviving the thousands of years underground. A tiny ceramic sculpture is more likely to withstand the passage of time than something life-sized. So the majority of items recovered from this period are small, many hand-sized, figurines. The figurines represented deities and priestesses, and were used for reenacting sacred rituals (Gimbutas, 1999). Interestingly, the images of deities that were recovered were all female. According to Gimbutas there are no images that have been found of a Father God throughout the prehistoric record. “Paleolithic and Neolithic symbols and images cluster around a self-generating Goddess and her basic functions as Giver-of-Life, Wielder-of-Death, and as Regeneratrix. This symbol represents cyclical, nonlinear, mythical time” (Gimbutas, 1991, p. x).

While art focused on the Goddess and primarily the female form, the human body was appreciated differently than in today’s society. Due to modern cultural programming, we often associate nakedness with sexual enticement. The modern analyst naturally projects these attitudes back thousands of years and assumes that ancient depictions of the body served the same purpose. Obscenity surrounding either the male or female body did not exist. Images of the body portrayed other functions, specifically nourishing and procreative aspects of the female body and the life-stimulating qualities of the male body (Gimbutas, 1999). The body almost always appears in

abstracted or exaggerated ways, but with a simple form that would include some specific symbols that usually represented the sacred force. The geometric symbols may have meant to appeal to certain functions of the divinity and archeologists believe that these forms were designed to focus the attention on the specific symbolic message. This symbolic art, like the Christian cross, represented the same symbolic concepts as more representational art. The simplified images do not disparage the human body, as has been commonly thought; instead, they express a sacred message (Gimbutas, 1999).

While no two images are exactly alike, they are almost always faceless and have very little representation of the arms and legs. They all share an emphasis on the reproductive aspects of a woman's body, focusing on the generalized image whose power lies in its symbolic meaning, icons that embodied the source of life. As these people observed the natural processes in a woman's body—menstruation, pregnancy, birth and lactation—the earth was understood by analogy to be the great womb out of which all life emerged (Gadon, 1989). This type of image had been made for many millennia, and one of the most famous, early examples is known as the Venus of Willendorf. The Willendorf figurine was discovered in 1908 in Austria and believed sculpted in 24,000 B.C. to 22,000 B.C. At just 4 inches high, this image is typical of the goddess images with exaggerated breasts, a head-dress or braids covering the face and insignificant limbs. The vulva is seen as representation of the life-giving aspect of the goddess.

The exaggerated body parts are thought to express different sacred functions. Female figurines, representing the complex feminine force, particularly show enhancements such as:

- Breasts—symbolizing the nurturing and regeneration of life, showing the body as a vessel of nourishment or renewal.
- Buttocks and vulvas—most likely signifying life giving and sustenance.
- Vulvas—dominating the symbolic portrayals, appearing separately or greatly enlarged, the vulva appears as a triangle, an oval, an open circle, or even as a bud or branch—a fact which emphasizes its life-giving, rather than erotic role.



The Venus of Willendorf
Photo by Don Hitchcock, 2008

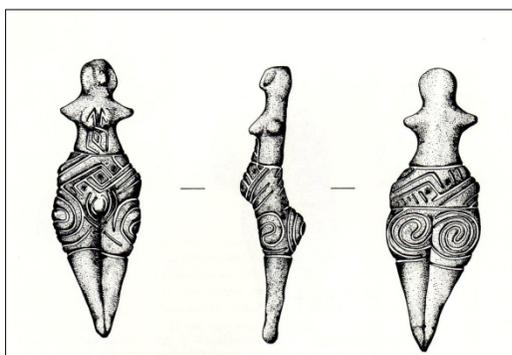
The frequency and longevity of these symbols in the archaeological record (over thirty thousand years) speaks for its essential role in the belief system (Gimbutas, 1999). Breasts, vulva and buttocks are powerful and universal symbols capable of conveying more than one meaning and are potent packages that evoke both physical presence and human significance. Elinor Gadon in *The Once and Future Goddess* explains, “Breasts, for example, are symbols of nurture *par excellence*, as a witness the widely worshiped iconic form of the Virgin nursing the Christ Child” (Gadon, 1989, p. 8).

Understanding the Symbols

Interpretation and understanding of the symbolism of these Paleolithic and Neolithic symbols is largely credited to two scholars: André Leroi-Gourhan, a leading French prehistorian, and Andrew Marshack, a scientific writer interested in theories of cognition. Leroi-Gourhan exhaustively examined the wealth of images that were created over a twenty thousand year period in sixty-six of the one hundred known sites in southwestern France and the nearby Spanish Pyrenees. Marshack

analyzed the function of the art as he searched for evidence of how our ancestors must have understood the world around them (Gadon, 1989). For example, Marshak noted carved notches that observed the lunar cycles, showing that the Paleolithic people were aware of the diversity of seasons. Based on his findings, we can imagine that people who had emerged from hunting and gathering lifestyles, whose survival would have depended on the ability to read the seasonal changes, would

also have noticed the natural changes of a woman's body.



From "The Living Goddesses", Gimbutas, M

The carved notches may also have recorded the menstrual cycle and the lunar months of pregnancy. The earliest rituals may have honored the menstrual cycle, the womb blood that nurtured the new life (Gadon, 1989).

Symbols from this time representing the Goddess

include Xs, Vs, triangles, and meanders, all thought to represent vulvas, breasts, and animal symbols conveying aspects of the Goddess and embodying her power. In one such figure, dating to about 5000 B.C., semicircles enhance the oval vulva, while a meander and spirals decorate the thighs and buttocks. This symbolic combination conveys dynamism: growing, flowing and turning. As in other symbolism, the feminine force is seen as active and life producing as well as regenerative, for example the Vegetation Goddess, known as a Goddess of Regeneration.

Symbolism of the Goddess as a Giver-of-Life proliferates in the artwork of the time. Birth was considered absolutely sacred. In fact, bringing a baby into the world was likely the most sacrosanct event in Neolithic religion. Neolithic people built special rooms where births took place and painted the room red as a reminder that red, the color of blood, was the color of life. Stylized figures on the walls illustrate women giving birth, while circular forms and wavy lines painted nearby

may symbolize the cervix, umbilical cord, and amniotic fluid. The color and symbolism in the room suggest that people regarded birth as an all-important religious event, and that they accompanied the event with ritual (Gimbutas, 1999).

Life giving and life sustaining images often include mother and child figures, some with masks depicting bears. The bear and the deer consistently appear with the birth-giving Goddess. The bear's history extends to the Upper Paleolithic when people observed the mother bear's pattern of hibernation and reawakening. The bear was the perfect symbol of death and regeneration: when she hibernated she metaphorically entered the realm of death, and when she emerged from the cave, she was metaphorically reborn. The deer or elk were sacred, as were their antlers, which held great symbolic power because they appeared seasonally during spring. For many thousands of years people worshiped the Deer Mother as the creator of life and there continues to be references to supernatural deer and deer-goddesses. In northern Asia it is believed to this day that the pregnant deer is the birthing Mother Goddess (Gimbutas, 1999).

There is evidence of other symbolically significant features of the art. There was a powerful connection joining water and the life-giving Goddess. Human life was seen to begin in a watery realm of the woman's womb, and therefore the Goddess ruled all water sources: lakes, rivers, springs, wells and rain clouds. Birds symbolize health, fertility and good fortune—all important to life (Gimbutas, 1999). There are many references to snakes and snake goddesses—snakes dwell both in water and in the ground, and hibernate in the winter and return in the spring. The periodic shedding of their skin reinforces their role as symbols of renewal. Snakes were thought to bring life in spring (Gimbutas, 1999).

The Goddess of Regeneration is seen in wall paintings and figurines, often portrayed as a frog-shaped woman giving birth. She is associated with animals, including vultures, representing the death

aspect, and the bull's head representing regeneration. The accompanying symbols of regeneration include abstracted representations of horns, triangles, rhombs, or double triangles, hourglass shapes and butterflies. Symbols are duplicated, triplicated, multiplied, juxtaposed, shown in reverse, and in positive and negative designs (Gimbutas, 1991).

The pregnant vegetation goddess—the annual cycle of germination, growth, and harvest—held both mystery and material sustenance for early farmers. The pregnant vegetation goddess (popularly known as the earth goddess or Mother Earth) was one of the most common female figures depicted in Neolithic Old Europe. Many Old European cultures connected this goddess with food, especially grain and bread. Archaeologists often find pregnant goddess figurines near bread ovens (Gimbutas, 1999). The pregnant vegetation goddess underwent changes throughout the year, mirroring the annual cycles of planting, growth and harvest. Rituals, festivals and celebrations were held to observe these important changes and many of the figures representing this goddess are shown heavily pregnant.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STORY OF THE WRITTEN WORD

Personal Lens

The second wave of the feminist movement hit in the 1960s, when I was a small child. After such a huge swing away from a positive role for women in society, the pendulum is slowly making the return journey to wholeness and balance. With the rise of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, women began finding their place as great creators and to identify themselves as heirs of the Great Goddess. Becoming conscious of our bodies and our connection to the earth and to each other allows women to see the boundlessness of their creative capabilities. Feminist studies are unlocking the mysterious potential of women that was buried, but not destroyed, thousands of years ago.

“It is the Great Goddess that initiates us into the profound mysteries of creation. Each time we enter into a creative act we open ourselves again to her rhythms, and to the great cycle of fragmentation, death and burial, self-seeding and regeneration” (Muten, 1997, p. 152).

Personally, I can see that my own creative powers reflect the same life-giving and divine energies of ancient times, and I find myself inspired by the Goddess. I have a sense of digging myself out of layers of confining history that kept me in the dark, but failed to snuff me out completely. I discover something fiery in my core that wants to burn and realize that all women carry within the same small embers of divine energy and this draws me to them. Each woman has an element of Brigid, the Fire Keeper, which recognizes the source of energy that comes from the Great Mother. The potential is awe-inspiring and exciting.

Snapshot: The Power of the Word

When I was a little girl and starting school, we lived in Charlottesville Virginia. I remember one particular day grocery shopping with my mother in the local A & P. It was a quiet day and the store was not crowded; I was more or less free to wander about on my own. The cereal aisle was of most interest because I could choose the cereal with the best 'prize inside', so I lingered while my mother went ahead to the next aisle. As I stood scanning the shelves a black man shyly approached me holding out a can and asked me what was inside. I easily recognized the familiar Campbell's Soup label and read out the name 'Tomato'. The man thanked me and slipped away and I hurried off in search of my mother to share with her what had happened.

I never forgot the man in the store and the powerful message I received. I was just a little girl, but I already understood that I had the magical power of the word and could see how it set me free. I think of how he might have waited until I was alone to approach me, maybe feeling embarrassed that he could not read and perhaps hoping not to be judged by someone so young. I only ever felt compassion for that man and everyone else struggling in a literate world. Forty-five years later the ability to read is still a power force in our society, but I notice that Campbell's started putting pictures of soup on their labels.



The Waning of the Great Goddess

The importance of the Great Goddess slowly began to fade as the world expanded. Large groups of people started moving into areas with superior agriculture and some of these peoples brought different cultural beliefs and behaviors. By the third quarter of the 3rd millennium B.C., almost all parts of Old Europe were transformed economically and socially. Old European patterns of living disappeared and the Indo-European religions absorbed the symbols and rituals of Goddess worship, keeping some traditions (though changing their meaning) and destroying others. Most importantly, use of the written alphabet became more widespread which brought enormous social and cultural changes. These changes were expressed as the transition from matrilineal to patrilineal order, from a learned theocracy to militant patriarchy, from a sexually balanced society to a male dominated hierarchy (Gimbutas, 1991).

Impact of the Written Word

Literacy has long been considered a huge benefit to all who embrace it. In the five thousand years since the alphabet was first invented there have been countless examples of how people's lives are improved with reading. However, Leonard Shlain points out that there is a downside to literacy that has been ignored. In his groundbreaking book, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess* he states, "One pernicious effect of literacy has gone largely unnoticed: writing subliminally fosters a patriarchal outlook. Writing of any kind, but especially alphabetic form, diminishes feminine values and with them, women's power in the culture. [He proposes] that a *holistic, simultaneous, synthetic, and concrete* view of the world are essential characteristics of a feminine outlook; *linear, sequential, reductionist, and abstract* thinking defines the masculine" (Shlain, 1998, p. 1).

Shlain explains that the originally balanced operation of the human brain, right lobe versus left lobe, became altered with the use of the alphabet. The right-side operations are essentially non-verbal:

It has more in common with earlier animal modes of communication. It comprehends the language of cries, gestures, grimaces, cuddling, suckling, touching and body stance... The right brain, more than the left, expresses *being*—that complex meshing of competing emotions that constitutes our existential state at any given moment” (Shlain, 1998, p. 18). Alternatively, the left side of the brain is concerned with *doing*. “The left lobe controls the vital act of *willing*. Its agent, the right hand, picks berries, throws spears, and fashions tools.... *Analysis*—reducing the components of sentences into their separate parts—is essential to understanding speech, especially if the content of the message concerns objective facts. This key left brain task depends upon *linear* progression, in contrast to the holistic perception of the right brain” (Shlain, 1998, p. 18).

The ability to understand the differences between *particular* and *concrete* to *general* and *abstract* has allowed humans to develop the arts and sciences and logic and philosophy.

But this skill tore us out of the rich matrix of nature. The part torn away became the ego. The left brain cleaved the right brain’s integrated sense of wholeness into a duality that resulted in human’s creating a distinction between *me-in-here*, and *world-out-there*” (Shlain, 1998, p. 22).

It is in this light that we explore the impact of the newly created alphabet and its impact on the goddess.

Human use of written symbols began 5,000 to 3,000 years ago (Shlain, 1998). The invention of the alphabet offered a new tool that revolutionized the way people could communicate with each other. Although the Sumerians are generally credited with the invention of writing, a script appeared

in east-central Europe approximately 2,000 years earlier than any other found to date. Unlike the Sumerian script, this writing was not devised for economic, legal, or administrative purposes. It was developed, instead, from a long use of graphic symbolic signs found only within the context of an increasingly sophisticated worship of the Goddess. Inscriptions appear only on religious items, indicating that these signs were intended to be read as sacred hieroglyphs (Gimbutas, 1991).

Pictographs were the very first method humans used to preserve their communication. Petroglyphs, stone pictures or rock art, are found wherever people have lived, but interpretation has not been possible. The Sumerians advanced the use of petroglyphs by inventing cuneiform, a form of writing that involves pressing wedge shapes in wet clay. Cuneiform involves abstract thinking skills, requiring a more advanced use of the left-hemisphere of the brain. The process started out as a simple way to keep records but grew more and more complex. Eventually the system contained hundreds of symbols that could represent both a noun and a sound, which would form the basis of phonetic writing (Shlain, 1998, p. 46).

The Egyptians developed a more sophisticated form of picture writing called hieroglyphs. More advanced because it involved three functions: to represent the image of a thing or action, to stand for a sound of a syllable, and to clarify the precise meaning of the adjoining glyphs. “Writing hieroglyphs required some artistic skill, limiting the number chosen to learn it. Despite its complexity, hieroglyphs were a surprisingly expressive writing system” (Shlain, 1998, p. 53). But it was still an unwieldy and complex method and eventually the need for an easier method of writing led to the invention of the alphabet.

The newly created alphabet was widely adopted because of its simplicity. Before the alphabet, written symbols were complex and required an understanding of each symbol for translation into knowledge. Instead of the complicated use of over six hundred cuneiform characters, or six thousand hieroglyphs that would confound any student, an alphabet, by definition

contains less than thirty characters (Shlain, 1998). This simplicity ended the hegemony of the elite whose interest had been to keep others ignorant by guarding the secrets to the written word.

The single most important impact of the newly created alphabet was that it allowed people to systematize knowledge (Shlain, 1998). This ability to create systems paved the way for dictionaries, encyclopedias, filing systems and eventually libraries. Systemized knowledge was the grandfather of linear, analytic thinking. People could think in abstraction and then record their findings. The earliest scientists began to study and dissect nature and the world around them.

No longer required to meet face to face, people could write down their thoughts and share them with any number of others. The written word created a new sense of time. Words could be read and acted on far into the future, which expanded the idea of time linearly—there was a much broader sense of the future and also the past.

As anthropologists mark use of speech as the dividing line between hominids and humans, Shlain proposes that the “introduction of writing completely reconfigured early agricultural civilizations...the ability of large numbers of ordinary working people to learn reading and writing formed the basis of Western civilization” (Shlain, 1998, p. 119). The first people to become substantially literate were Semites – Canaanites, Phoenicians, and the Israelites and the first alphabetic book is the Hebrew bible. Under the Hebrew belief system the Goddess is harshly rejected and replaced by the words of Yahweh. Written words, controlled by men, came to hold the power and images of Goddesses and Gods are banned (Shlain, 1998).

The next culture to become literate was the Greek culture. While the Greeks were less inclined to reject images than the Israelites, they did suppress women’s rights. Greek philosopher Plato wrote extensively, even writing the words of Socrates; however Plato did not think highly of women. Next, Aristotle’s leadership represents Greek passage from an oral culture to a literate one. He also taught that women were an inferior subspecies of man (Shlain, 2006).

Regarding literacy, the Roman Empire is notable for reaching nearly universal levels of literacy. Shlain credits the stability of Pax Romana, the long period of peace, tutors from Greece, papyrus from Egypt and easy to use alphabets. Interestingly, the new teachings of the words of the gentle prophet named Jesus became popular in roughly the same period. His religion embraces the feminine values of free will, love, compassion, non-violence and equality. Women play a role in the Christian religion, too. But there is nothing in writing from Jesus. Writing about Christianity is carried out by Paul and subsequent other writers. As the Church grows in power there is an emphasis on masculine values of obedience, suffering, pain, death and hierarchy. When the alphabetic text becomes canonized in 367 A.D. women are banned from baptizing or conducting sermons (Shlain, 2006).

Brigid

It was during this time that the far-seeing Brigid is first mentioned in writing. Folklore and tales of the Druids mention Brigid, with her mystical ways, in much earlier times, but she becomes an important figure to the church as a means to attract the Irish. Christianity arrived in Ireland around 431 A.D. The Goddess Brigid was described by Bishop Cormac Mac Cuilleánáin in his ninth-century *Sanas Cormac (Cormac's Glossary)*:

Brigid seems to have had a wide appeal in the fifth century A.D. and was revered by many of the Irish Celts and Irish Druids, and it seems that many early Christians did not completely abandon belief in the old gods, goddesses and local spirits, which is not surprising as these beliefs went back many generations” (Wright, 2009, p.32).



Goddess Brigantia

Rather than trying to suppress the pagan beliefs, it was common for the church to absorb deities and festivals to generate support. Brigid had been such a popular goddess that she was one of the deities adopted by the church and subsequently became a more complex figure.

St. Brigid, an early Catholic nun, is patron saint of Ireland and Fallen Women, the traditional patroness of healing, poetry and smithcraft. She represents the sister or virgin aspect of the Great Goddess. She is associated with the element of Fire, with inner healing and vital energy. Brigid, also known as “The Mistress of the Mantle,” is patron saint of Warfare (in that she grieves for the fallen) and it is in this personification she is known as "Briga". Her soldiers were called Brigands. In modern Britain she is known as the warrior-maiden Brigantia, and venerated not only as justice and authority in that country, but also seen as personification of Britain and depicted on their coins (Wright, 2009). One of the stories of Brigid’s life as a saint supports her original aspects as a solar or fire deity. During her infancy the neighbors ran to her house because it was glowing and appeared to be on fire. The radiance actually came from the infant Brigid, said to be a demonstration of her grace “bestowed as by the Holy Spirit” (Wright, 2009, p. 84). She also is credited with keeping a sacred fire burning throughout the ages. And so Brigid takes on another attribute—Brigid, the Fire Keeper.

During the Dark Ages there is a period of time when literacy becomes lost in secular society. As the Roman Empire falls to barbarian invasions there is part of history of which there is little written record. Few people outside the church can read and write and there is resurgence in the popularity of images. People become aware of Mary through her image and not her written words and she becomes highly revered. Chivalric code instructs men to care for women and courtly love becomes fashionable. This period lasts until there is a renewed interest in literacy during the High Middle Ages. Commerce demands literate clerks and masculine values begin to reassert dominance

over feminine ones. As the Renaissance begins there is an emphasis on the individual, which encourages male artists, male thinkers, and masculine themes in art (Shlain, 2006).

Gutenberg to Zuckerberg

Prior to 1451 every piece of information was hand written. Reading and writing were held in control, most often by religious leaders, until the revolutionary invention of the Gutenberg press changed the way documents could be produced. It was suddenly possible to spread information to the masses and books became affordable. Literacy rates soared in those countries that had presses (Shlain, 1998). As knowledge expanded there was a tremendous surge in science, art, philosophy, logic and imperialism. Religious leaders began to feel threatened by the quickly spreading literacy among the lower classes and began to clamp down and exert patriarchal power. As a result, women mystics, once revered, were labeled witches, and torture and burning at the stake became commonplace.

The Protestant Reformation took hold, powered by many people who were now able to read and decipher the Bible for themselves. Mary is reduced in prominence and her images removed as the Protestant movement becomes patriarchal. Ferocious religious wars break out and there is a great deal of upheaval across Europe. As literacy rates grow, so do hunter and killer values. At this time, after the Bible, the next best selling book is the *Malleus Maleficarum* (or *Witch's Hammer*), a how-to book for the rooting out, torture and burning of witches. Interestingly, countries where there has been slower acceptance of printed materials, Russia, Norway, Iceland and the Islamic countries bordering Europe, do not experience the same witch-hunts. There are estimates ranging between 100,000 women to millions who were murdered during the times of these witch-hunts. "There is no parallel in any other culture in the world in which the men of the culture suffered a psychosis so extreme that they believed that their wise women were so dangerous that they had to be eliminated" (Shlain, 2006, para. 14).

Photography and Further Technology

In 1826 the first photographic images were created. This invention, along with the discovery of the electromagnetic field, combined to bring about the return of the power of the image to the human experience. Photography was able to do for images what the printing press did for words. It made reproduction of images inexpensive, simple and available for the masses. The idea that a “picture paints a thousand words” helps to understand the massive appeal of photography. Suddenly it was possible to have an accurate image of a loved one who lived far away or had died. The power of the image was widespread and effective.

In 1848 the suffragette movement formed during the Seneca Falls Convention and eventually succeeded in securing women the right to vote, in 1920 in the United States and 1936 in England. At this same time there was a growing tide of effort for women’s right to education and better working conditions. This was the dawn of the feminist movement and is often referred to as “First Wave” feminism, as women began to organize themselves and fight for equal rights.

After the turn of the century there was enormous growth in areas of technology, a burst of creative output and growth. Photography and electromagnetism combined which made more methods of sharing and transferring information. The telegraph suddenly allowed messages to travel at great speed that seemingly shrunk the globe overnight. Television, radio, film and the telephone also reconfigured the world. World wars broke out and political upheaval altered the outline of countries around the world.

Television, Computers and The Internet

The expansion of technology imposed a shift to using the right hemisphere of the brain to decipher the information on the television screen. Famed philosopher and visionary Marshall McLuhan explains in his groundbreaking book *The Global Village* that every new technology requires

us to use our senses differently and extends human consciousness (McLuhan & Powers, 1989). Literacy rates actually began to decline once the television was invented. Television requires a different mode of perception than reading because of the images that fill the screen. “The electroencephalogram (ECG) brain wave patterns of someone reading a book are very different from those of the same person watching television. So fundamentally different, in fact, that there is little deviation in those patterns even when the content of the book or television program is varied” (Shlain, 1998, p. 408). Interestingly, but maybe not surprising, watching television produces the same slow alpha and theta brain waves as the practice of meditating.

In present day, more than any other time since the creation of the alphabet, is the right side of the brain utilized (Shlain, 2006). Images are regaining their role in all areas of culture and society. The men’s room door shows an image and no longer spells out M-E-N. As images of the atomic bomb blasts and the first photos of earth taken from a spaceship are beamed back there is another shift in consciousness. Everyone knows of the image of the naked Vietnamese girl running in fear and pain. Iconic information is as important as text information and new areas of expression are being discovered and utilized at lightning speed. With the whole visual perspective widening, people are more sensitive to the impact of their life on the planet. And within all these changes, society is elevating feminine values of childcare, welfare, healthcare and concern for the environment. Women are reemerging with power.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE STORY OF MEINRAD CRAIGHEAD

Personal Lens

Meinrad is a profound inspiration for me. Her life and work offer a breath of air into my own and fuels my fire. I have spent a great deal of time thinking about the different roles that Mother plays throughout her story. Her own mother and grandmother created a perfect, safe spot for Meinrad to grow and bloom. The mother church provided further shelter until she was ready to step out and stand face to face with the Great Mother on her own. This all makes me think of my own mother and grandmothers, all gone, and how exposed I feel. I reflect on how in some ways this has inclined me to hide myself—until now.

Snapshot: Communion

We didn't have communion in the church we attended when I was a young girl. To me church was the place we cut out pictures of baby Jesus and glued them on construction paper and watched the older kids act out the story of Moses. If they had communion I didn't know anything about it. Or at least I didn't know anything about it until the time I went to church in South Carolina with my grandmother.

We lived in Ohio and Grandma was in South Carolina, so we only saw her once a year. We stayed in touch the best we could. Grandma always sent me a sweet birthday card with a \$5 bill tucked inside and several times a year she would send me a beautiful hand-made dress with a finely smocked bodice. Once she even made a doll wearing a dress that matched mine. She was a nice grandmother.

I always knew she loved me very much, and not just because of the detail of her sewing, but by the way she would watch me with a smile on her face and the way she would shyly take my hand and hold it. When I was older I saw that she had saved every letter and card that I had ever sent her, tied in a bundle in the linen closet.

She just was not a cuddly, fun grandmother that encouraged you to try on her jewelry or tell you funny stories about the time she laughed so hard she almost peed her pants. Grammy, mom's mother, was the fun sort that insisted we go to Howard Johnson's for fried clams and choose from the twenty-eight flavors of ice cream. No, Grandma was my dad's mother and she was a different sort of grandmother.

I think her past made Grandma feel awkward around children. Because of the Great Depression she got divorced and left her only child to be raised by her parents. She moved to the city for work, thinking it would only be a temporary arrangement, but Memaw and Pop, my great-grandparents, ended up raising my dad. I think that is part of the reason grandma didn't seem to know how to be silly and have fun, but she would watch me and smile and make me pretty dresses.

On one of our annual visits to Charleston, Grandma took me to church. It is the only time I remember going to church with her and it was just the two of us. Instead of going into the Sunday school, I went with her into the main sanctuary. We sat in the crowded pew and I liked being able to sit up close with her, even if it was in church. When I got fidgety Grandma dug around in her big purse and found some Certs breath mints to keep me busy. I watched as the men passed around big metal trays with little cups of juice in them. Grandma nodded for me to copy her, so I took a little cup and sipped the juice. It tasted so good I drank the cup right down. Next we passed a tray with little crackers for us to try.

After the service we hung around and I followed Grandma to the kitchen behind the altar. By then I think we were the only people left in the church. All the metal trays with the little cups were stacked and it was my grandmother's turn to wash them all up. I could see the empty bottles of Welch's grape juice in the trash and recognized the delicious juice in the little cups. They must have expected more people at church because there were a lot of cups that still had juice in them. Grandma was busy at the sink with hot water and suds up to her elbows when I asked if I could have the leftovers.

The dictionary defines communion as “an act of the most holy and intimate sharing.” Now I look back and see each handmade dress as a long-distance hug, every stitch a kiss. If I close my eyes I can feel Grandma holding my hand, patting it and smiling at me. Grandma wasn’t the silly, joke-telling kind of grandma, but that day in church, when she let me drink those leftover cups of juice, I sensed a holy and intimate sharing. Her love for me was palpable. I am guessing that Grandma’s life



did not follow the path that she had expected. She went through some hard experiences that could have shaped her into a hard woman, but she was soft and sweet. And with her quiet wisdom she taught me how even small things can become acts of communion.

Introduction of Meinrad Craighead

The story of artist Meinrad Craighead is important because her life pattern mirrors the history of women. She intuitively connected with the Great Goddess as a child, then later felt the constraints of patriarchal society when she became a nun. Later she chose to leave the religious orders and found herself back in the arms of the Goddess. Meinrad Craighead's paintings are the first modern images that really resonated with me. I found the ancient symbols present, but in a new context where I could connect with the subject personally. In her essay, *Meinrad Craighead: A Study in Feminine Vision*, Virginia Beane Rutter states, "The greatest gift of Meinrad's work to women is that it speaks directly to the heart and soul, the innermost place of the feminine interior garden, the well-spring of life" (Craighead, 2003, p. 221).

Meinrad calls to the heart of women and that voice is heard and understood by those who are listening. There is recognition and comprehension that stirs deeply in a woman's soul and acts as a solace as well as an inspiration. Women searching for their own creativity and spirituality are likely to see in Meinrad's treatment of the archetypes of the Great Mother—the Greek goddesses Demeter, Persephone, and Artemis, the Black Madonna, Hildegard of Bingen, Brigid, and the Hopi Crow Mother—a passport for bringing alive the goddess powers in their own psyches (Brussat, 2011).

Meinrad speaks about the connections that link the ancient goddesses of India, Egypt, and Babylonia to Greece and Rome to the Native American totems as spirits and to the Christian mystery of Mary. "In her work, Meinrad Craighead's synthesis of these archetypes, alongside everyday images of women's work, clothes-hanging, corn shucking, fire building, weaving, dancing, dreaming – lift up the prayerful wholeness and holiness in women's lives. Many see themselves and the holy mothers of all time in her work, and in so doing *God becomes bigger*" (Kellum, 2009, film).

Early Years

Born in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1936, Charlene Marie Craighead was the eldest of the three daughters of Marie (Engster) and Charles Craighead. Her early childhood was a simple existence of playing with her sisters, helping her mother and grandmother with chores and pursuing the desire to draw. In the retrospective of her work, *Crow Mother and the Dog God*, she states:

My first love was for charcoal. My father gave me a narrow gray box of six charcoal sticks. Knotty, crooked, still coated with the metallic sheen from the fire, messy. Black. My young soul had found the way to mark a surface significantly and see itself reflected (Craighead, 2003, p. 1).

The young Charlene was extremely close to her maternal grandmother, Memaw, and this connection was to form a basis for her understanding of the link between the physical, mundane world and the spiritual.

Growing up in Little Rock during the Great Depression, Charlene had a happy childhood of days spent playing outdoors with her little sisters and nights rocking next to Memaw on the porch swing. Even as a young girl Charlene felt a strong affinity with nature. She loved trees and was particularly drawn to an unusually beautiful old magnolia that shaded the Craighead yard:

We children would crawl through the magnolia's low, sweeping branches, drink rain water from the deep flower cups, drowse in her exotic perfume, idle in her welcoming shade through endless hot summer afternoons, scratching pictures in the dust. I can remember the huge, eerie, white blossoms glowing at full moon and the swollen stalks spilling red seeds into my hands (Craighead, 1979, p. 7).

It was while playing outside on a hot Arkansas afternoon that Charlene had her first mystical experience:

It was my seventh summer. I think everything and everyone slept that hot afternoon in Little Rock. The day, the dust, the sun were red; the roses were wide open. I lay with my dog in a cool place on the north side of my grandparents' clapboard house. Hydrangeas flourished there, shaded from the heat. The domed blue flowers were higher than our heads. I held the dog, stroking her into sleep. But she held my gaze. I watched the dog and she watched me, a balance of equal weights. As I looked into her eyes I knew that I would never travel further than into this animal's eyes. They were as deep, as bewildering, as unattainable as a night sky. Just as mysterious was another movement, the rush of water deep within me, the sound in my ears resounding from my breast. I gazed into the dog's eyes and listened to the sound of the water inside and I understood: This is God (Craighead, 1986, p. 1).

To Charlene this experience was profound. It engendered a sense of a total body-mind-spirit, an acute awareness that transcended ordinary vision. In this non-ordinary state of consciousness, she felt she had seen a face of God—Her Face (Kellum, 2009, film). She describes the energy exchange between herself and the dog as “a key that I would have the rest of my life.” It was the first of many visions and all of them featured God the Mother, which became the force that compelled the young Charlene to draw incessantly (Kellum, 2009, film).

With the outbreak of World War II, Charlene's father was excused from military service, but was forced to move the young family from Little Rock to Chicago to find work. The move was devastating to Charlene who felt a “grievous rending of my soul” at leaving her beloved Memaw in Little Rock (Kellum, 2009, film). Her grandmother wrote only very basic English so Charlene found she could resolve the situation by sending her grandmother pictures. Understanding the pain of

being away from her grandmother, Charlene's mother would send the child home as soon as school finished so she could spend the summer with Memaw. All the drawings and paintings that had been sent south through the school year would be hanging on the walls of Memaw's house. "My first exhibition was in my grandmother's dining room," says Meinrad (Kellum, 2009, film).

The family moved in search of work again in 1947, when Charlene was eleven years old. This time they moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and it was there that Charlene discovered the public library. She loved the shelf of books dedicated to Greek mythology where she began to learn about the ancient Greek goddess Artemis who "became as familiar to me as stories about saints" (Kellum, 2009, film). It was also in Milwaukee that Charlene began taking Saturday art classes. Her imagination for her art was fueled by her Catholic upbringing with its ritual and ceremonies, its candles, incense, psalms and litanies. "From the beginning, I had a safe container in which to dream, inside the arms of my mother and my grandmother and then out into the imagery of the Catholic Church" (Heffern, 2008, p. 12). Charlene was able to absorb the beauty of the church with the eyes of the budding artist. The Catholic schools she attended supported this process of imparting beauty along with knowledge. "Friday afternoons we would put away our books and draw, make images then put them up on the board on Mondays. It was an ideal way to grow as an artist" (Heffern, 2008, p. 12).

In 1950, the death of her beloved Memaw was cataclysmic for Charlene. This traumatic time was made all the more significant in that it coincided with the start of her first menstrual cycle, "my first bleeding" (Kellum, 2009). The loss of her grandmother at the threshold of her young adulthood culminated in a grief that became a source of searching and longing that has remained with her throughout her life. As she found comfort in the embrace of an aunt, she discovered a place that she could temporarily lay down her grief. Later, as an adult she realized that her many pilgrimages to

Black Madonna exhibits continue to expose the sense of loss she originally experienced when Memaw died. “Even anticipating each discovery, I still approach these dark altars grieving, and I find there the deepest place to lay that grief down” (Kellum, 2009, film).

The loss of Memaw set up a searching and a longing in the budding young woman. Not knowing where to go with her life, she began to study the works of Trappist monk Thomas Merton of Gethsemane Abbey in Kentucky and also of social activist Dorothy Day, founder of *The Catholic Worker* newspaper. She wrote to Dorothy Day for advice because she felt the calling to dedicate her life to the church and to the work of the world. Day wrote her back with instructions to first get her college degree. But most important to Charlene was the instruction to “Feed the hungry by being an artist.” Day’s advice had a massive impact on her future when Charlene realized she could “make pictures that would somehow feed people” (Kellum, 2009, film). Armed with the idea that she could help people by doing the thing she loved the most, Charlene headed off to college to study art.

Charlene Craighead attended Clarke College, a small Catholic college in Dubuque, Iowa. She spent her junior year in Vienna where she attended the Institute of European Studies. Ever since discovering museums in Milwaukee, Charlene realized that “it was all there to be seen. And I began looking” (Kellum, 2009, film). The galleries and museums of Europe opened the world up for Charlene, who was captivated by everything she saw. “It proved to be a year of feverish awakenings and premonitions, which coursed through the rest of my life” (Kellum, 2009, film). During her stay in Europe she spent an entire month in Greece soaking up the culture and art. It was on her return to Vienna that she went to pray at Karlskirche, or St. Charles’ Church, and discovered a flyer with a familiar-looking photograph of a monk named Brother Meinrad Eugster. Brother Eugster was, in fact, Charlene’s great-uncle who had been at a Swiss monastery that is famous for its Black Madonna.

Back in the United States, Charlene received her Bachelor's degree and then her Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where she had focused on printmaking. Following graduation she was hired to teach art at The College of Saint Joseph on the Rio Grande in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A few years later she was invited back to Europe, this time to teach for two semesters at "Villa Schifanoia" in Florence. While in Europe, she exhibited a series of gesso cuts. Unable to afford the price of wood for woodcuts she discovered that she could make a similar surface of her own layering gesso on panels of Masonite. Then like a woodcut, these boards were then inked and printed by hand with a spoon (Craighead, 2003).

By 1960, she moved from Italy to Spain on a Fulbright Scholarship. Her plans were to study medieval Catalan art and architecture. The increasingly spiritual Charlene moved into the bell tower of the monastery at Montserrat and began working in charcoals as she prayed (Kellum, 2009, film).

Montserrat, in the Catalonia section of Spain, is home of the Santa Maria de Montserrat Benedictine Abbey. Within the Abbey is found one of Europe's famed Black Madonnas, an image of Mary (Mother of Jesus) where the skin appears to be black. These images, which can be in the form of either statues or paintings, have been a source of speculation concerning their origin and exact meaning. Black Madonnas are typically attached to a Catholic church and some are associated with miracles, and these miracles are known to draw large crowds and pilgrimages. The Black Madonna at Montserrat is called 'La Moreneta,' The Little Dark-Skinned One, and is considered a "miracle-working" image. Earliest records of La Moreneta date from approximately 718 when the statue was thought to have been brought from Jerusalem. The current statue is more likely to date from the 1200s. Scholars dispute the origins of the Black Madonna, or Black Virgin, with some stating that the image was originally of the Great Goddess, or Isis, the Egyptian goddess which was adopted by the church as a means of attracting new followers.

Charlene Craighead watched the devotees and pilgrims climb the hill to the Abbey and she was fascinated by the idea of the Black Madonna.

There is a grave aura about many of the Black Virgins, an expression of utter solitude so intense that the child on her knees or in the embrace of her left arm seems strangely appended. She sits, solitary, weighted, at the crossing-over place, the place where we fall, face down and do obeisance (Craighead, 2003, p. 19).

The idea of God the Mother and the connection that has been created to tie her to Mary (the Mother of Jesus) appeared to grow in significance to Charlene.

“Her gravitas defuses the Christian story. The older mystery of the ancient Black Mother God seeps and spills out of the Catholic container. We hear her oldest names chanted in our ancestral dream and subliminal memories: Black Stone, Black Ishtar, Black Isis, Black Cybele, Black Artemis, Black Mary, Hail, full of grace, favor mercy blessing! Hail, Gate, Garden, Morning Star, Evening Star! Permit me again and again to enter your prayer, your place of dismemberment and remembering. Despite the Fathers, it is you whom we still worship. You, Black God Mother” (Craighead, 2003, p. 19).

Taking Holy Orders

A life-long, devout Catholic, Charlene felt the call to take holy orders while in Europe. In November 1966, at the age of 30, Charlene Craighead became a nun and received her religious name in the community: Meinrad. She joined Stanbrook Abbey, a contemplative house for Benedictine nuns that was based in Worcestershire, England. Meinrad declared that she “adored monastic life” (Kellum, 2009, film). Along with the prayer and contemplation of her new home, Meinrad liked the opportunities that life in the monastery offered. She worked outside, caring for the bees, the garden

and trees. Indoors she baked bread, and she was lucky enough to get to work on her art. Before she arrived at the Abbey her reputation as a fine artist had already spread among the nuns. The organization realized the potential income from Meinrad's artwork and provided her with a studio to work. She focused on printmaking and her work was available for sale through the Abbey. There was very little contemporary religious artwork available at the time, so this was an excellent opportunity for the Abbey to create income and for Meinrad to honor Dorothy Day's recommendation to "feed the hungry by being an artist" (Kellum, 2009, film). They left her alone to create and Meinrad began to explore other approaches to the divine, especially the Divine Mother. She realized that, "All these images were about the sacrality, the divinity, the presence of God the Mother in my life. And they were all water and water over stone, and night and moons and the female body language vocabulary" (Kellum, 2009, film).

There were dark times for Meinrad at the Abbey. She loved being a contemplative nun but she was also expanding her spiritual understanding of God. She wondered if something was wrong with her, as though she were carrying something mysterious and nameless inside. The feelings would come and go, and luckily she had her work as an outlet for these feelings. Meinrad saw her mother for the last time when she came to England to visit—just one month before her sudden death during heart surgery. The loss of her mother proved to be another central experience in Meinrad's life. Following her mother's death particular symbols became significant in her work: earth, bird, stone, bone, and door. These symbols "began an unpredictable dance around that death" (Kellum, 2009, film). For example, in the collection of work called *The Mother's Bird*, the bird and the tree symbolically form together to bind heaven and earth together.

Meinrad had a growing sense of her instinct for God the Mother and found security and stability in her understanding. She describes the experience in *The Mother's Songs*, "She was the sure

ground I grew in, the ground sill of my spirituality. Yet we remained comfortably at home in the bosom of Holy Mother Church. My Catholic heritage and environment have been like a beautiful river flowing over my subterranean foundation in God the Mother. The two movements were not in conflict, they simply water different layers of my soul” (Craighead, 1986, into.).

Her work was becoming well known and moving out into wider art circles and Meinrad was becoming famous. In September 1979 she published her first book *The Sign of the Tree* which contained eight essays and 86 images that she created on scratchboard, a technique where the artist uses sharp knives and tools to remove a layer of India ink coating a clay-covered board.

Leaving Monastic Life

It is not clear why, but in October 1980, at the age of 44, Meinrad made the decision to leave Stanbrook Abbey after fourteen years. She states, “It was as though I had to get out of the monastery to be able to incorporate larger pieces of my story” (Kellum, 2009, film). It appears to have been a difficult decision reached after much prayer and reflection. “Life is filled with the most amazing choices. We listen to all the choices, the choices given to us, but we have to decide, and we can only do that cautiously, carefully and prayerfully” (Kellum, 2009, film). She remained in England for three more years, sustained by a grant awarded by the Arts Council of Great Britain. It was during this period that she began to experiment with applying colored ink to the scratchboard and to painting. Twenty of the paintings that she made at this time form the basis of her well-known book *The Mother’s Songs: Images of God the Mother*.

Meinrad’s father died in 1982 at the age of 67, and the following year Meinrad returned to Albuquerque, New Mexico, after living in Europe for over twenty-one years. She worked part-time at the Sagrada Art Studio in Old Town Albuquerque and worked to finish the text and paintings that

were included in *The Mother's Songs*. Later that year she found and purchased a small home, near the Rio Grande in Albuquerque's North Valley, where she continues to live to this day.

The home that Meinrad created in New Mexico became a sacred space to her. Her life is simple, her home is small and she lives surrounded by alters, kachinas (Native American sacred figures), and wild life. Once settled in Albuquerque, Meinrad finally published *The Mother's Songs* in April 1986. The final book contains 40 colored plates with texts:

Every picture in this book tells a story—childhood memories, my encounters with the Black Madonna in Europe, dreams and experiences of her during the years I lived in a monastery and, more recently, my awareness of her in the landscape of the American Southwest where I now live (Craighead, 1986, intro.).

God The Mother

Meinrad experienced God as a feminine entity, starting with her first mystical experience at the age of seven:

God the Mother came to me when I was a child and, as children will do, I kept her a secret. We hid together inside the structures of institutional Catholicism. Through half a lifetime of Catholic liturgies, during years of Catholic education, from first grade through college, in my professional work in Catholic education, for fourteen years in a Catholic monastery, we lived at my inmost center” (Craighead, 1986, intro.).

Was this intimate, secret relationship the impetus for Meinrad's decision to leave Stanbrook? Secrets long to be revealed and will find an outlet whether consciously or subconsciously. As a child, Meinrad instinctively felt the need to keep the private image of the Mother God a secret. She felt that her own identity was entwined with the image and therefore her own integrity depended on

protecting this image. However, Meinrad credits the Mother God for guiding her as an artist and illuminating her imagination with a presence that could not really be veiled. “She erupted in my imagery. And it is as an artist that I am compelled to reveal this secret life we have shared for nearly fifty years” (Craighead, 1986, intro.).

Working and living in New Mexico provided a new vista to explore and an expanded outlet for Meinrad’s art. The very landscape offered a backdrop for the Mother God to reveal herself. “Wind moves white clouds below a hard sun. They will blackly overshadow acres and acres anywhere in this vast landscape. From a height, and at a distance, I often watch these dark patterns racing over the land and understand her sweeping presence, the overshadowing embrace of Crow Mother, holy mother of this high desert and my Rio Grande valley (Craighead, 2003, p. 6).

Meinrad had an intrinsic understanding of the Divine Being as feminine. “My personal vision of God the Mother, incarnated in my mother and her mother, gave me from childhood, the clearest certainty of woman as the truer image of divine spirit because she was a force living in me. She was more real, more powerful than the remote fathergod I was educated to have faith in. I believed in her because I experienced her” (Craighead, 1986, intro.). The paintings that Meinrad produced were filled with rich images sourced in God the Mother and reflected the wide number of influences on Meinrad’s life. Her work does not seem confined by linear time, distance, or cultural frame as it includes imagery and symbols of Native American shamanism, ancient mythology and her modern Catholic heritage. “Add to the mix her own dreams and mystic visions and the result is a unique synthesis of energy, color, and connectedness” (About, 2010, para. 1).

In creating her art, Meinrad draws on a deep source within, the women in her life—her mother and grandmother—and the women who have gone before. She describes the process of beginning a new painting in *The Mother’s Songs*:

Sometimes I feel like a cauldron of ripening images where memories turn into faces and emerge from my vessel. So my creative life, making out of myself, is itself an image of God the Mother and her unbroken story of emergence in our lives” (Craighead, 1986, intro.).

Her work shows not only images of a figure of the Divine Feminine embodied, but also as expressed through a connection of all power around her including the sky, the earth, animals and also of dreams. She accesses the dark places within herself—“artists thrive in the deepest layer of mulch”—and then brings forth dense, fertile images into the harsh light of day (About, 2010, para. 2). They are held up to the light and air for close examination, and inviting recognition by anyone who cares to see.

The actual preparation that Meinrad uses each day before work is a ritual to her. “My preparation is my morning walk by the river...I feel surrounded by spirits. I know who my spirits are and have known forever because they identify themselves in my imagery” (Kellum, 2009, film). “All art for Meinrad is prayer, a continual supplication for vision” (Heffern, 2008, p. 12). Although no longer directly connected with the church, Meinrad relies on the use of prayer and contemplation to access the Divine as the inspiration for her work. These daily rituals continue to reflect her time as a nun. Art historian Eugenia Parry describes the advantage of ritual to an artist: “[It] allows you to do things that make you porous, that opens you, that opens your cells, that opens your pores and makes you the receiver” (Kellum, 2009, film). The time that Meinrad spent in the Abbey, those 14 years of contemplative life, seem to have created a vessel of receptivity and creativity within her. She talks about the use of prayer when preparing to work and how it can be applied to other creative endeavors:

There are so many ways we talk about prayer, as self-emptying, or the quietude, or sitting in a place of receptivity. It's all of those things, but it's all of those things which are preparatory to any kind of creative work (Kellum, 2009, film).

Nature appears to have taken the place of the Abbey buildings. Meinrad moves through nature as though visiting a cathedral, offering herself to the trees, birds, animals and rocks themselves to speak through her and her art. Everywhere she looks she finds sacred images to approach, treating them as a sacramental sigh and a source of grace (Craighead, 2003). Once imbued with this grace she takes on the images as one would put on a cloak, "Stepping into your sacred space is to give yourself to the images, which, in fact, are already there. You are entering your own memories. You are entering your own mysteries, and that is your unique story" (Kellum, 2009, film). Meinrad's art is the result of her going to ground, calling on all of her spiritual allies and resources, laying herself bare and pouring out the images. The art is a reflection of the deep spiritual experience she plays out both on and off the canvas.

"These drawings are a record of the movements of my soul...a by-product of contemplative prayer" (Robinson, 1978, p. 28). The tools she uses to release these records allow for the very intense imagery that she prefers. She uses mixed media, charcoal mixed with paint and scratchboard, although the scratchboard technique proved so strenuous that she eventually damaged her shoulder. The charcoal has been a medium of hers since childhood, and it is a fitting tool as it is formed from the remains of nature burnt and pressed beyond recognition into something new and useful. Much of her work deals with the process of birth and death and rebirth, and the need for death for this process to take place (Kellum, 2009, film). The use of charcoal also hearkens back to ancient artists creating images of the Great Goddess, when charcoal would have been one of the few artist tools available.

The role of fire and death played out dramatically for Craighead in June of 2003 when children playing with fireworks set the woods of the bosque, the wooded area along the Rio Grande, near her home, on fire. “I needed to be ‘inside the fire,’” she says in a documentary about her life:

I made myself be inside all the animals. Amidst all of this destruction and pain and suffering and chaos and fire, fire, fire, there was some kind of movement of blessing. It was simply an understanding...that there was some presence in the midst of this chaos which was receiving the animals and being with the animals (Kellum, 2009, film).

This is a good example of the method Meinrad adopts to reach out to the Divine and to feel the connection with all that is around her, spiritually and materially. This is similar to the role that the Black Madonna is often assigned. She is an image that people use to connect with the spiritual and to have access to the Divine where they can lay down their grief. Following the terrible fire in the bosque, she used her charcoals to pull life from that fire, resulting in a remarkable collection of paintings called *Fire in the Bosque*.

Many of the *Fire in the Bosque* paintings feature coyotes caught by the fire. Meinrad’s work often features animals that hold significant, ancient meaning and they are symbols that represent similar meanings from those used in Neolithic art. She uses traditional Christian and Catholic symbols like Black Madonna images and nuns, but she also uses symbols directly from nature.

Dreams and shamanic journeys have played a large and important role in Craighead’s art. It is here that she has become Badger, danced with the Great Mother in the kitchen and learned from Tortoise, Bear, Snake, Wolf, and other creatures of the earth...Meinrad Craighead is a masterful explorer of the spiritual practice of connections, delving into the ties which bind us to the Great Mother, Earth, animals, water, trees and much more (Brussat, 2011, para. 3).

Animals are major subjects in her paintings. Meinrad has such an affinity with these creatures that are living representatives of pre-history with a story and message for us. She recognizes animals as having special roles among us and that they are here to be healers, evidence of wildness and emissaries of mystery (Brussat, 2011, para. 3). Meinrad sees the role of nature as preparing us to hear the message of the Great Mother and instead of simply being a backdrop to our lives it has a more serious role to play. "Nature is meant to sensitize us to her silences and rhythms and in doing so she prepares us to enter and deeply appreciate the internal silences and harmonies and rhythms expressed in the arts" (Robinson, 1978). She describes some of the symbols that she uses as follows:

Badger energy is ever digging, digging, digging ever deeper, following all of your intuitions, which lead to the hunches, which lead you to explore this or go there or talk about this or talk to that person about something. The digging is the exploration.

Coyote is seeing, and native people say the coyote carries his energy at the tip of his nose and the tip of his tail. And when you see coyote imagery in my work you will see that very often his entire tail is bright red, and very often is entire face his bright red. The coyote energy is running, running, running, always sniffing. Always seeing what's here and what's there. Finding each other, running, playing, just completely of the earth, and every time reinforcing the earth's power rising up.

Crow Mother is the great eye of the above. She's the great eye at night. She's the great eyes during the day. She's all the eyes that oversee all of the birds which oversee through time and, of course, back into time. We know they are the remnants of dinosaurs. Those great, most ancient creatures that stomped over the face of the earth, still with us in the flight of birds.

The birds are the creatures that make the sacred marriage between heaven and earth. They are the creatures of both places and we get to be creatures of both places with our feet deeply rooted in earth energies but at the same time rising up, letting our energies rise up and inhabit the totality of our environment.

Meinrad describes a group of trees near her home that she feels represent herself and her two sisters. “We are three trees all growing together but in different directions. We are spirits and we are embodied spirit as the trees are embodied spirit. Everything is an embodiment of a manifestation of spirit...The bird and the tree symbolically form together to bind heaven and earth together” (Kellum, 2009, film)



Meinrad Craighead

CHAPTER SIX

Final Focus

Central to this thesis as an organic inquiry is the component of my personal experience. Understanding the role and impact of the Great Goddess and the work of Meinrad Craighead has become very personal. There is something compelling, moving and inspiring about her artwork and images for me. I needed to understand what it was that created such deep feeling. Through this study I have discovered some specific ways that I have been changed. The study of the Goddess has generated or re-generated my connection with nature. I see the outside world with completely different eyes. I no longer see boundaries and separation between the outside world and me. I know I am part of the natural world. I see meaning and significance in the animals and plants that I encounter. I am reminded that spiders are like the grandmothers that connect all of life, robins are harbingers of passion to come and the death of the dove in my yard is sweet evidence of the eternal renewal of life.

I understand the inter-connectedness that all people share. I have come to believe that we are all joined, cared for by the Great Mother, and it is through our interactions that we see ourselves most vividly. I cannot see myself without looking at the people around me. And this is where we all share the role of creation. As we see each other's lives and hear each other's stories, we allow each other to grow. The Internet does play a role in the expansion of who we really are as individuals and as a collective. The Internet is another platform for creation, accessibility, and connection and inside that creative space the Great Goddess—and, ultimately— each of us becomes bigger. The goddess story continues, my story continues and your story, as the reader, continues. And telling the stories is key.

Thanks to the Internet, my story in this document, will become equally accessible to someone on the other side of the globe, to my granddaughter, and to the next woman searching for her roots in the Divine Feminine. I always intended this to be a passionate project, but I never anticipated how the topic could have an impact powerful enough to have changed me. This thesis led me to greater understanding of the hunger we all have for connection. The great strength of the organic inquiry is that it accommodates the interweaving of personal story and factual detail to show how we are changed by what we study. Instead of mastering this topic at an objective distance, I entered into an interactive relationship—a communion. I understand this may defy traditional academic expectations, but I found I could do no less. This right-brained, receptive, feminine topic refused to be disciplined into the left-brained, linear, masculine format. I had no choice but to connect my own story to the larger story, to find myself in the universal.

Educator Parker Palmer recognizes the struggle of people, particularly intellectuals, looking for connection. In his book, *A Hidden Wholeness*, he writes:

Instead of telling our vulnerable stories, we seek safety in abstractions, speaking to each other about our opinions, ideas and beliefs rather than about our lives. Academic culture blesses this practice by insisting that the more abstract our speech, the more likely we are to touch the universal truth that unites us. But what happens is exactly the reverse: as our discourse becomes more abstract, the less connected we feel. There is less sense of community among intellectuals than in the most ‘primitive’ society of storytellers” (Palmer, 2004, p. 123).

This thesis has used the story of the Goddess, the story of Meinrad Craighead and my story as open offers to the reader to join in and connect.

Meinrad Craighead wrote in *The Feminine Face of God*, “The Mother has but one law: create, make as I do...transform one substance into another...transmute blood into milk, clay into vessel, feeling into movement, wind into song, egg into child, fiber into cloth, stone into crystal, memory into image, body into worship” (Anderson & Hopkins, 1991, p. 192).

Post Script

As this thesis neared delivery, at the crowning, so to speak, I learned that my thesis advisor's mother had died. In a way that is hard to put into words, I felt this major life passage somehow brought her and her mother into the story too. I sensed that perhaps the transpersonal opening that this thesis generated at its center might serve as a space to hold and soften her grief. After all, I am newly aware that we are all in this story together. I am grateful to my advisor for continuing to work beside me through a difficult personal time. I feel blessed to have the opportunity to witness her process, even from a great distance, and to have the perspective of inter-connectivity and continual renewal of life.

And In The End

It had always been my intention to present a copy of my thesis to Meinrad Craighead upon completion. The opportunity presented itself earlier than expected when I was invited to go to New Mexico shortly after my thesis defense. I seized the opportunity and wrote a letter to Meinrad telling her of my paper and my wish to meet her in the upcoming weeks. I was crushed to receive an email in reply from a close friend of Meinrad telling me that Meinrad is in poor health and no longer able to receive visitors. I wrote back and expressed my disappointment but said I would send her a copy of the paper on completion anyway. The reply was poignant.

Meinrad is 76 years old now and suffering from a form a dementia that manifests rather like dyslexia. She is unable to read. The news was sad for me. While writing this thesis I had carried the image of my granddaughter Grace as inspiration, but I had also dreamed of making a connection with Meinrad. As I reflect on her disability I could see another perspective of the situation. Meinrad is still in our physical world, and as her companion assured me that she now likes to watch movies,

so she has simply moved on past the use of written words. I see Meinrad continuing to play her role as one of the many midwives participating in the rebirth of the Goddess. As she moves beyond words, I can only speculate that perhaps she is taking the final step to transcend the boundaries of patriarchy, and for that matter, the dualistic notions of left and right brain, patriarchy and matriarchy. As Meinrad continues to circle on the sacred spiral of birth, death and recreation, I like to think that she is ahead of us all, out where artificial divisions disappear and the Divine permeates the whole.

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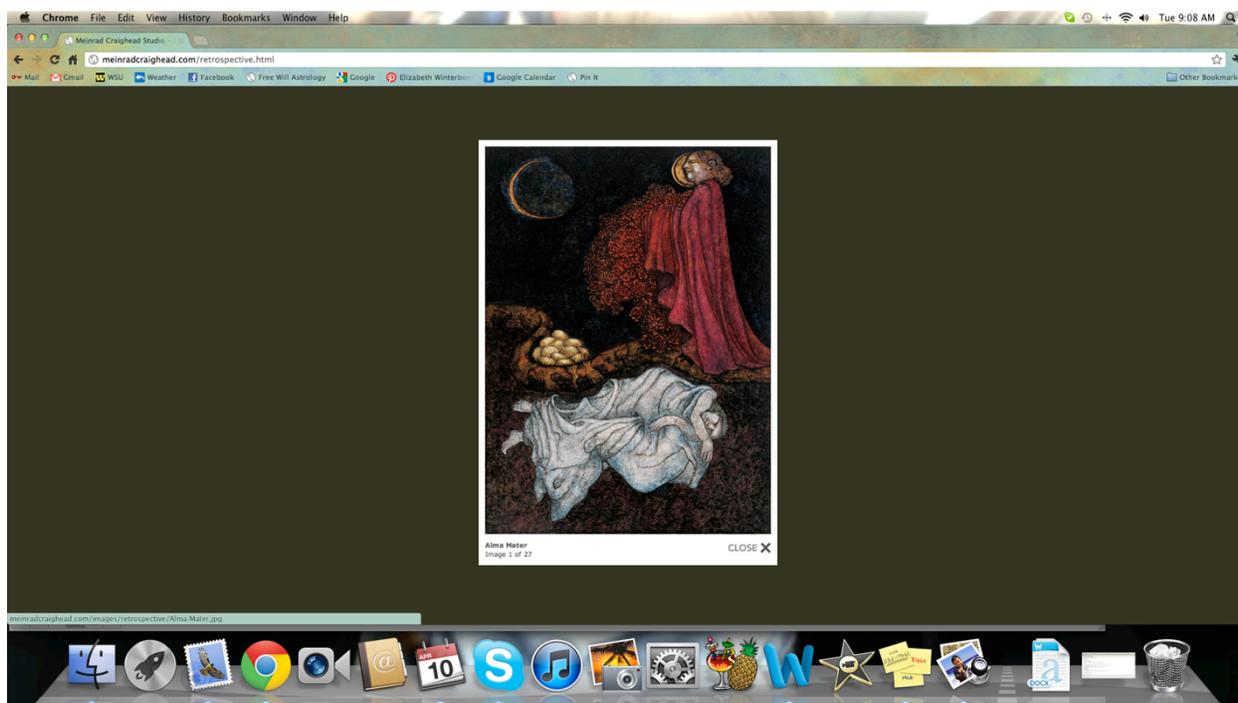
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APPENDIX

APPENDIX

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE WORKS OF MEINRAD CRAIGHEAD

These are interpretations of the twenty-seven paintings of Meinrad Craighead that are available on her website, www.meinradcraighead.com. I chose these paintings because they are an excellent representation of her work and importantly, because they are available to anyone online. I wrote my own interpretation of each painting prior to reading any supporting materials to ensure the interpretation was wholly my own. I also include, where available, the thoughts or meditation that Meinrad had attached to the paintings in her books on these paintings, plus additional interpretations contributed by others included in the book *Meinrad Craighead: Crow Mother and the Dog God*. I am displaying the images as screenshots taken on my computer on April 10, 2012. I wanted to utilize the medium that has a role in reintroducing us to the Great Goddess.



Alma Mater, 1989

Alma Mater is a painting that shows a woman draped in a deep red cloak with a huge outpouring of deep red roses that appear to be coming from her heart. She is standing on a huge curving snake/serpent that forms a horizon. The snake's beginning and end are not visible. The snake curls around a nest of 12 eggs. In the left corner is a crescent moon and behind the face of the

woman there appears to be a full moon. Lying below the snake is a ghostly figure. The figure appears to be dead or dying, draped in a shroud.

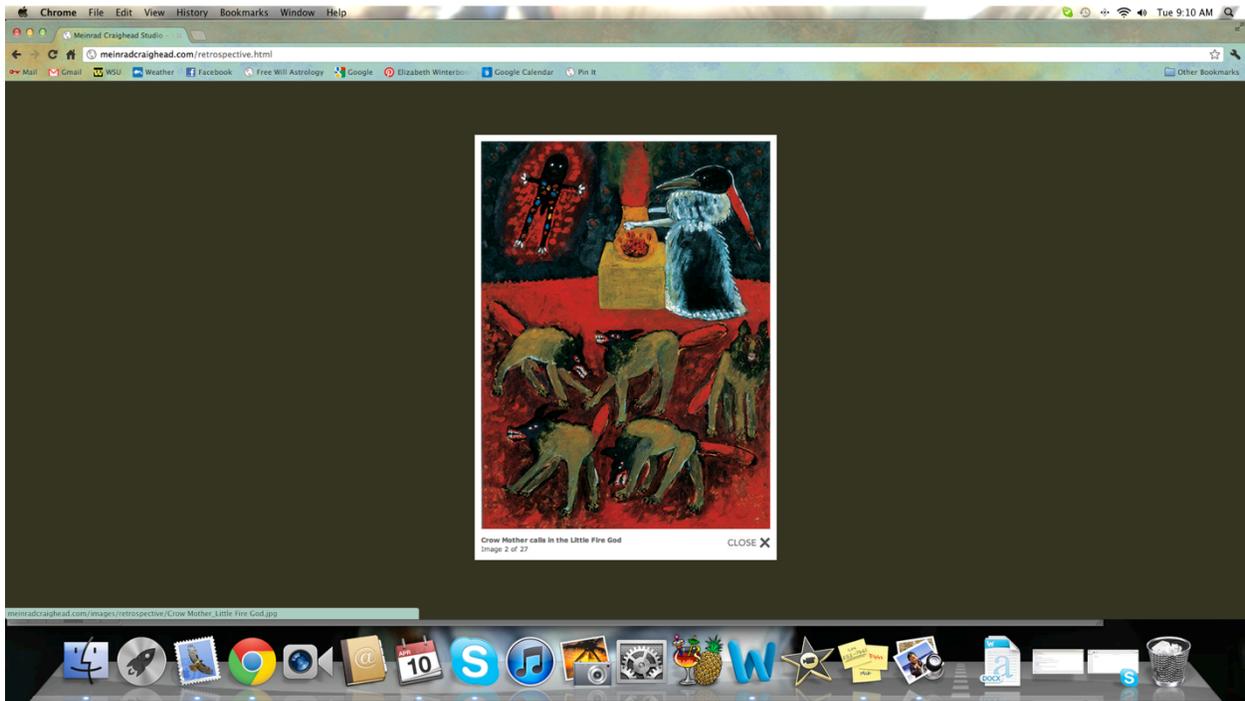
The symbolism noticed in this painting are the moons; a waxing moon and a full moon are visible. These are the moons that represent the Mother and the Crone. The woman is at the point of being a Mother and is facing the direction of the waxing moon, or Crone Moon, so facing the transition from Mother to wise woman. The snake is a symbol for transition as it sheds its skin into rebirth. The eggs, twelve of them, symbolize birth, new start, beginnings and the number twelve might represent the menstrual cycle. The abundance of red roses show an outpouring of true love overflowing directly from the heart. Under the woman lies another woman, someone who appears to be gone—it could be her past life or old self.

This painting represents a woman in her prime, pouring out love in abundance. She is facing her future head-on as a wise woman in a cloak of regal, blood-red glory, rising above her past and moving soundlessly and gracefully forward.

Alma Mater, 1989 (Meditations by Meinrad Craighead are in boldface)

Alma Mater translates in Latin to nourishing mother. On the 12th anniversary of the death of her mother, Meinrad and her sisters plant a tree in her honor. She calls the tree Alma Mater. She cares for it and it stands guard by her gate. She says it “guards my gate, keeps my threshold, the place where I await my own dies natalis. Meinrad has had recurring day dreams and night dreams of a figure that appears in the painting. She describes the figure, “Distant, always moving left, never looking at me, she glided through the landscape, robed, carrying many roses. I never saw her feet and for some reason this puzzled me. Speaking to her, I began to call her Alma Mater, welcoming her, watching her strangely motionless passage” (Craighead, 2003). “Then she appeared in a painting and stayed and I came to recognize her, a woman manifesting the journey into the crone moon, the journey

into wisdom and regeneration. She does not need feet for she glides astride the body of the Serpent who is moving into its own phase of renewal, sloughing off a dead self, sliding out of an old mask”



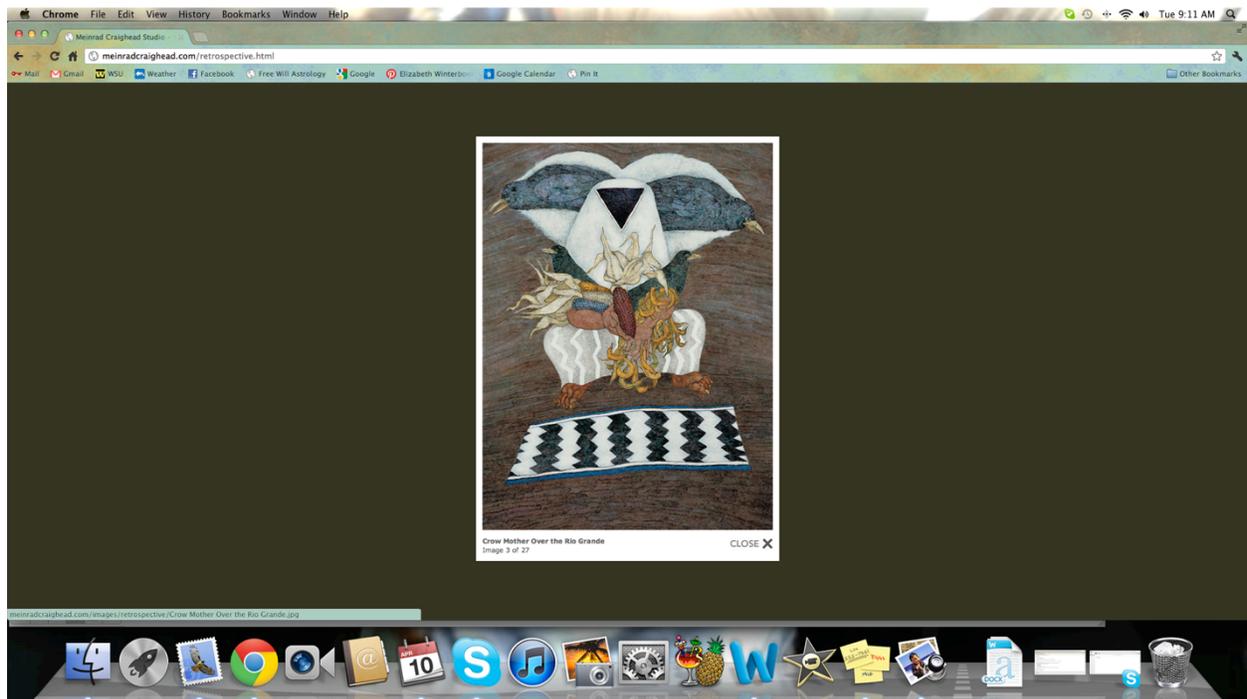
Crow Mother Calls In The Little Fire God, 2000

In the painting the crow mother is praying at the altar of fire. The crow mother appears to be wearing a cloak, like a regal cloak with a high neck. Her arms are surrounding the chiminea that is standing on a square altar. The chiminea is burning red and is blazing with fire out of the top towards the heavens. The Little Fire God is appearing from the sky. The Little Fire God is in the shape of a human with arms and legs and what appears to be a penis or maybe a tail hanging down. The God's arms and legs are splayed and it is surrounded by glowing red, like fire. Standing below the altar are five coyotes. The coyotes all have blazing red tails, wide eyes and bared teeth. They look anxious. Three of the coyotes are males with red-tipped penises.

This painting represents the Crow Mother calling on the Fire God to come and save the distressed coyotes. The Crow Mother seems calm in her mission as the Little Fire God responds to her call.

Crow Mother Calls Forth The Little Fire God, 2000 (Text by Eugenia Parry)

Meinrad had to give up her scratchboard medium because it had severely damaged her shoulder after many years. "Since 2000 she has worked in opaque watercolor in a style that can only be called "animal," and she has produced some of the most powerful works of her career. Forced to give up the minutiae of Dürer-like drawing, she has used the knowledge gained from a lifetime of close seeing. It informs new gestures that are as rough and bold as shouts in the dark. The colors, untainted by modulating liminal grays, are as lurid as blood. Dogs continue to guard somber thresholds. They gather to hunt, saffron-colored, like the "little bears" of Brauron. One sprouts grass. Nor has the Great Mother forsaken her. She manifests as a running woman with a dead dog in her arms, or Artemis. Or Crow Mother who appears amongst a furious pack of wolf-dogs, calmly stirring the fire that summons the little spirit god of creation (Craighead, 2003).



Crow Mother Over The Rio Grande, 1988

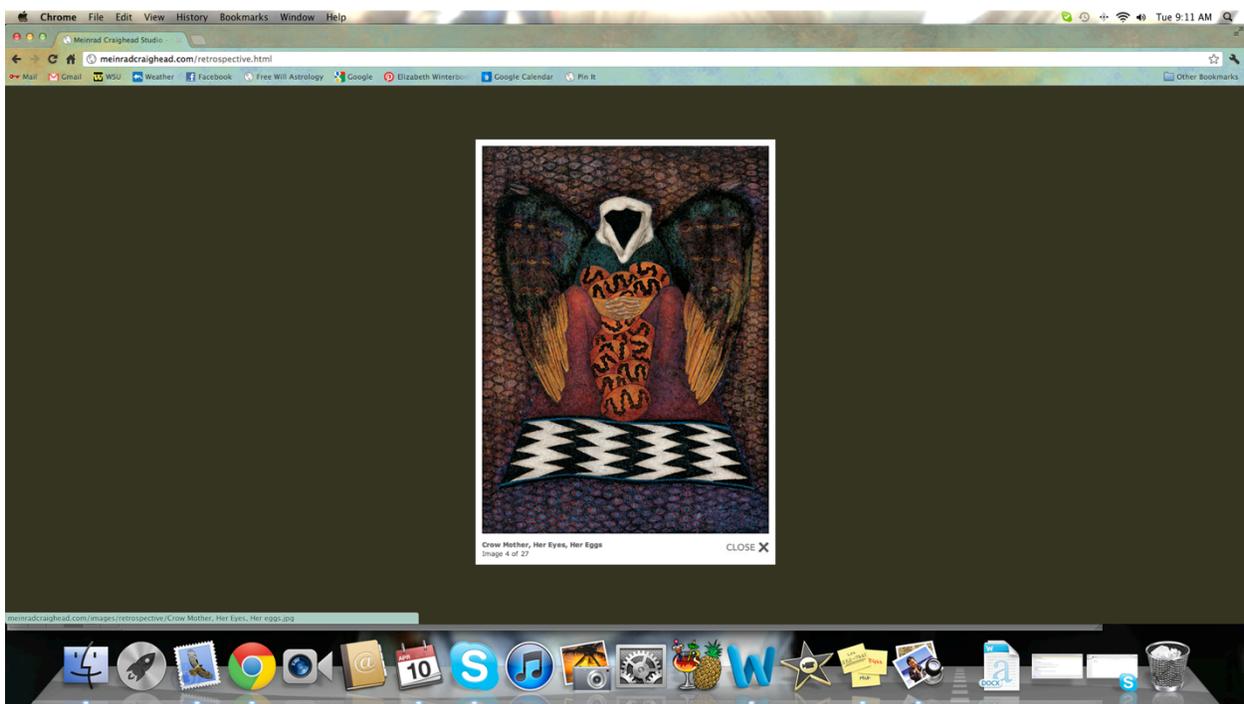
The crow mother is seated facing the viewer with her traditional black triangle face as the focal point of the painting. She has two black crows coming from behind her head, one facing left and the other facing right, they could be part of the wings of the Crow Mother. Behind the crows are two white swathes creating the appearance of wings. On the Crow Mother's lap she holds two more crows, four ears of corn and a bunch of beans or chilies. The ears of corn, lying in the crook of her left arm, are each a different color yellow, white, blue and red. Her left hand is holding the red ear of corn out to the viewer. The chilies are tumbling from the crook of her right arm and reaching to the ground. Behind the corn and chilies are two additional crows, again facing in opposite directions. The Crow Mother's skirt is decorated with a faded meandering stripe, which represents water. Her legs are splayed beneath her skirt and her bare feet are sticking out. Below her feet is a mat or rug with black and white meanders, which represent water or a river. The mat is edged in blue.

This painting shows the Crow Mother facing the present, but also watching over the past and future. She is at the edge of the life-giving water of the river, and holds out the abundance of corn and chilies or beans, which provide the nourishment of life. The Crow Mother is offering the comfort of a mother's care with sustaining love, food and water and extends this over all time.

Crow Mother Over the Rio Grande, 1988 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

My studio is named for Maat, the All-Seeing Eye of the Mother. I paint within her eye and she watches me. What more may I say of this Mother than this: She keeps an eye on me. As her eye gives birth to me, my eyes bring out my images. The feather of her flying eye, seeking truth, falls on my brush...She sows her magic beans, claiming my soil, possessing my womanhood. She feeds me from her abundant lap. She feeds me white maize and yellow

maize, red maize and her precious blue maize. She stuffs the colors into my center and I mix my inks. Outside crows gather in the cottonwoods, throwing their eyes around, scanning this river valley. What they see they talk about. They tell us what they see. Flying between me and the southern sun, their ragged shadows pass over my work bench, altering colors, suggesting values, changing patterns (Craighead, 2003).



Crow Mother, Her Eyes, Her Eggs, 1991

This painting shows the Crow Mother directly facing the viewer. She has her traditional black, triangular face surrounded with a white hood or nun's habit. She is seated with widespread wings reaching to the edges of the painting. Her feathers are covered in eyes. Out of each wing rises a crow. The seated Crow Mother is clasping approximately fifteen eggs that are colored warm orange with zigzag lines that remind me of markings on a corn snake. The eggs are spilling forth from

between her clasped arms and her open legs. The eggs reach the edge of the blue water edge of the mat that represents water. The background is completely covered in eyes. There is no horizon, just a wall of eyes.

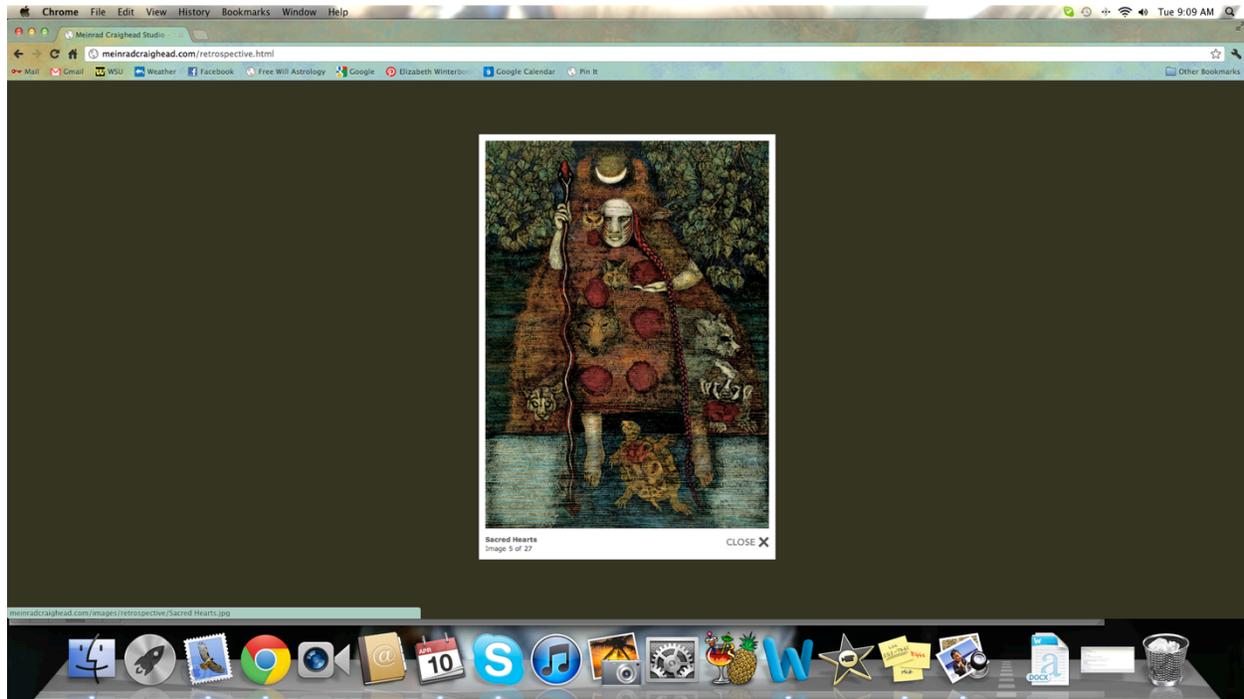
The eye is often said to be the window to the soul. This image has the black eye or face of the crow mother staring out at and drawing in the viewer. The Crow Mother sees all, there is no space that is not covered by an eye. She is clasping the eggs, the symbol of all beginnings as they lead down to the flowing waters below her. Watchful, waiting and caring, she sees all, including the future and the past.

Crow Mother, Her Eyes, Her Eggs, 1991 (Text by Virginia Beane Rutter)

In Crow Mother, Her Eyes, Her Eggs, 1991 the spirit guide literally embodies the symbols of life and death. Dark, golden tipped wings are spread against a scaly-patterned background. Crow Mother's body is formed of orange-colored eggs with squiggly black snakes on them. From one perspective, the eggs seem to delineate one long, thick snake body that has shaped itself as her breasts and body. With her triangular black, blank face, white veil and strange red legs, she sits with hands clasped over the eggs, brooding again over the river of life. Multiple rows of eyes on the wings suggest "John's vision in the Book of Revelation where cherubs unexpectedly sing the Trisagion and like seraphs, beat six wings, full of eyes all round and with." This Crow Mother has angelic vision and understanding.

While the eggs and the snake symbolize rebirth, the snake is also the mediator between conscious and unconscious life, because it lives both above and below ground. If a woman is not in right relation to the snake power of the unconscious, it can also deal death. A woman who was afraid of what she would find in her analytic process, dreamed: A woman is showing me her snake in a bag. I know this snake; we have a history in common. I can see the snake watching me through the cloth of the bag. We recognize each other. My friend assures me that I will not be hurt, and somehow I trust her. This image allowed the dreamer to trust the wisdom of her unknown psyche. The cista mystica, the mystery snake in the basket, is Demeter's familiar in the Eleusinian rites. The dreamer was both

separating from her actual mother and moving closer to the spiritual mother in her analytic work. The look between the snake and the dreamer changes the woman's feeling. Through trusting the friend-analyst whose gaze she holds each hour, recognition diminishes her fear (Craighead, 2003).



Sacred Hearts, 1990

The sacred hearts included in this painting are those of a shaman whose cloak encompasses images of an owl, coyote, wolf, bear, bobcat, badger and turtle. Each animal has a red circle to represent the heart of the animal. Above the shaman is a crescent moon facing upwards, so it is not clear if it is waxing or waning. The shaman stands with his head amongst the leaves of the trees and has his feet submerged beneath the surface of a flowing river. Within the tree branches the head of a crow peaks out as though speaking into the shaman's ear. His long, red, single braid reaches below the surface of the water. The shaman is holding a long red serpent that appears to be a staff. It

reaches from the head of the shaman into the water below. The turtle is below the water line except for his head, which is raised above the water.

This image represents the interconnectedness of the hearts of these powerful animals with the heart of the shaman, or wise person. The shaman has the crow, the moon and the owl about his head, perhaps for wisdom and guidance. The animals of the earth meld into the cloak of the shaman. This painting gives a feeling of strength and understanding shared by man, animals and the earth, all blending together. It stirs a feeling of respect for all as they are connected via the heart with the earth, including the birds, the beasts, the snakes, turtles and man.

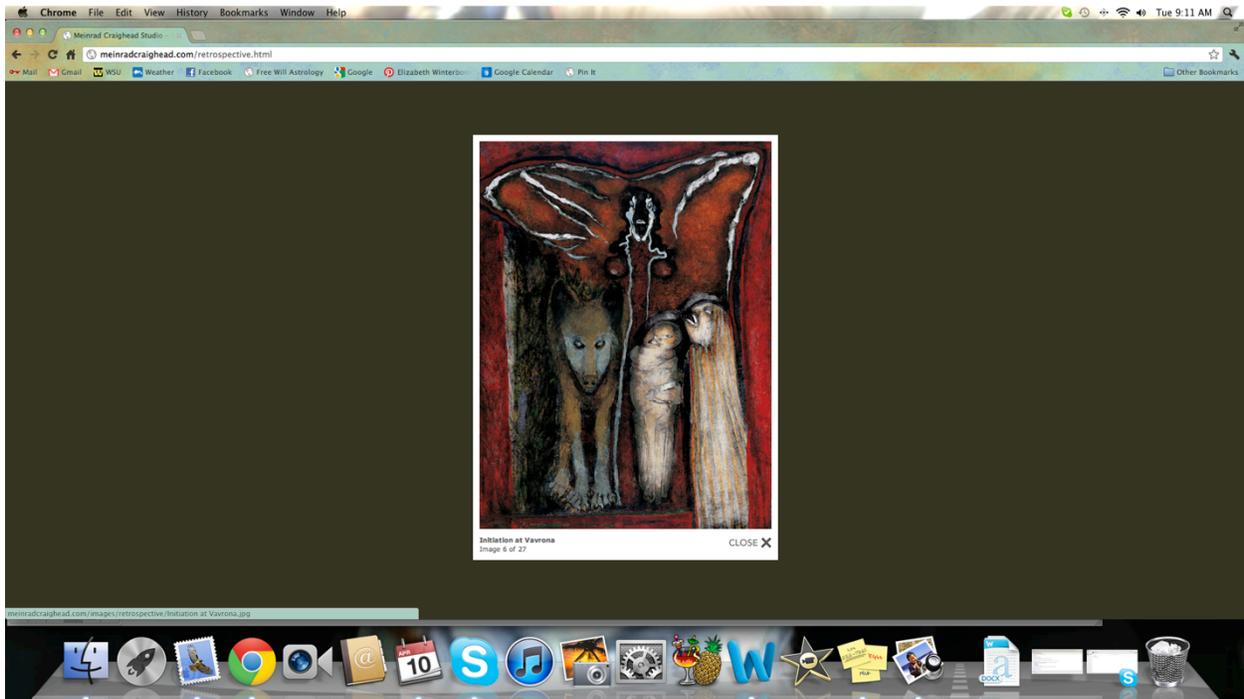
Sacred Hearts, 1990 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

“O Sacred Hearts, stir us, we beseech You.” Before going to my workbench I circle Maat and feed her animals. The litany begun outside continues inside as I go around the seven altars, giving her animals cornmeal and juniper berries. I place each small stone fetish to my lips. I suck in its breath.

Without animals to share the motions of our lives we are diminished; our lives are less than whole. This impoverishment is one of our saddest and loneliest bargains with civilization. Surely, the goodness and beauty of this land of New Mexico is maintained, indeed stayed up, by the indigenous people. Rooted in this landscape from the beginning, they continue to celebrate and share their living vision of the place of animals in religion. Their chanted stories and sacred dance ceremonials, which link all creatures endowed with eyes and breath and heartbeat, bespeak a time when the world was not divided into animal and human, divine and non-divine; a time when boundaries were so fluid we all flowed in and out of each other and shone with equal light; a time when we understood the animals when they spoke to us and taught us how to survive and how to worship. But time shifted and

drew distinctions. Time began to mark categories, and the motion of the whole broke to pieces in words. What we named was separateness.

Yet our common needs and determined deaths link us. Our common life source declares our union. We are promised to each other, and to believe this covenant is to love our animal wits and blessed instincts and sensual bodies (Craighead, 2003).



The Initiation At Vravona, 1998

Vravona is the modern name of a sacred site found in Ancient Greece. This painting shows two human figures and a coyote under the wide-spread wings or arms of a goddess figure. The two figures, one smaller than the other and possibly a mother and child, are surrounded by a background of dark red. The child-sized, smaller figure appears to be wrapped in a white cloth or shrouds. The pair are looking up at the Goddess figure, and the larger one has its mouth open as though calling or asking for something. Next to the figures stands a coyote facing the viewer of the painting, as

though on guard. It is not menacing, but it stares straight ahead with alert ears. The large Goddess-type image has arms or wings spread over the other figures and prominent breasts directed at the coyote and human pair.

This painting suggests the encompassing care of the Goddess who offers support and nurturing to all below, including animals and humans. In answer to all who call to her, the Goddess provides a protective covering. The coyote, though strong and self-reliant in nature, is offered the same protection and is enclosed in the same setting.

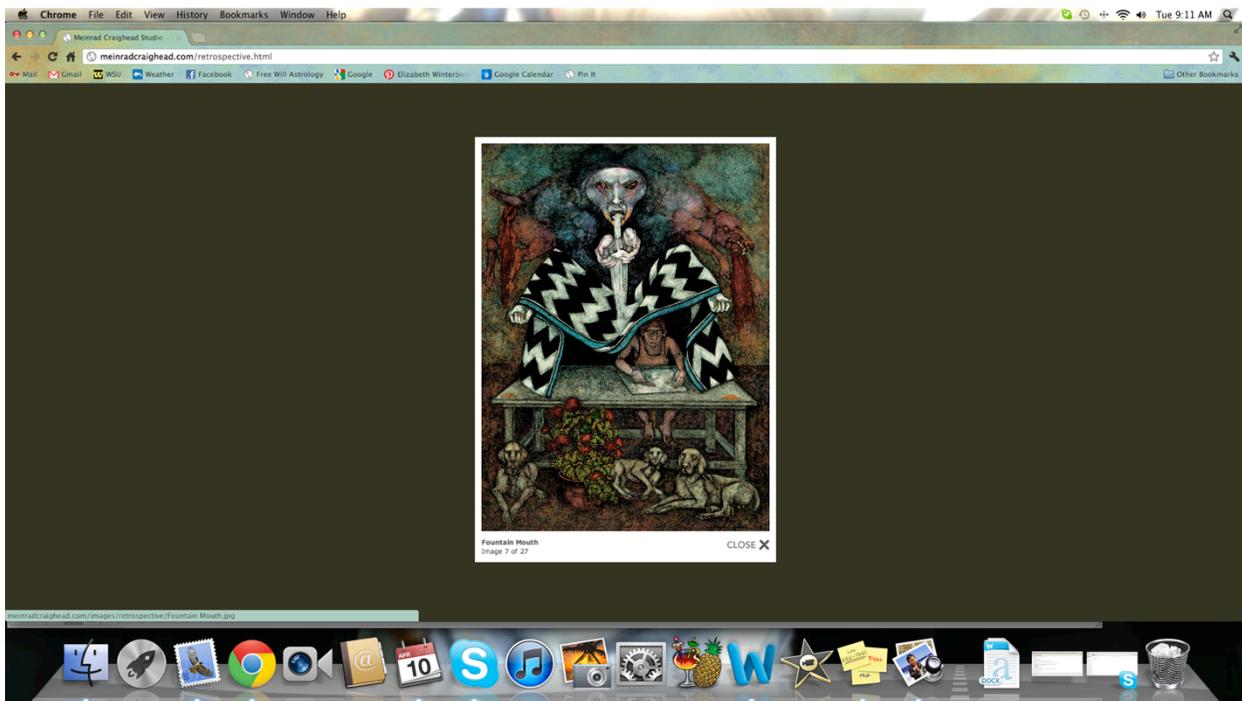
Initiation at Vravra, 1998 (Text by Virginia Beane Rutter)

“Here the goddess is a butterfly-like figure, her wings outstretched over her gray wolf dog and two figures. One of the figures may be a girl child just emerging from a cocoon’ the other, an older woman, shrouded. The whole tableau creates a temple diorama in blood red, black, and white. This painting emerged after a trip to Greece, where Meinrad found a holy image of Artemis, about nine inches high, in the sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia near a village named Vravra. The original wooden effigy was said to have been stolen by Orestes and Iphigeneia from the Taurons and brought to Brauron at Artemis’s instruction. Ancient worshippers rubbed the image with the blood of sacrificed animals.

When Meinrad stepped off the bus at Vravra, she was greeted by a stray white dog. In this place where Iphigeneia had once reigned as priestess, Meinrad had a revelation. Prior to leaving home, during a shamanic journey she had experienced herself being painted white into a badger identity, but she had not seen the painter. Here, she saw that the painter had been Artemis, who had claimed her for another initiation. At the Artemisian sites of Letrini and Ortygia, priestesses daubed their faces with gypsum or white clay in honor of Artemis Alpheia, “the white goddess.”

The eyes of the dog and the old woman were clearly visible in Initiation at Vravra. The ‘bunt’ has deepened, turned inward. The encounter with the divinity is expectant with change. What is beginning or ending? Psychologically, the

butterfly belongs to the goddess transformation symbolism, which reached its high point in Minoan Crete with the labrys or double axe. A woman companioned by her instinctual Dog God, animus, in undergoing a transmutation. The girl emerging from the cocoon and the old woman suggest stages of the painter's life occurring simultaneously. A woman viewing this image sees a moment in time encapsulated when she might experience rebirth under a sheltering divinity” (Craighead, 2003).



O Fountain Mouth, 1989

In this painting an artist sits working at her table. Pouring down from above is a heavy, angry looking weight of water in the form of a river that surrounds her. The source of the river is the mouth and eyes of a face. Two hands try to catch the water, but it still pours forth. Two more hands appear to be passing the sands of time onto the worktable. Behind the face is the form of a large, angry or pained dog. Blood is pouring from the dog's mouth and vagina. The artist's eyes are focused on her work, her bare feet rest on the base of the table below. On the table are two small vessels, like salt and pepper shakers or pots of paint, one is blue and the other is purple. Three dogs

lounge on the floor in front of the table. Next to the dogs is a large potted plant, a geranium with big red blooms.

This painting evokes the sense of creative pressure that the artist feels from the Goddess that is driving her to work. Inspiration and urging pours down from the heavens surrounding the artist and there is an air of urgency to create before being swallowed up by the water. The upper dog also symbolizes the moving of time and adds a raw edge to the urgency. The waiting dogs show patience and calmness, which is grounding for the artist and the flowers provide inspiration.

O Fountain Mouth, 1989 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

Away on my long European sojourn, it was only in dreams that I could visit the Land of My Dreams. In them I often wandered this desert, these mountains, my Rio Grande valley. Like a wraith never laid to rest, the land returned to haunt my dreams and finally, after twenty-one years, to reclaim me. I had two magic carpets that served these dream journeys of return, two Navajo rugs that I had acquired when I lived in Albuquerque in the early 1960s. They were rolled up in my sister's attic in Milwaukee. In my dreams about New Mexico, the rugs would unfurl and enfold me in the flow of the Rio Grande and the four mountains, which their woven designs represented for me. These former household spirits floated through my dreamscapes determined to be honored and placated even in my absence. I missed the two rugs as I missed old friends and longed to see them.

Now the river rugs hang in my studio, above my workbench. Maat clothes herself in the waterfall and hides me in the grotto within the folds. The water spills down and fertilizes my creative space. She signs the boundaries with cornmeal. In the cave I pray, O Fountain Mouth, a cry I have whispered for such a long time, an icon given to me by Rainer Maria Rilke in one of his poems. Icon of the Fountainhead whence flow the divine waters from the

Fons et Origo. Icon of the God of Beauty whom I worship, the dark God brooding over her waters, originating all life, blessing the growth rising from the matrix cast in her mold. *O Thou Fountainhead* (Craighead, 2003).



Hagia Sophia, 1987

Hagia Sophia is the name of an ex-patriarchal basilica located in Istanbul Turkey, built in 600 A.D. by order of Justinian the Great. The basilica changed to become a mosque and then ultimately a museum. The name Hagia Sophia is Greek for Holy Wisdom. This painting depicts a seated woman surrounded by symbols of wisdom and power. Four moon phases are represented in each corner—the dark moon, waxing, full, and waning set in a dark blue background, like an endless sky. The center image is surrounded by a row of what appears to be bear claws. Since earliest times bears have been considered sacred, particularly in their ability to move between worlds. Bears were seen as

‘tutelary figures’ or spirit helpers (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). The central figure is cloaked in red. She is flanked by two owls.

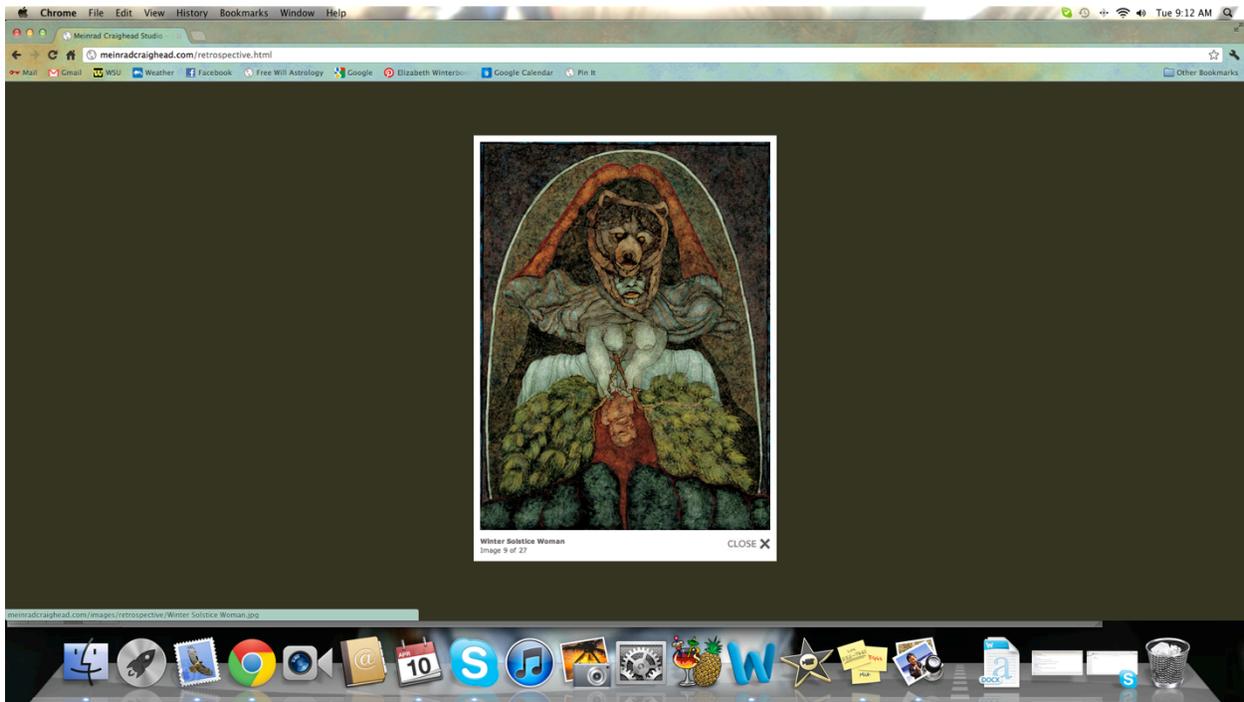
Throughout history, owls seen with the Great Goddess have represented the giving and taking of life, as well as wisdom, just as the Great Goddess is seen as the conveyer of the perpetual cycle of death and regeneration (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). The central figure is holding the end of a string or line that leads to an inner labyrinth contained in her belly. Her face appears to beckon or ask the viewer to come follow the line.

This painting invites one to enter in and follow the path that is created by the Goddess. She is surrounded by time, wisdom and strength and she patiently waits for each person looking for her path. The image offers comfort and hope that there is a way to follow and one only needs to begin.

Hagia Sophia, 1987 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

“O Seat of Wisdom, enthrone us, we beseech Thee”

Lady Wisdom threads the labyrinth of her womb, and each of us begins our life journey to her center, our pilgrimage to the Holy Land. *Doth not Wisdom cry out? Doth not understanding put forth her voice?* Throughout the moons of our life span? (Craighead, 2003)



Winter Solstice Woman, 1988

The winter solstice is the point in the year when the darkest point has been reached and there is a turning toward a new beginning. This painting shows a woman giving birth. She is leaning forward between her widespread legs and pulling forth the baby from her womb. She is in what looks like a cave with the skin of a bear wrapped around her. Bears are said to have special spiritual powers as they hibernate and reemerge to start life anew. The birthing woman is holding two evergreen branches in her hands, guiding the new life, which is always forthcoming. The blood from her womb is soaking into the ground.

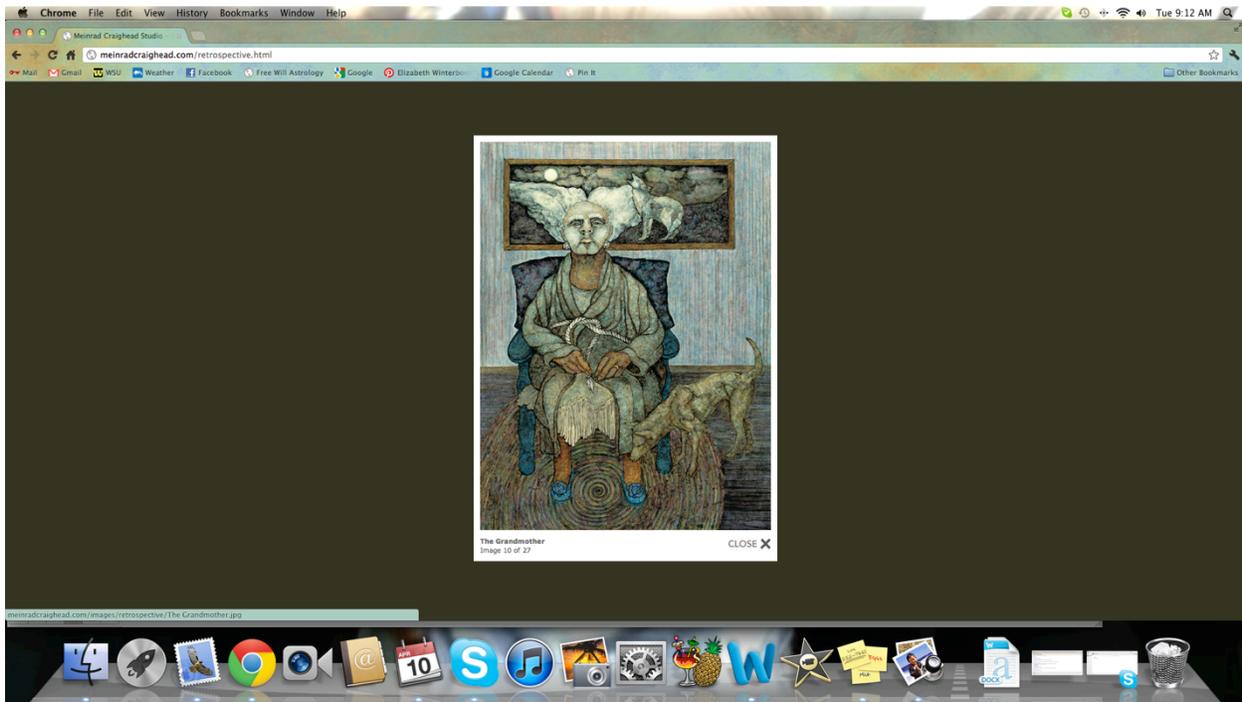
This painting represents the eternal reemergence of life, which at the darkest point begins anew. The ancient power of the regenerative bear encompasses the woman through her ordeal, which promises that life will continue forevermore.

Winter Solstice Woman, 1988 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

“ O Cave of the Heart, illumine us, we beseech Thee.”

Who are these animals to whom I speak each morning? While the building of Maat was under way, I wondered which animals would choose to live in her. My totem animals are ever with me, again and again manifest in my dreams: Turtle, Horse, and Mountain Lion, who travel in my dreamscapes and teach me. Would they guard this space alone? I made a Winter Solstice pilgrimage to Zuni Pueblo to spend the day with the stone animal fetishes carved by these people. If I spent time with these spirit animals, they would answer my question, Do you want to come live with me? For a long time that day I handled the stone animals. Gradually the animals came. Wolf came first and the others followed: Bear, Coyote, Eagle, Mole, and Toad. I brought them home and buried them near the foundations of the studio. The animals waited, their energies seeping into the dormant earth, while the sun gradually shifted south, gathering strength.

During the dark season I thought of Bear deep in some cave, dormant through her period of gestation. While a friend and I were building my studio in the valley, Bear was making her cubs in the mountain. Whenever I looked east to the mountains that winter I thought about the sleeping bears and the mystery of making. “God lies in the details,” I repeated to myself, trying for perfect angles and exact measurements and right craftsmanship. God lies in the details of all growth and making. I was building my cave, my place to withdraw and hide, the sanctuary where I would birth my images and find God lying in the details (Craighead, 2003).



The Grandmother, 1987

The Grandmother is a painting showing an old woman sitting in an armchair above a spiral rug. Her hair is spread like angel wings above her head and flows into the picture hanging on the wall behind her. In the hanging picture there is a full moon and a howling coyote. The woman is wearing a loose fitting robe held closed by a rope belt. She is wearing a wedding band and rather fancy earrings. At the grandmother's feet there is a dog peering into the center of the spiral centered beneath her feet. The floor appears to flow like a river, while the wall behind her reaches from the ground and upward into the sky.

The spiral in this painting is significant. The woman's feet are placed on either side of the center of the spiral. The spiral shape is extremely powerful in symbolism and is the most widespread shape in the natural world. "Its symbolic power is in its evocation of an archetypal path of growth, transformation and psychological or spiritual journey. Based on the direction of its spin, whether expanding outward and larger, or tightening inward and smaller, a spiral is a cosmic symbol that may

represent one or the other of several dualities: growth or decay, ascent or descent, evolution or involution, waxing or waning, accumulation or dissolution, increasing or decreasing, expanding or contracting, offering or receiving, revealing or hiding” (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). The Grandmother painting represents the decreasing and descent of the old woman. The coyote howls at the full moon that is soon to be on the wane. This is a woman who is nearing the end of her life, following the natural progression of the beautiful spiral shape. Her hair is like angel wings, ready to take flight.

The Grandmother, 1987 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

“O Holy Trinity, awaken us, we beseech Thee.

When I was a child, reading the *Chicago Tribune* was an evening ritual. Sitting on the floor at my father’s feet I paged through each section after he had finished reading it and passed it down to me. I looked for photographs, pictures of anything that interested me, hoping especially for photographs of animals. I taught myself to draw by studying these newsprint images and drawing from them.

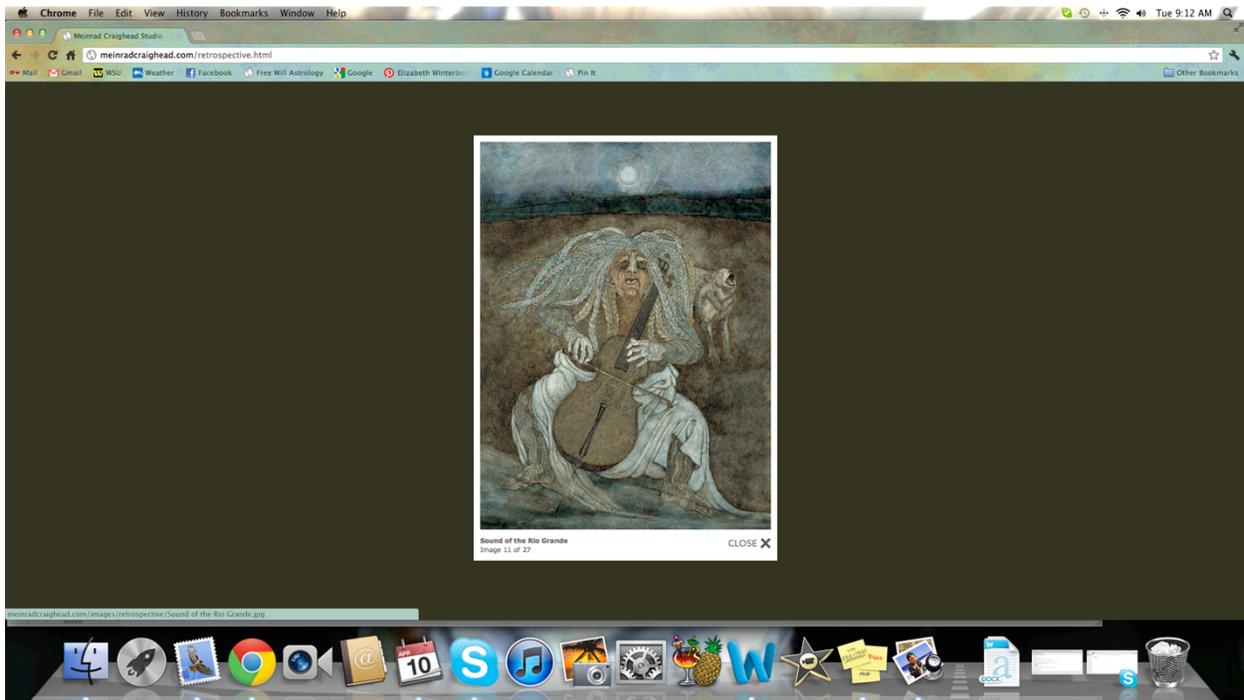
I had no desire to linger after school for any activity. I wanted to be at home drawing. In the late afternoons, before my father returned from work, my sisters and I sat on the floor around the high wood-box radio listening to the afternoon serials for children. Nearby, in the kitchen, our mother prepared the evening meal. As each serialized story unfolded in fifteen-minute episodes, day after day, I drew the stories as I heard them and stapled them into “books.” Leaning against the wooden box the sound vibrations came right through my back into the pencil. “The Lone Ranger” was the last and longest story, a heady half hour of horse hooves beating on my back. My sisters and I hoped that our father would not arrive

until 6:30 when “The Lone Ranger” ended, because when he came home, the radio had to be turned off.

Drawing became a daily habit. Drawing was necessary, something I not only wanted to do but had to do, because it was through drawing that I communicated with my grandmother in North Little Rock. From September through May, I drew pictures for her. From time to time I would select from the collection and my mother would send a package of drawings to her mother. Memaw never thanked me for these drawings, but she acknowledged them with collections of her own. Fat envelopes would arrive stuffed with chronological clippings of two cartoon strips that ran daily in the *Arkansas Gazette*, “Jitters” and “The Katzenjammer Kids,” cartoons unavailable in Chicago. I did not miss one episode of Jitters the monkey or those kids who spoke slang German, the “KKs” we called them. Methodically, day by day, my grandmother cut the two four-frame strips from the newspaper and carefully assembled them to keep the running storyline intact. She was making “books,” too. This faithful exchange of imagery between Memaw and me kept us connected during the nine months we were separated each year. She never wrote “thank you,” she never said, “I like this one” or “My favorite drawing is...” But when I returned to my grandparents’ home for the summer months, there my drawing would be, taped to a wall in the dining room surrounding the only picture that hung in their home. This was a large dime-store print of a wolf in a snowy landscape, a great gray wolf howling at the moon. “Look, I give your drawings to Wolf and Moon,” she seemed to be saying to me.

My grandmother died when I was thirteen years old. But in the repeated summer journeys of return to her, the solitary figures of wolf, moon, and grandmother became a unified, composite image that stirred and fertilized my imagination. Each was the other, a trinity of

equals. Boundaries between these three silent presences slid away, revealing a Trinitarian mystery of union that deeply marked my young soul. *Credo*, said my soul. *Credo*, say my drawings still, today. I believe in this holy trinity of grandmother, wolf, and moon and worship these ancestral spirits deep within me (Craighead, 2003).



The Sound of the Rio Grande, 1988

The *Sound of the Rio Grande* shows a person with wildly braided hair sitting at the edge of a river playing a cello. Next to the musician is a coyote howling to the moon. Just above the horizon there is a setting or rising moon. The seated person's entire skin is covered in geometric patterns or symbols, including meanders and spirals. The figure is draped in a white cloth below the waist. The torso seems to be part of the landscape with the arms and head emerging. The figure is sitting right at the water's edge and the feet are in the flowing water. The bow of the cello rests on the strings, as do the player's fingers.

The painting illustrates how the sound of the river is like a call from the Goddess. There is a haunting quality created by the misty colors and the shaded moon. The appearance of the figure has a wildness, with flying hair. The figure's draping is flowing along with the river. Represented by the howl of the coyote, this painting shows a call to listen to the Great Mother in the sounds of nature as she is playing beautiful music for all.

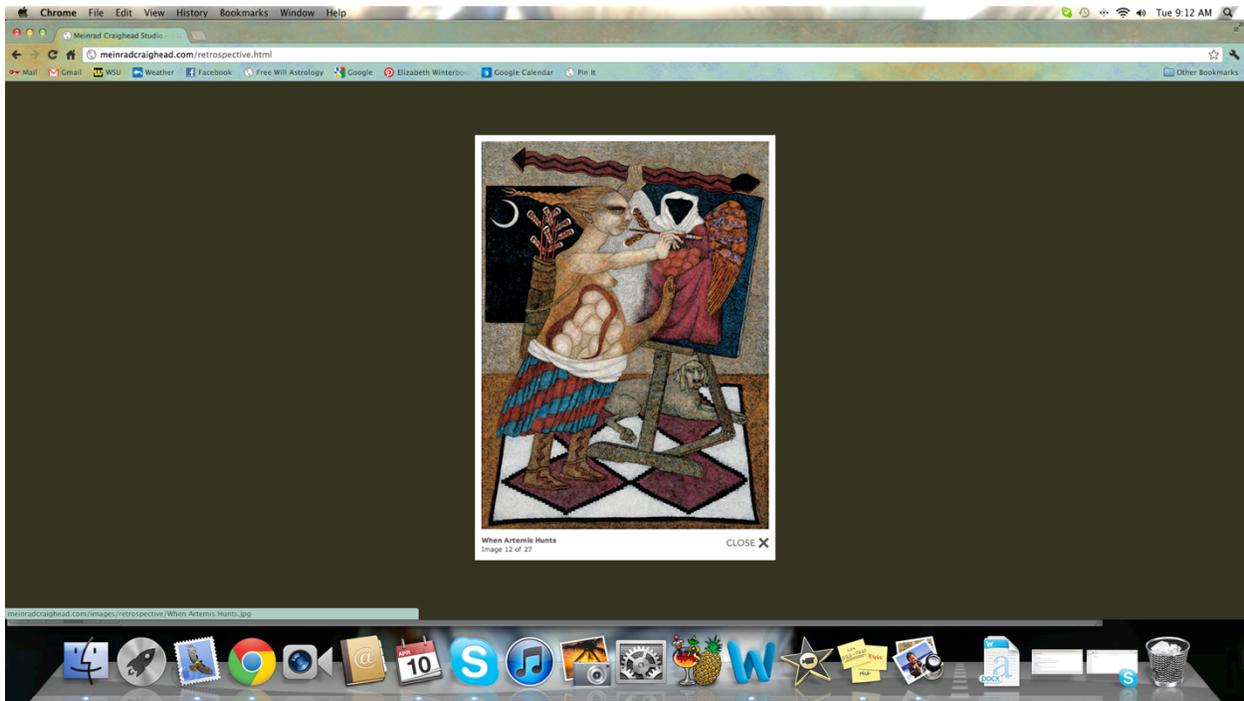
Sound of the Rio Grande, 1988 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

“O Soul of the World, seal us, we beseech Thee.”

The music in the river returns to my studio and runs within the music that plays here all day and into night. Music magnifies the aboriginal sound. It plows my soul, upturns my earth, reaches into ever deeper levels to dig out and irrigate the innermost memories. The great, gorgeous sound enters the deepest well where live the fish with the largest eyes, and it lures images from the depths. Music verifies all I have ever understood about the searing beauty of the matrix.

In some of Mahler's music I hear the sound coming from the place where I know I live. Knowing that certain pieces are haunting me, I may wait for years for an image to arrive from this ur-place where it has gestated, inspired by the music originating in the same matrix. Music is my psychopomp, guiding my images from the otherworld and attending their birth. The suite of my paintings published in *The Mother's Songs* was inspired by some of the songs in *Das Lied von der Erde*, especially “The Farewell,” the last, the longest, the most powerful evocation of the voice of the Divine Mother for in Mahler's songs I first heard her singing to me. Through a span of eight years I passed countless hours absorbing her voice before the images in these painting began to appear.

True to his name, Mahler is an iconographer: he makes the divine present in his song icons. Another of his icons that I worship before is the soprano's "Resurrection Song" in his Second Symphony. Early in the symphony a heart-rending two-note instrumental melody is introduced, a cry from afar, a far cry one must hasten toward. It vanishes in the forest but returns periodically through the long work. At last the simple piercing melody is articulated and the soprano cries, "O Glaube." O believe, my heart, O believe (Craighead, 2003).



When Artemis Hunts, 1991

When Artemis Hunts is a painting of a woman artist standing at her easel painting. She is in the middle of painting a picture of the Crow Mother. The artist is wearing a quiver on her back with arrows sticking out and the paintbrush that she is using looks like an arrow. Her belly is bulging and inside is a large pile of eggs, out of which a snake is emerging. The snake is looking up and watching

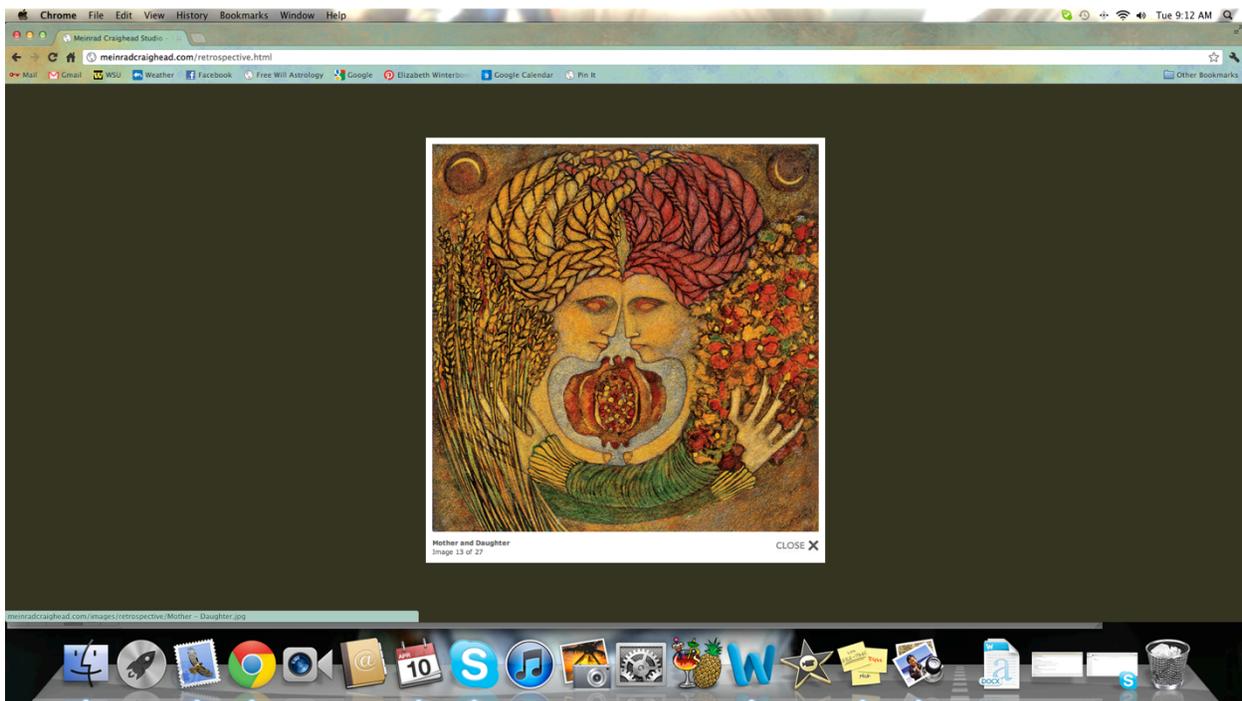
her paint. Her hair is in a single braid that appears to be flying out behind her. In her other hand she is holding up a long wavy object with a triangle at one end and what looks like the head of a snake at the other end. Outside the window is a completely black sky with a waxing crescent moon shining white against the blackness. Below the easel is a resting dog, lying on a rug with a large geometric pattern of diamonds or squares.

Artemis is known historically as the mistress of wild things who hunts with her hounds who can sniff out prey. “Arrows carried by the Goddess Artemis represented her control of the hunt and of wild animals” (Walker, 1988). The use of an arrow as her paintbrush is significant. “The arrow that flies through the air and magically finds its target will remind us of the far-reaching and penetrating power of humankind’s mental physical and spiritual focus” (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). This painting shows Meinrad at work, focused with precision on her target of the painting, her hair flying along with the flight of the arrow. The snake represents the artist pregnant with vision and ideas and taking on the feminine characteristics of the secret, enigmatic and intuitional (Cooper, 1979). This painting represents the passionate vision and drive of the artist at work, driven by divine inspiration, and utilizing a hunter’s focus and skill to capture its prey.

When Artemis Hunts, 1991 (Text by Virginia Beane Rutter)

The new moon is again in the sky, but here, the painter in her Artemis aspect-one breasted like a mythical Amazon, a quiver of arrows over her shoulder-paints the Hopi Crow Mother with an arrow-tipped paintbrush. Artemis’s belly is full of eggs, out of which a snake undulates, its head moving toward the eggs in Crow Mother’s picture. The painter is using the hunter’s arrow-aimed vision. Intently focused, she is seeing with Artemis’s eyes. Her left hand reaches up to grasp a lightning bolt-serpent “arrow” on the wall. At her feet lies her perennial dog companion. The snake ferreting out the eggs visually connects the painter with her creation.

These images of Artemis have a startling effect on the viewer. They are neither neo-classical images of the goddess nor the prettified Barbie Doll figures that a woman is accustomed to seeing in the media. Rather, the images are individualized, earthy figures of gravity and dimension with symbolic attributes that resonate to the archetype. The Artemis embodies the meaning and substance of the feminine that a woman analyzes and is reading for in her own development. Psychologically, Artemis speaks to a woman who needs to separate out from the herd, the collective, to get in touch with her essential solitary nature, with her animal instincts, with the seer, the huntress in herself (Craighead, 2003).



Mother and Daughter, 1981

The glowing colors of gold and red enliven the painting called *Mother and Daughter*. This painting is of two women facing each other in profile facing with their foreheads touching and arms around each other. On the left is a mother with a waning moon, a large sheaf of wheat and wheat

colored hair. Her hair is intertwined with the hair of the woman on the right. The woman on the right is the daughter, who has red hair and a large bunch of fresh red flowers. Another crescent moon, waxing, is on the side of the daughter. Between the two women is a ripe pomegranate with seeds pouring forth.

This painting represents Persephone, the mythological Greek Goddess, as the young girl who was kidnapped by Hades. Demeter, Persephone's mother and the grain goddess, is so distraught over her daughter's disappearance she brings winter to the land and the wheat stops growing. Hades agrees to allow Persephone back but, tricking her with a forbidden pomegranate seed, has her promise to return to him in the Underworld for three months of the year. The braided hair is a symbol of an umbilical cord that attaches the two women together. The wheat represents the harvest and the flowers the eternal return of spring.

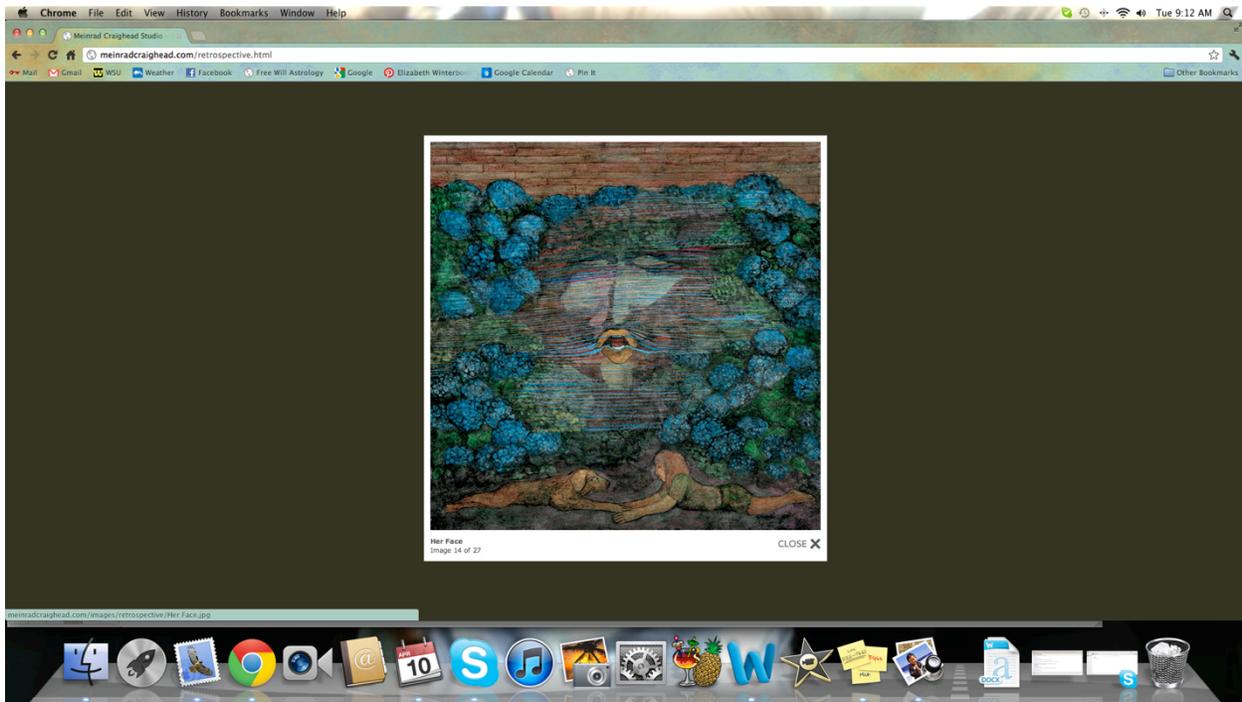
Mother and Daughter, 1981 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

Each year in June my mother put me on a train in Chicago and sent me to her parents in the summer. She could not go with me, but she told me that it was good for me to be there where I began. I had to touch home, and through me she did also. When I was old enough to understand, she said: "Your flesh is growing there. When you were born Memaw buried your cord and membranes in the soil in North Little Rock. You are rooted there like me and Memaw.

When summer was over I had to leave. The doors in North Little Rock closed, the dogs slept, waiting through another winter. Memaw grieved at my going away. But every summer my mother sent me on the journey of return.

The dream of the journey comes repeatedly. Over the years the point of departure in the dream varies; I begin in many different places, familiar or foreign to my experience. But one in movement, the journey is always the same. I travel for many days, leaving a great city, passing through ever smaller towns into increasingly remote villages. I travel alone, driving a small white car, carrying a small white puppy. Beyond the last village lies an open, untracked landscape, the distance so vast and unarticulated that no horizon can be seen. I leave the car and we walk into the space where earth and sky are merged, perfectly united, each with the other. We walk for a long time. Gradually earth and sky separate and on the horizon a dark speck appears. We walk toward the object and it grows as we come to it.

The tree and the sea announce their identity simultaneously. The earth ends in the sea; the tree grows at its edge. We continue walking toward the great pine and enter the substance of the tree. In the darkness my dog disappears but this does not grieve me. I circle through the multiple concentric rings of the tree, shrinking and aging within each ring. At last the spiraling ends. I arrive at the small dark spot of origination. When I touch this innermost center I realize I am already there. I have been journeying to where I am (Craighead, 2003).



Her Face, 1983

Her Face is a painting that shows a girl and her dog facing each other on their bellies. The girl's hands are outstretched and touching the dog's paws. They are looking at each other. Above the pair is a large face with flowing blue lines across it that evokes flowing water. The water flows within a blue flowering bush. Behind the face is a brick wall. The mouth of the face is open and the water flows across it. The eyes are sort of hidden and veiled.

This painting shows that the face of a great river, "moving water flowing between two banks, water rolling as Time itself, as if veins of the Great Mother Earth" (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). I think this represents the idea that the vitality of life can be found within a flowering bush, or anywhere ordinary for that matter, if there is a desire to find it. The river is large and flowing over everything, including the girl and the dog of this painting.

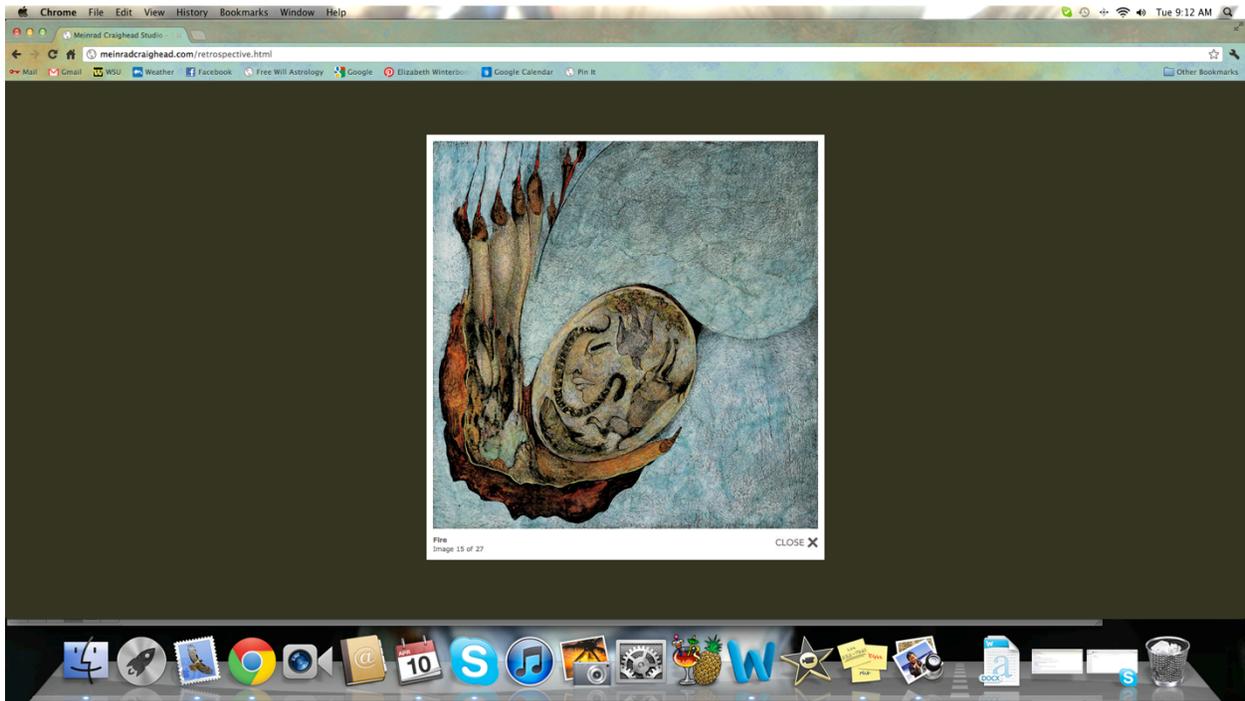
Her Face, 1983 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

It was my seventh summer. I think everything and everyone slept that hot afternoon in North Little Rock. The day, the dust, the sun were red; the roses were wide open. I lay with my dog in a cool place on the north side of my grandparents' clapboard house. Hydrangeas flourished there, shaded from the heat. The domed blue flowers were higher than our heads. I held the dog, stroking her into sleep. But she held my gaze. I watched the dog and she watched me, a balance of equal weights. As I looked into her eyes I knew that I would never travel further than into this animal's eyes. They were as deep, as bewildering, as unattainable as a night sky. Just as mysterious was another movement, the rush of water deep within me, the sound in my ears resounding from my breast. I gazed into the dog's eyes and listened to the sound of the water inside and I understood: "This is God."

I spent the rest of the afternoon digging a hole. I spaded and shoveled the hole for many days until the walls collapsed, my act of worship exhausted.

Soon after this, in an elementary school in Chicago, I came upon a photograph in a book; it was a small statue of a woman. The recognition was immediate and certain: I knew this was she whom I had heard in the water and whose face I had sought within the dog's eyes. This discovery brought a sense of well-being and gratitude that has never diminished.

But the figurine had no face. She was crowned with waves of water, covering her head, overshadowing her face. It was her entire body that spoke, her breast-belly body, a thick bulb rooted, pushing up a halo of water, the water which moved within me. I've been looking for her face ever since. I had then and still have one essential prayer: "Show me your face" (Craighead, 2003).



Fire, 1984

Fire is a painting dominated by the image of an egg containing pictures of a fish, a snake, a person's face, a bird and a running dog or other animal. The egg is held within a hand that has long pulling fingers with sharp, scratching nails. The nails are dragging across the pale blue, soft background revealing hot red and orange colors behind.

“In many creation myths, the universe is hatched from an egg which has everything within itself and is needful only of brooding” (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). In earlier, Upper Paleolithic times the egg was often used to symbolize regeneration and rebirth and that symbolization has survived into modern time as decorated Easter eggs. The title and the images contained in the painting, suggest that behind all life there is a burning fire. “All living things are in some way fertilized, tempered, ripened or destroyed by forms of fire” (Archive for Research in

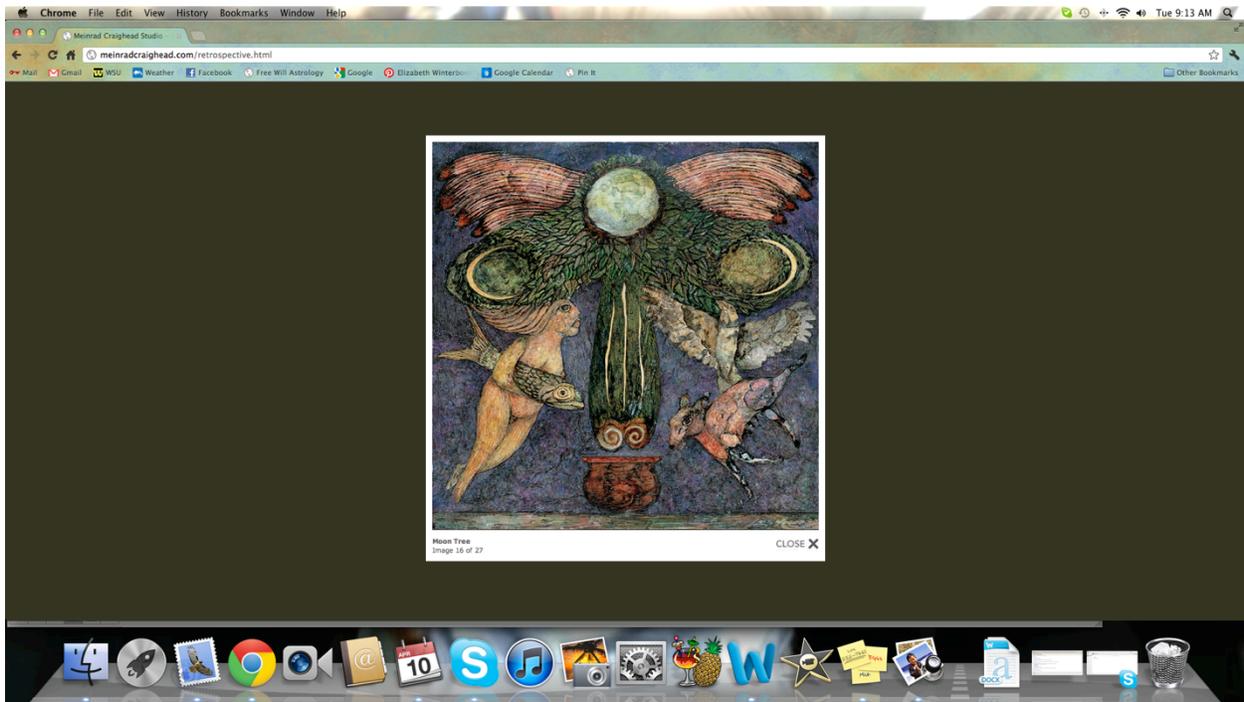
Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). This painting represents the fire of spirit that burns within all living things.

Fire, 1984 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

The trees are diseased and had to be felled. A crew arrived from Barcelona, and for days chainsaws screamed over the mountain at Montserrat. When the logging was finished and the trucks had gone, an old man remained to tend the burning rubble. He raked debris to the fiery centers of the seven huge stumps, often sitting down to smoke a cigarette and stare into the fires. At twilight on the second day the man left. That night I sat down to continue the vigil.

The stumps, rising like charred mountains from their separate seas of white-hot ash, smoldered for nights and days and more nights. Inside each black mountain a burning womb sat cooking on the earth, hollowing a cave. All the fires on earth visited the seven caves during those nights: home fires and war fires, fires of initiation and purification, menstrual fires and the fires that inflame the imagination.

Finally, the trees were gone, my vigil was over, and the fertilizing ashes blew over the mountain (Craighead, 2003).



Moon Tree, 1983

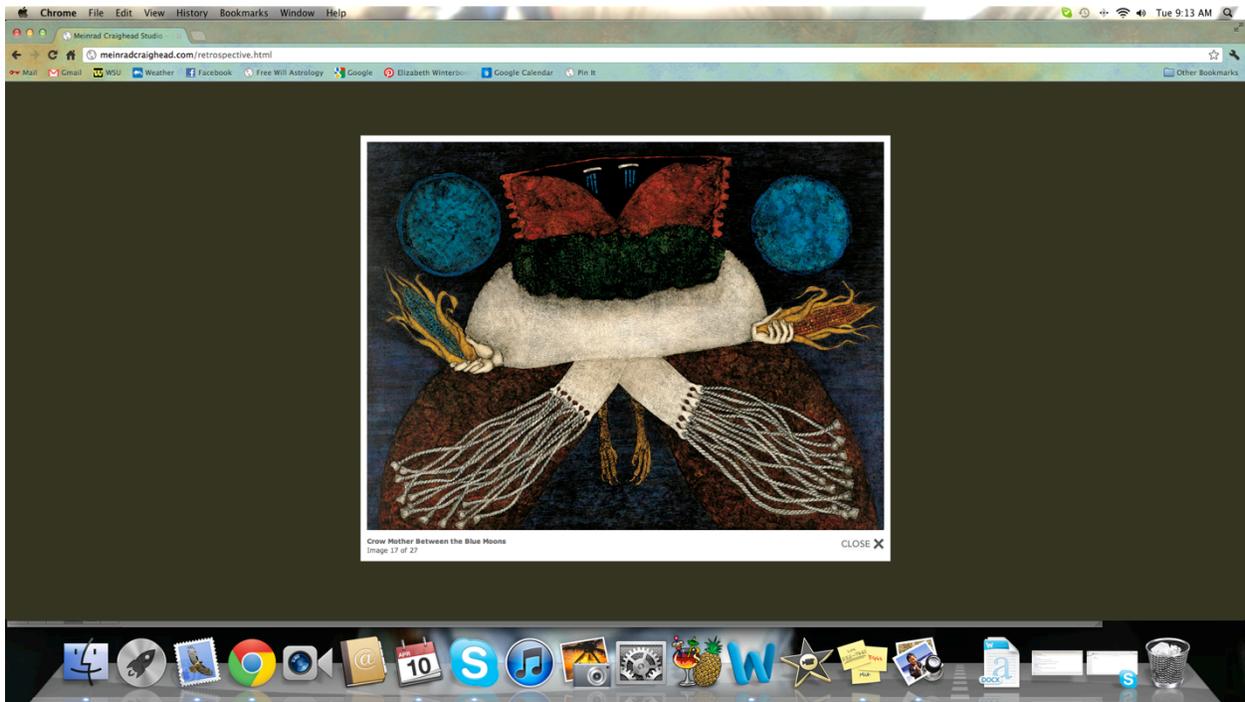
The Moon Tree painting contains lots of symbolic imagery, the title recalling the ancient Sumerian symbol where “the house of the night mother who passes across the sky” (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). The central tree has a curved green trunk, like a birth canal, poised over a pot. The symbol of the tree evokes feminine aspects of nourishment, shelter, protection and support, suggesting that the tree is offering the “supporting aspect of the Great Mother” (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). The branches bend down almost like a pair of arms. The center of the tree contains a full moon image and each of the two outstretched, arm-like branches holds a crescent moon. The three moons form the ancient Celtic symbol of the Maid, Mother and Crone. The tree seems to have wings, as though it is in flight. Alongside the tree are figures of a naked woman holding a fish, an eagle or hawk and a goat or dog figure. All the figures are floating or flying. Only the pot is resting on the ground.

Moon Tree represents the Great Mother/Goddess who is bringing all life up and sheltering it with her mighty branches. The spirals and lines along her trunk represent the continuing presence of life and vitality, raising everything up off the ground towards a spiritual aspect.

Moon Tree, 1983 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

It was a long drive from Florence, but when I reached Barcelona I was almost there. I was going to the mountain of Montserrat to live for a year near the statue of the Black Madonna venerated in a monastery there. Night was falling as I camped in a highland meadow near the mountain.

I was cold and could not sleep. The full moon pulled. I watched her rising through naked tree branches, drawing their black lace across her face, binding herself to earth. She flew her heavenly arc, illuminating the distant mountain, and sank into its serrated silhouette. I wondered if, in passing, the moon and the black Madonna had seen each other (Craighead, 2003).

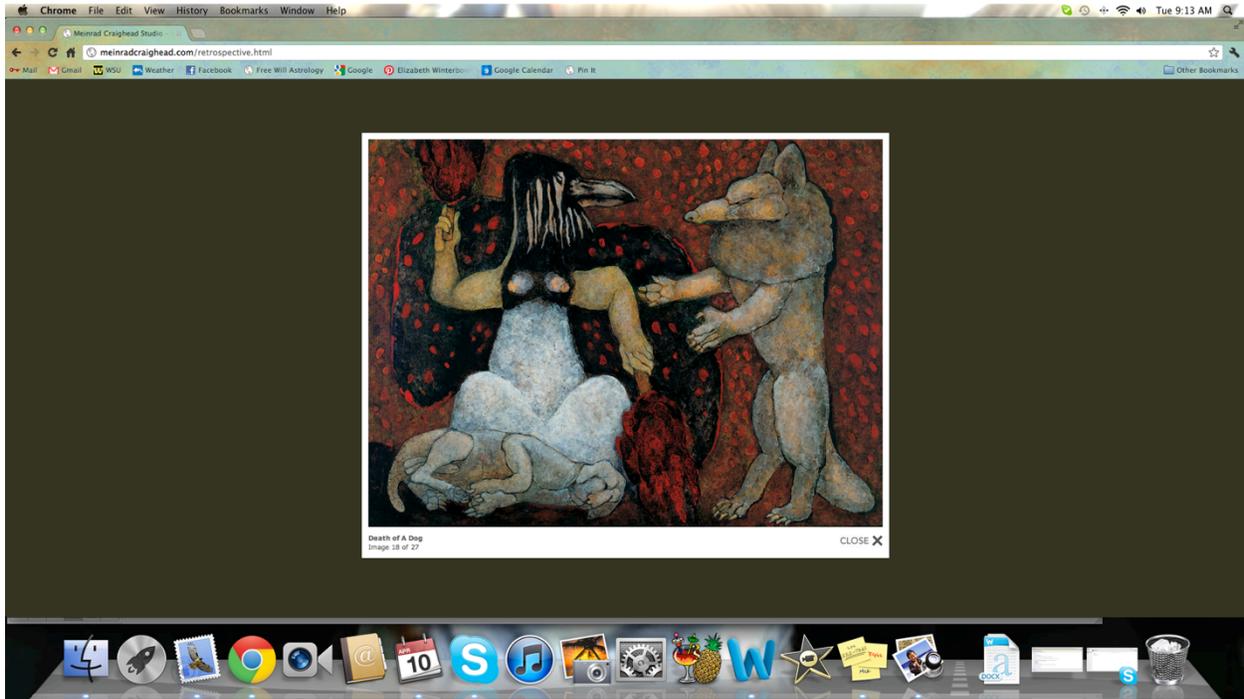


Crow Mother Between The Blue Moons, 1993

Crow Mother Between The Blue Moons shows a crow mother figure that appears to be flying. She is hooded with the traditional black triangle face emerging from a red and black-fringed top. Below the head area is a white cape that has two ties or ends of belt flying loose. Two human hands appear at either side holding two ears of corn, one red and the other is blue. Bird feet hang down; giving the impression that she is flying. From the ends of the belts hang many cords. The head is flanked by two large blue moons.

Farmer's Almanac explains that the blue moon occurs "whenever two full moons appear in a single month, which happens on average every 2½ to 3 years. The second full moon is called a Blue Moon" (Farmer's Almanac Staff, 2009). A blue moon is commonly used to refer to a rare event, as in "once in a blue moon." The Crow Mother deity of Native Americans is depicted here as a kachina, a figure that if offered reverence and respect can bestow good fortune. The flying rope tassels from the belt are umbilical cords that have been braided.

This painting, *Crow Mother Between The Blue Moons*, depicts the supply of food and nourishment provided by the Crow Mother, even over long periods of time. She offers the corn to all, represented by the long reaching tassels.



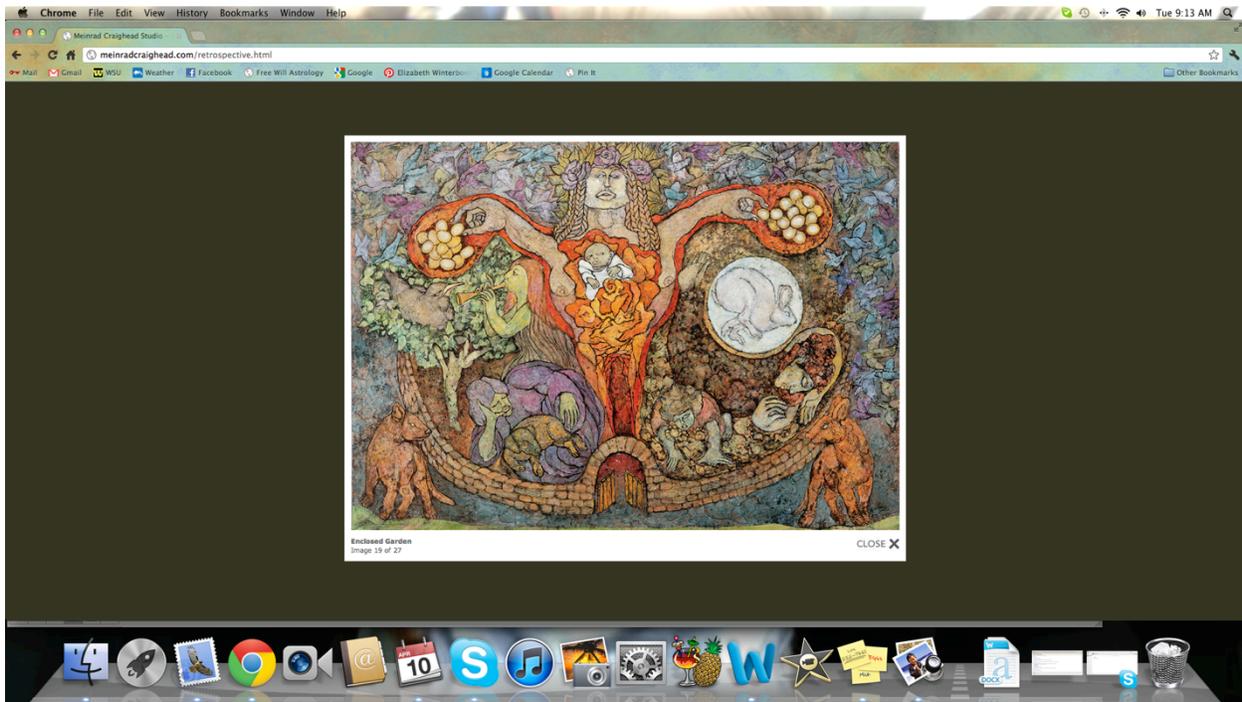
Death of a Dog, 1998

Death of a Dog shows a pet dog lying dead at the feet of a winged crow goddess. She is waving red torch-like objects as though she is summoning the coyote. Standing upright with outstretched arms is a coyote figure that seems to be receiving the spirit of the pet dog. In Native American culture the coyote is referred to as the trickster and a shape-shifter. The Navajos call the coyote “God’s Dog” (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010).

Loss of a pet dog can be a spiritual event, and to this painting represents the transition of the pet to the afterworld care of the coyote, there to receive the dog into heaven.

Death of a Dog, 1998 (Text by Virginia Beane Rutter)

*The Great Mother delivers us across the threshold of birth and receives us back across the threshold of death. Once begun, either process is inevitable. Waiting for a child to be born or for a person to die are both times of attending initiatory, sacred space. Our culture glorifies birth and ignores death. In analysis or deep psychology, a woman reclaims the symbolism of the whole archetype. The eye of the ego and the eye of the unconscious develop a mutual gaze and understanding that moves toward wholeness, toward embracing the opposites. Meinrad depicts the final threshold and intimates a rebirth in her painting *Death of a Dog*, 1998. The image shows Crow Mother holding a torch in both hands, one up setting fire to life, one down, extinguishing that life. A dead dog lies curled at her feet. The deity turns her head toward the Dog God, Coyote-Anubis, who moves toward her with arms out-stretched. Below her breasts, her figure is made of the white cocoon material. The gaze between Crow Mother and the Dog God is intense and loving. Although Coyote comes to receive the dead animal, he looks as if he wants to embrace and comfort Crow Mother. Perhaps the loss of the real dog, Brimos whose name means “fire of transformation” intensified the relationship between Meinrad and her spirit dog. That sacred marriage will result in a new birth. Meinrad assures us that “dogs are psychopomps. The dogs from your life will be there to greet you, to get you over the threshold of death” (Craighead, 2003).*



Enclosed Garden, 1984

Enclosed Garden is a complex image containing many symbolic figures. The central figure is a woman in the shape of a pregnant womb within a garden. Her vagina leads downward towards a curved gate within a brick or stone wall surrounding a garden. The woman has a tiny, yet unborn baby that lies sleeping curled up within a rose. The woman's arms reach out into ovaries and each hand is picking up an egg from a large pile. The woman's hair is braided symbolizing umbilical cords and her hair is crowned with roses. Surrounding the woman, the sky is completely filled with birds. Beneath her right arm there is a tree in full leaf with a crow. The tree and crow are both known to represent aspects of Mother. There is also a woman blowing a small horn and another woman resting, curled up with a pet dog. On her left side there is a full moon with a running rabbit. The rabbit and moon are common symbols throughout history that represent everlasting renewal and the cyclical nature of life (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). Below the moon a woman is sleeping and another appears to be working, perhaps kneading dough? Surrounding all of

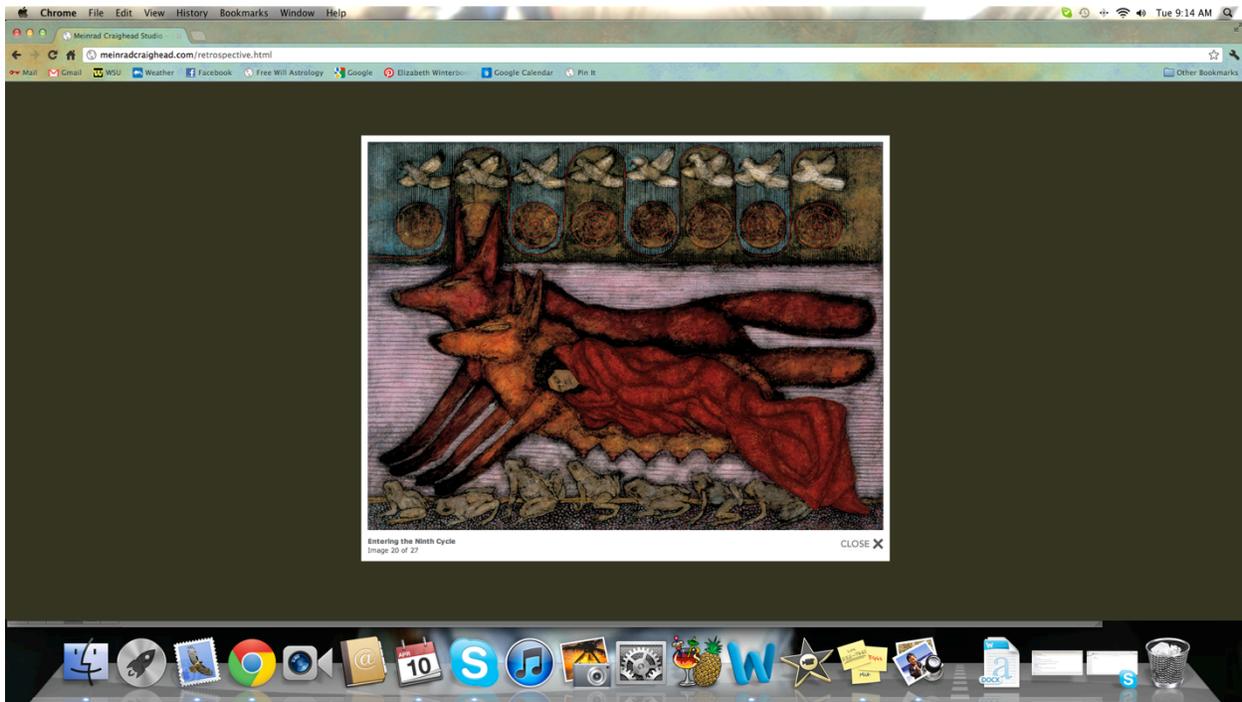
these images is a brick wall with the slightly opened gate. Outside the gate two dogs stand waiting, with eyes on the open gate.

Enclosed Garden is a very beautiful, moving painting that speaks of the fertility and life-giving power of women. There is a fullness and lushness in this painting that evokes the rich flowering of a woman's body and the role of women in waiting, caring and birthing new life.

Enclosed Garden, 1984 (Text by Virginia Beane Rutter)

Out of grieving the loss of her personal mother, Meinrad brought the archetypal mother to vibrant, visual life in her painting Enclosed Garden, 1984. As she worked with her own history, the female body came into the picture. Here, the garden is surrounded by a low brick wall, its arched entry guarded by dogs moving outside the periphery. The abundant life wrapped in the enclosure includes young girls and female figures, alluding to the painter at different stages of her life. Above them all, a large flower-crowned, golden-haired woman rises from the center. She is Demeter, the Greek goddess of grain, presiding over the life of the earth. She is also Lady of the Beasts, the goddess in her Artemis aspect. Her body is the womb, her arms fallopian tubes, and her hands are each joined to an ovary full of eggs. A tiny baby nestles between her breasts as a red rose. A tree with birds grow beneath her right hand, while a hare in a full moon is suspended under her left. Her uterine shape echoes the bulls' heads at Çatal Hüyük. The head of the bull is the uterus, with its horns the fallopian tubes, and symbolizes the transformation mystery of the power of the bull, or male energy, in the generative womb. The maternal threshold, the vaginal opening, flows with blood into the fertile earth. Meinrad said, "This is my first image of the Great Mother, the seed of the next journey is in that one."

...In the painting, the deity is selecting an egg from each ovary with her thumb and forefinger. The hands are instruments of the ego. Yet the deity's eyes are closed; she is looking inward (Craighead, 2003).



Entering The Ninth Cycle, 1993

Entering the Ninth Cycle has a rhythmic nature to its images. At the top of the painting are eight white birds in flight—perhaps doves. Below each bird, within regularly placed waves are eight circles containing a spiral. Below the circles there is a horizontal area with two large, running coyotes. The closest coyote is a female with five large teats visible. Carried within the female coyote is a figure wrapped in a red cloth that appears to be sleeping. Below the coyotes are seven frogs. Frog's as symbols for birth and water have been in existence since before 6000 B. C. E., linking womb, waters, fertility and developing life (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010).

In this painting called, *Entering the Ninth Cycle*, I believe the seven frogs are referring to the artist's life entering its seventh decade. Born in 1919, Meinrad Craighead would have been 74 at the time when this painting was created. The coyote, the Native American "shape shifter", is carrying the figure in repose and she is on her way up towards the eighth decade marked by spirals and flying doves.

Entering the Ninth Cycle, 1993 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

Burying Double Coyote – Abydos

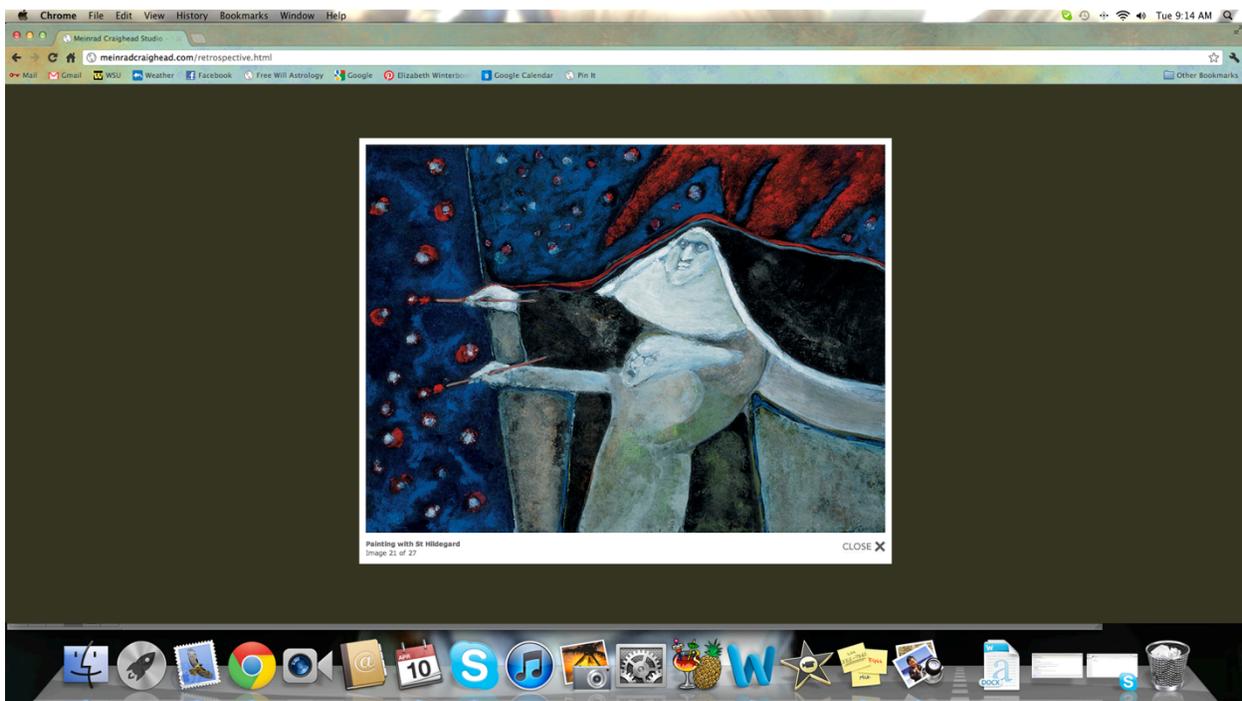
The time for our departure for Egypt drew near, and I gave much thought to finding a gift for Anubis. At Zune Pueblo, I found it: a six-inch, jet-black stone fetish. Father Coyote holds his tail straight back and has one turquoise eye. Mother Coyote's tail hangs down to touch the ground, and she has one turquoise eye. They run side by side, closely pressed together. Running, they become one body; where their heads join, they share a third turquoise eye.

Traveling with friends and an Egyptian guide, we reached Abydos and spent the day there; it was the last day of 1992. As we moved through this extensive site, I watched for a place to make my offering to Anubis. Late in the afternoon, the guide took John and Neil to a nearby site while Rosemary and I stayed in the temple complex and continued the search. Beset by begging children and suspicious temple guards, it seemed impossible that we would find a place apart for the few minutes of silence and solitude we needed for prayer. At last, in the ruins well away from the main temple, we found ourselves unexpectedly alone.

Between two low walls, where a corridor narrowed to a sheltered place, I spotted a lump of desiccated dog scat. I lifted the scat, dug a deep hole, buried the black Mother and Father Coyote, and carefully replaced the turds; all the while, I asked Anubis to receive my thanksgiving offering. With the late afternoon sun still hot on our backs, Rosemary and I clipped our fingernails into the sand over the gift, then snipped off bits of each other's hair and scattered them over the offering. Finally, taking turns, we squatted and marked the place with urine. After sitting for a while in silence, our ritual ended and we turned to leave. Immediately, we were set upon by children running toward us over the rubble. Isolated, we

were choice prey for the little beggars, and they plucked at our clothing until we gave them candy.

I often recall that day when we went to Abydos to worship. Finding that a dog had designated the place, performing the succession of simple body rituals, and experiencing the unlikely stillness as we completed our prayer-all made whole a day of great heart purpose enshrouded in Anubis's ceremonial garment of invisibility (Craighead, 2003).



Painting with St. Hildegard, 2001

Against a background of a night sky, the painting shows a ghostly-looking nun figure painting and guiding another, smaller figure painting. They are both reaching across a line or wall and look like they are painting the stars in the sky.

St. Hildegard was a 12th century nun that is much beloved. She was given to visions and had a holistic, natural view of healing that is embraced by the New Age community today. A mystic with the ability to see into the future, she was very influential and respected even by the pope (Foley, 2012). This painting shows how Meinrad Craighead received spiritual guidance from St. Hildegard to create her art. Held like a child, Meinrad identifies with a young girl being supported as she paints. The figures both seem to reach across a wall or line, which signifies the line of acceptability or propriety where a nun might feel confined.

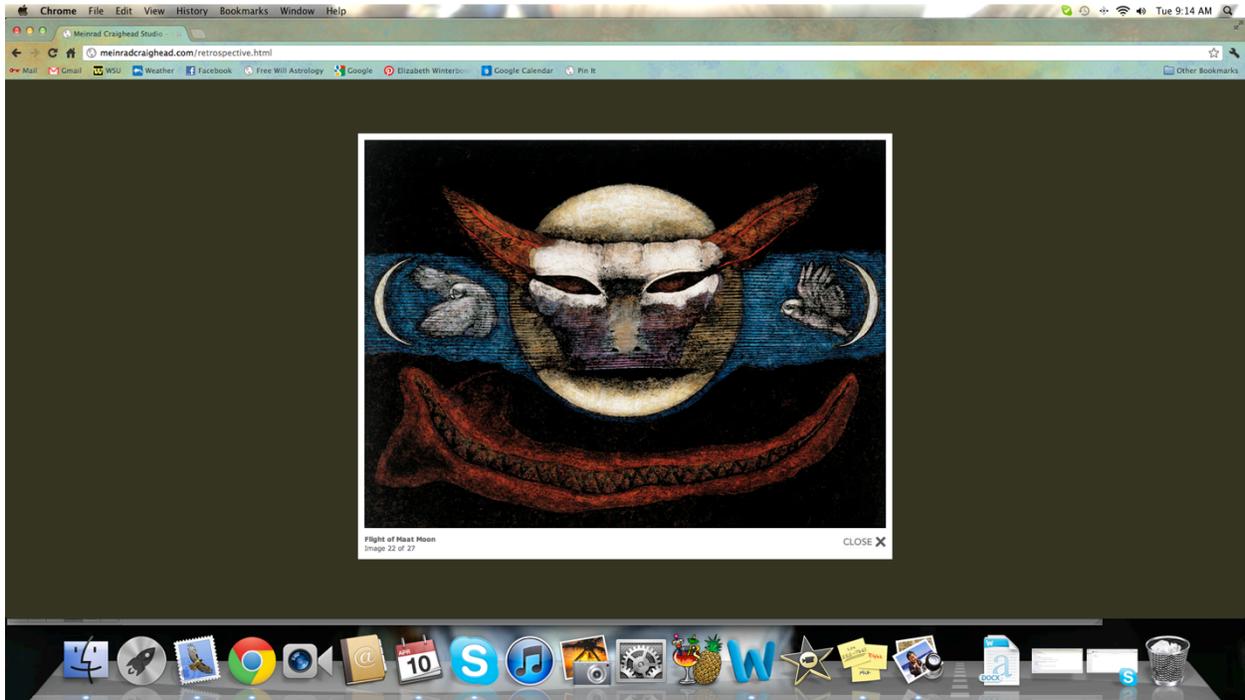
Painting with St. Hildegard, 2001 (Text by Virginia Beane Rutter)

In the fall of 1998 on the occasion of Hildegard's nine-hundredth anniversary, Meinrad undertook a two-week pilgrimage back to the Rhine with her sister Carole. This trip preceded a year of physical trauma and illness, which Meinrad calls her "dismemberment nadir" at age sixty-four. In 2001, during her recovery, the fire inspiration returned, and she painted St. Hildegard in three watercolors.

In Painting with St. Hildegard a childlike Meinrad is being held by the abbess and both of them are painting red and white eye-like scintilla on the sky. Meinrad is Hildegard's spiritual child; they see visions together.

In these paintings Meinrad returns to the inner intensity of contemplative life, to her own mysticism. Hildegard infuses her with new vision and shows that there is budding life in the chrysalis to which she has returned. The presence of fire also alludes to the masculine spirit that ignites a woman's creativity, because Hildegard, too, lived her spiritual and creative life in relation to a fiery principle. C. G. Jung commented on Hildegard's text that "the radiance of 'the countless eyes' means 'God's knowledge,' that is his seeing and knowing...the souls of men are 'fireballs'"

(Craighead, 2003).



Flight of the Maat Moon, 1989

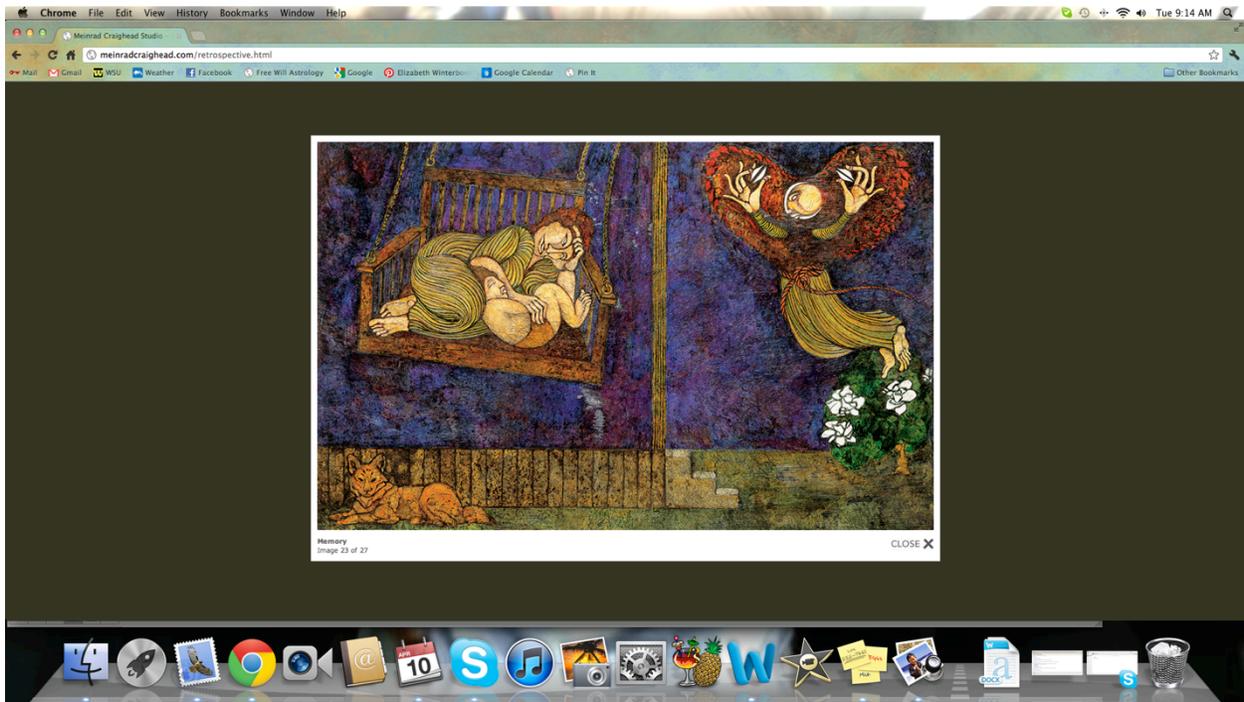
The painting *Flight of the Maat Moon* focuses on the Celtic symbol of the Goddess, which features two crescent moons with a full moon between them, flanked by two owls in flight. The full moon is covered with a mask. Beneath the moon image a snake is stretched out across the canvas.

Maat was the Egyptian Goddess of Right. She was the personification of truth and justice and was signified by an ostrich feather. She was known to restore order from chaos and was so respected that gods revered her and obeyed by pharaohs (Seawright, 2011). The mask of this painting is that of Maat. The owls are showing the passing of time and wisdom as they fly from one moon to the next. The snake represents continuous life, transformed through the shedding of skin, close to earth and emblematic of primordial life force (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010).

Flight of the Maat Moon, 1989 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

“O Eternal Presence, measure us, we beseech Thee”

Standing before the west face of the altar is to think about the End, which is union. The pictures here repeat those on the face of the altar, but in reverse. Here the water does not rain vertically, it flows horizontally. It is the water lying in earth, a river running to its source. It is one river merging with all rivers to become one body of water lying just over the horizon (which is everywhere at eye level). Turtle crawls down underground to wait through the dark half of our year. With her winged horns the full moon embraces her sisters. They are herself, her other eyes. The old sickle moon looks back to her virgin aspect and thinks, My, how time flies. She is grandmother now, flying into oblivion. Snake carries West to the End where we all go to sleep, to die, to drop off the edge with sun into Beginning (Craighead, 2003).



Memory, 1982

Memory is the painting of a woman and a child on a porch swing. The swing is in motion. On the ground beside the porch is a watching dog. In the air next to the porch an angel is in the air, watching the two figures. She has her arms outstretched and in each hand she has finger cymbals. The angel is wearing a belt that is a rope, tied around her waist. There is a flowering bush with white flowers in full bloom.

This painting is of Meinrad Craighead as a young girl wrapped in her grandmother's arms, swinging on the swing at night. They are being watched by the angel and perhaps can hear the angel as she plays the little cymbals. The full blossoms and the figure's bare feet tell of a hot summer's night. *Memory* is a painting that depicts the artist's recollection of being safe in her grandmother's arms and the protective feelings evoked as though guarded by an angel playing sweet music.

Memory, 1982 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

My parents moved often when we were youngsters. We lived in many apartments and I attended school in four states. The security of my grandparents' small frame house on Main Street steadied me. My mother was born there. It was as holy and immovable as a mountain, connected to the earth, spreading shade like the trees that surrounded it. I might be moved around, but the house stayed there, and my grandparents did, awaiting my return each summer.

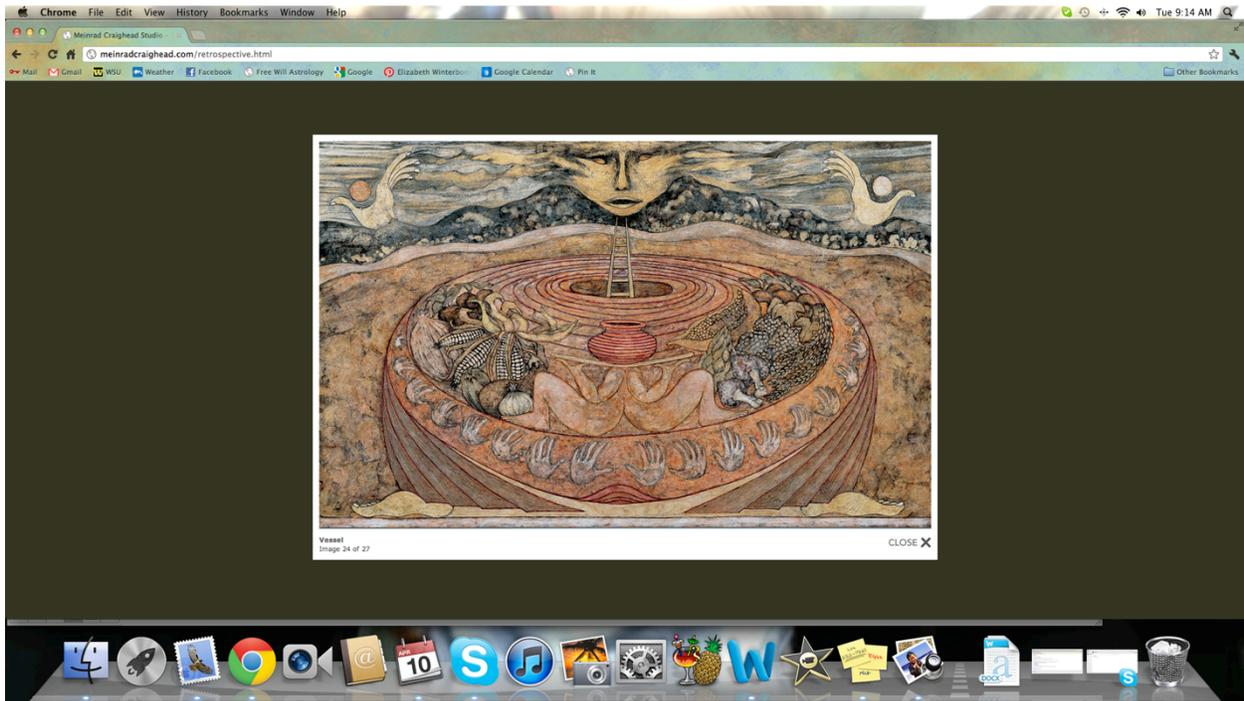
Often at night, after Grandpa had left for the station at ten o'clock to drive the train to Memphis, Memaw and I went for a walk. The sidewalk was still warm under our bare feet, the rubber moss roses cool, and, even in the darkness, the nasturtiums glowed orange, the gardenias, white.

From the swing on the front porch, Memaw presided over night. There was a humming about the woman, keening melismata drawing in the pulsing cicadas and silent fireflies. Lying in her lap I felt the humming slowly absorb the rhythm of the swing. The swinging bower swung the sounds and silences of nighttime and arced us into the flying starlit sky (Craighead, 2003).

(Text by Virginia Beane Rutter)

The ink drawing Memory, 1982, shows Meinrad as a child sleeping in Memaw's arms in a swing. A moon-beaded, red winged angel floats in the sky above three white gardenias, arms upraised, clicking castanets in its fingers.

Meinrad's dog familiar lies sleeping beneath the swing. Here the bond between granddaughter and grandmother is being blessed by a spirit. The image of the angel watching over them embodies the early physical bonding and pattern of trust in the motherline that Meinrad experienced (Craighead, 2003).



Vessel, 1983

Vessel is a painting of soft earth colors showing a large Goddess that forms the entire landscape. The mouth of the Goddess is blowing between two mountains appearing like breasts. Her arms reach out forming mountain ridges and each hand is upright, supporting two full moons in the sky. A ladder is reaching from the Goddess's mouth down into a hole into the ground. The hole is part of an enormous vessel, or bowl around which the Goddess's legs wrap. The vessel itself is highly decorated. There is a painting of a smaller bowl as part of the decoration, along with corn, gourds, mushrooms, artichokes and wheat. Two headless, naked figures support the smaller vessel. All around the large vessel are handprints. At the base of the vessel there is a small lip that looks like the vulva.

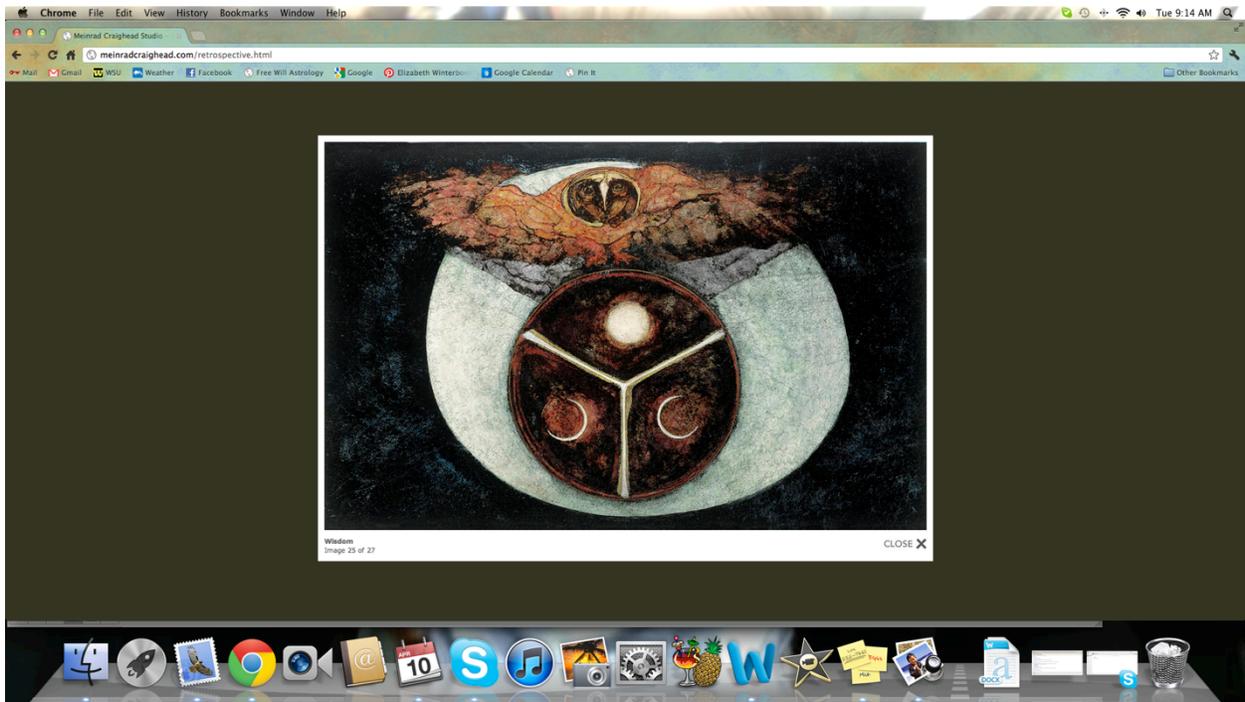
This painting depicts Mother Earth, the Great Goddess and how all life comes from within her. Her body forms the landscape and provides the place from where we receive life and food and care and the handprints are significant representations of the many hands that are part of the life process.

Vessel, 1983 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

When I came to New Mexico in 1960 I found the land that matched my interior landscape. The door separating inside and outside opened. The images my eyes saw meshed with images I carried inside my body. Pictures painted on the walls of my womb began to emerge.

Over twenty years later I returned to New Mexico, and I went to the Great River to complete the circle of my long journey. Near the Rio Grande is Kuaua Kiva, a sacred hole in the ground. I climbed down the ladder and sat in the center of the cool, dark vessel. The walls of this womb are painted. Hares and birds are spitting seeds. Clouds and rain fertilize maize and jimson weed. Shafts of lightening flash into pots and are held there. Human handprints chase a trail of deer hooves. Masked dancers, girded with conch shells, spin hoops and rattle gourds.

The snake and eagles bear their messages to me (Craighead, 2003).



Wisdom, 1983

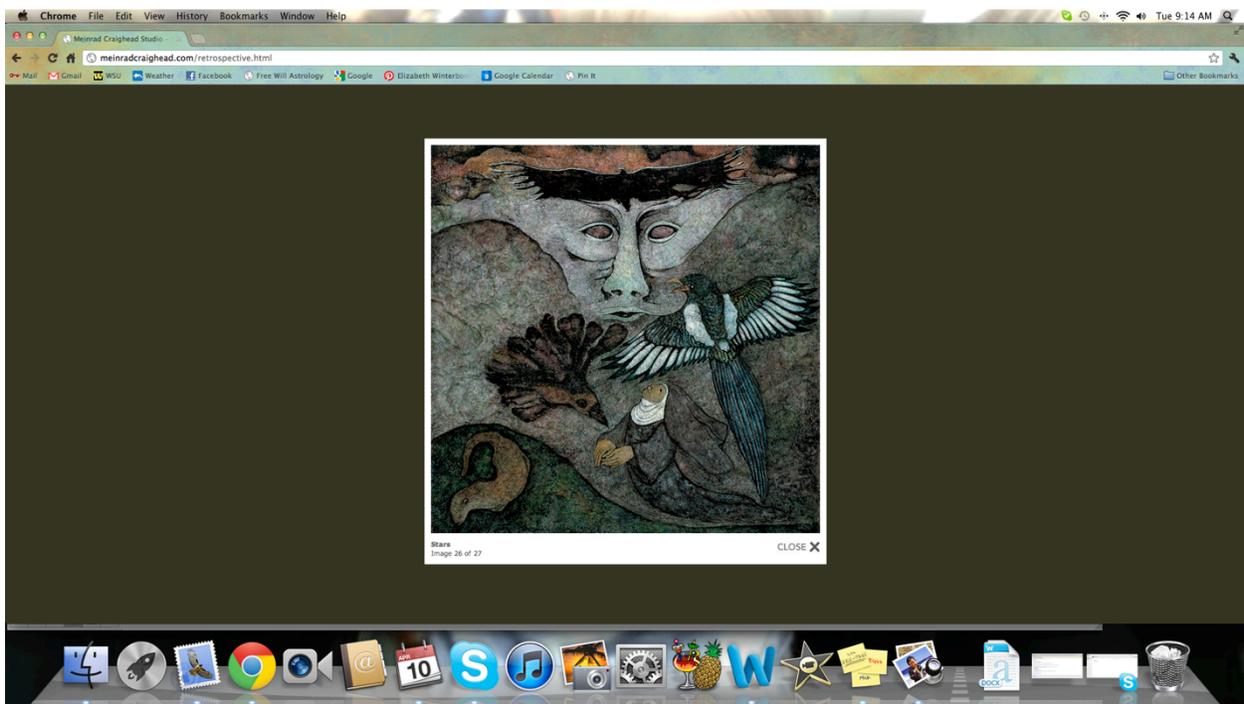
Wisdom is a painting with simple, elegant symbolism. The image shows a large white egg in a black background or sky. An owl with widespread wings is facing directly at the viewer. The owl is flying over a full moon with the Celtic Goddess symbol. The full moon is divided into three equal pieces. The three symbols, Maid, Mother and Crone, are represented by their moon phase in each of the pieces of the moon.

This painting is symbolic of the fullness of life, like the fullness of the egg. The egg represents the creation myth from whence the Universe is born. It is the symbol of regeneration and rebirth. The owl conveys the wisdom of the ages, bringing the ability of what is dark into the light, but also the ability to live in the darkness (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). The moon represents the cycles of life, always appearing and passing.

Wisdom, 1983 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

When I reach through the hole at my center the gift eludes my grasp. Whatever it may be, I can possess it only as that mystery which beckons from the greatest distance and draws my heart deeper into the quest.

The journey waxes full and then wanes dark, again and again. I stare into my hole focusing on a single point, waiting for her to dart wildly through my landscape (Craighead, 2003).



Stars, 1984

The painting *Stars* is the painting of a praying nun. She is a small figure, sitting in the darkness and searching the sky. Above her are figures of a large magpie, a mythical looking bird, and a black crow-like bird that forms the top of a large face. Below the nun there is a creature, a sleek figure with a long, thick tail that looks like an otter or maybe a salamander.

This painting looks like a nun asking for answers. She is looking into the sky, and although the title of the painting is Stars, there does not appear to be a traditional star image. Instead, the sky is filled with birds. A mythical bird, a magpie and a crow are visible. Birds are seen as the bridge between earth and heaven, as they can fly where no man can go. They have the gift of vision from their higher viewpoint. The nun appears to be asking the birds and the great face, a goddess, for advice.

Stars, 1984 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

For some years I have corresponded with Iyanaga Genku, a Zen Buddhist monk in Tokyo. He often sends his poems; “Magpie” was the first I received.

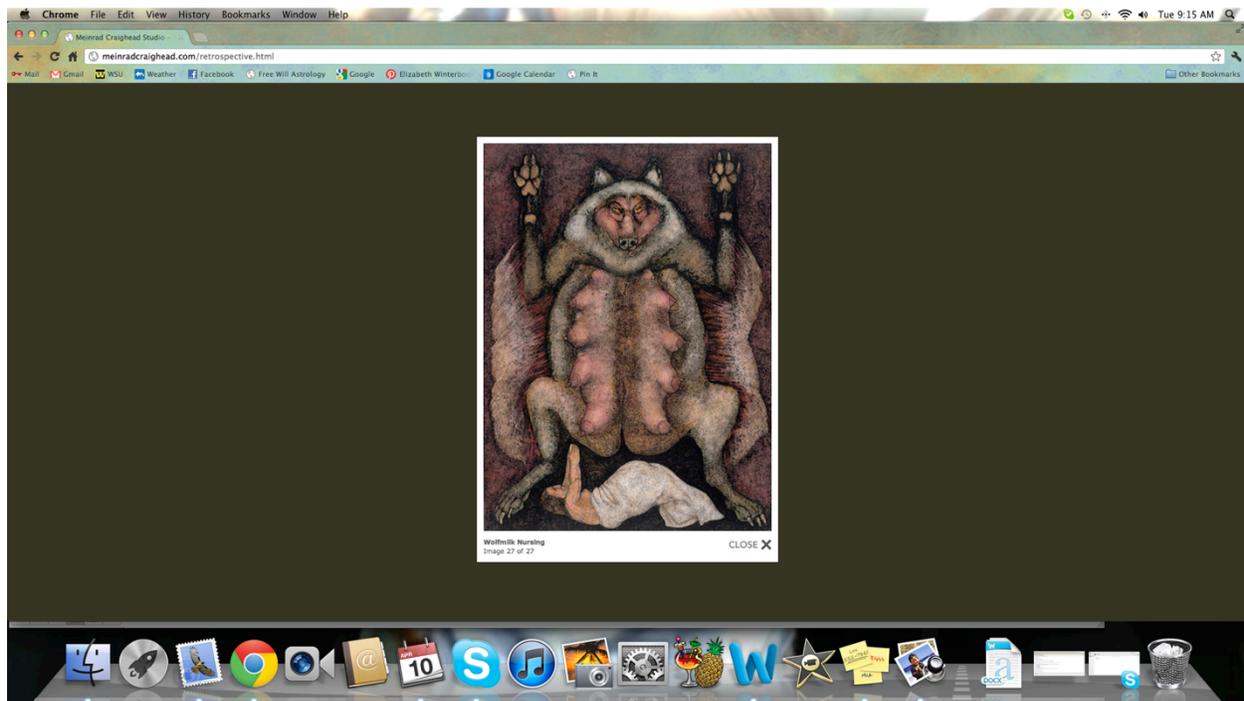
The magpie, the magpie
called to me,
“Look at the Morning Star”
she called to me.

The magpie called again to me.
“Look at the Evening Star”
she called to me.

Her eye opens above the eastern horizon, the Morning Star of the youngest Mother, as old as the dawn of the world’s first morning. Her spirit slips forward in successive moments, releasing color from night, waving the first dim light through her veils. Birds fly from her body singing, awakening us to prayer. The Morning Star shines in the darkness of our prayer in the light of spiritual awakening.

Twilight runs in the grasses, collects in hollows, spreads. Dusk blurs edges; disparate patterns are sewn together and dissolve into the primordial unity of night. We see the

Evening Star, fiery red in the green or yellow sky to the left of sunset, set over the night road and the western gate of death. The wheel turns, moving us over the horizon into darkness (Craighead, 2003).



Wolfmilk Nursing, 1992

Wolfmilk Nursing is a strong image of a wolf mother, standing or squatting on her hind legs and holding her front paws in the air like hands. She is staring straight ahead. Her teats are very full. Lying on the ground is a small figure of a woman draped in white, who is reaching upwards in a prayerful, beseeching way, towards the wolf mother.

The primordial she-wolf nurtured a civilization into being, which indicates the importance of the wolf for the creative process, culture building and our capacity to engage psyche's energies of dissolution as well as rebirth in our repeated cycles of transformation (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism, 2010). The small, helpless figure of the woman is asking the great primordial

she-wolf for sustenance of all kinds, including spiritual nutrition. Honoring our source of life and our place on earth, this painting displays the power of where we come from and the source that keeps us alive.

Wolfmilk Nursing, 1992 (Text by Meinrad Craighead)

At the home of a friend, a small group of us sat on the floor, a shaman among us. I had never journeyed with a shaman before, but I'd always known that creativity is essentially shamanic: we surrender to the spirit world and are led on a journey of discovery and recovery. How could someone else find my images and give them to me? I was deeply skeptical but not unwilling.

When the drumming begins, my soul travels south of Albuquerque to the ruined Cerro Indian pueblo overlooking the Rio Grande. I want to linger with the petroglyphs there but I am pressed on across the empty scrubland. After a while, at a distance, I see an animal running toward me. As we draw together, I see that it is a wolf; she rises on hind legs exposing her swollen breasts. Her front legs raised as if in praise of the beauty, she slowly circles in a round dance. Her swollen teats shine pink, and I understand that this nourishment is for me. I call to her, "Your name is Wolfmilk!" She replies, "My name is Wolfmilk." She indicates that I am to follow her, and we travel into the empty landscape in the direction from which she has come. We move at a brisk pace, and I begin to tire.

Suddenly Wolfmilk simply vanishes, and I am left standing before Anubis. His tall, black body is wrapped in ceremonial scarves; his delicately pleated white kilt hangs to the ground and blows around my body. He grasps my shoulders and we gaze into each other's eyes. I understand that I belong to the Dog God. He is Opener of the Way, and as my mother's firstborn, he claims me for himself. Unexpectedly, a river appears beside us, and Anubis

takes my hand as we step into the Nile's current. But the journey ends at that moment because at another level of consciousness, I faintly hear the shaman's drum, signaling the necessity for my return. It drags me from Anubis and returns me to the group. Many months later, Wolfmilk and I traveled to Egypt (Craighead, 2003).

(Text by Virginia Beane Rutter)

In the ink painting Wolfmilk Nursing, 1992, a huge, gray she-wolf rises up on hind legs to expose its pink belly and milk-swollen teats. Meinrad has depicted the animal with discontinuous realism: the huge paws are closely seen; other body parts fade into gray blurs. As a whole, the rampant wolf is more significant as heraldry. Meinrad simplified and flattened the animal into space that resembles a playing card. Each wonderful paw occupies a corner of the format. The face is a wolf mask. Amber eyes stare intently like those of transfixed saints in Greek and Russian icons.

Below the wolf lies the artist, shown as a girl. She is nude, wrapped in a white cloth. An exposed breast points toward the teats, as if to compare her vulnerable immaturity to the nursing mother's wild fertility. Her bare arms reach toward the teats in a gesture that combine obeisance with prayer. In animal language of dominance, Meinrad, virtually naked and belly up, willingly submits, subordinating herself to the alpha's higher power. She will drink the terrible mother's milk like a wolf pup, believing that the feral substance will change her. The image, a rite of passage, feels like a fairy tale. Its message is as clear as that of Beuys with the coyote, but there is a difference. Beuys claimed to let the animal teach him, yet he dominated with staff and cape. Meinrad surrendered completely. As with the coyote, wolf milk was medicine (Craighead, 2003).