

Lesbian Love and the Great Goddess in Louise Maheux- Forcier's *Amadou*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the portrayal of the lesbian lover as an embodiment of the Great Goddess figure in the Quebec novel *Amadou*. A study of literary imagery and intertextuality in this novel shows how the first person narrator, Nathalie, creates her own personal mythology of a pagan, matriarchal cult in direct opposition to the dominant patriarchal, Judeo-Christian order upheld notably by her husband, a self-appointed Christ figure and representative of the Father's law, who proposes to save Nathalie from her own lesbian desires.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine la représentation de l'amante lesbienne comme incarnation de la Grande Déesse dans le roman québécois *Amadou*. Une étude des images littéraires et de l'intertextualité dans ce roman révèlent la façon dont la narratrice autodiégétique, Nathalie, crée sa propre mythologie d'un culte matriarcal et païen qui s'oppose directement à l'ordre patriarcal, judéo-chrétien prédominant appuyé notamment par son mari, soi-disant Rédempteur et représentant de la loi du Père, qui voudrait protéger Nathalie de ses désirs lesbiens.

ALTHOUGH LOUISE MAHEUX-FORCIER'S first novel, *Amadou*, received the Prix du Cercle de France upon its publication in 1963, critics were slow to recognize its literary importance. Warmly praising *Amadou* in 1964, André Brochu foresaw that certain critics would camouflage their moral disapproval of this novel, one of the first in Quebec to mention the taboo subject of lesbianism, by criticizing its aesthetic form (338).

More recently, Roseanna Dufault, a feminist critic, has shown how the reception of this novel has been negatively affected by a reluctance

to accept the narrator's bisexuality as a responsible adult choice. In the past few years, more and more critics, especially those outside Quebec, have chosen to study the complex structure and imagery of this novel. In 1987, David Lobdell published a comparative study of Maheux-Forcier's *Amadou* and *By Grand Central Station I lay down and wept* by English Canadian writer Elizabeth Smart, as poetic celebrations of eroticism. He stresses the tendency to transform the loved one into a divine figure. In this study, I would like to pursue the theme of the divine loved one in *Amadou* to show how literary image and inter-

text work together in the narrator's discourse to create a pagan, matriarchal world in direct opposition to the patriarchal, Judeo-Christian order.

In the matriarchal myth created by the narrator Nathalie, the Supreme Deity is her first love, Anne, the metonymic incarnation of Beauty: "Elle était la Beauté et tout naturellement, elle découvrait la beauté autour d'elle" / "She was beauty incarnate and responded naturally to the beauty of the world about her...." (23).¹ Nathalie kneels before a vision of Anne as one of Botticelli's creations, "superbe et nue dans ses cheveux" (45) / "a superb, naked figure with a luxuriant head of hair" (22) — one cannot help but think of Botticelli's "Birth of Venus." Anne's role as a pagan idol, a manifestation of the Great Goddess image,² is especially supported by metaphors equating Anne with a statuette:

Je l'avais trouvée comme mon ami Jean découvre ses petites statuettes en Turquie et ressuscite des villes endormies, enfouies sous la poussière et les avalanches et le temps et le feu. Anne m'attendait du fond des âges, couverte de terre et pareille à moi. (13) / I had discovered her in the same way that my friend, Jean, discovers his little statuettes in Turkey, resurrecting sleeping cities buried beneath the dust of avalanches, time and fire. Anne was waiting for me at the bottom of the ages, covered with earth, a replica of myself. (7)

Toute la beauté du monde résumée dans ses cheveux! [...] Sur ses savates, toute la terre qui recouvre depuis des siècles, toutes les statuettes égyptiennes encore enfouies et les vases grecs merveilleux! (43) / In that head of hair was to be found all the beauty in the world. [...] On those battered shoes, all the earth that had lain for centuries over all the unexcavated

Egyptian figurines, all the marvellous Greek urns, in existence. (21)

elle était aussi, très exactement, une statuette de terre cuite créée par un artiste joyeux et bon, en des temps inconnus.... (47) / She was like a terracotta figurine, whose limbs had been shaped by a noble, joyful artist in some prehistoric atelier.... (23)

It is no accident that this first passage is immediately preceded by a reference to the intertext that clarifies its significance: "Puis quand je glissais ma cuisse douce entre ses cuisses elle devenait sérieuse et nous disions les chansons de Bilitis" (13) / "But when I slid my soft thigh between her own, she grew serious and we chanted the songs of Bilitis" (7). *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, published by Pierre Louys in 1894, are verses in the sapphic mode, the fictional memoirs of Bilitis, supposedly a contemporary of Sappho.³ As Nathalie encounters Anne for the first time on a hot dusty street, so Bilitis discovers her true love, Mnasidika, unexpectedly: "Je l'ai trouvée comme un trésor, dans un champ, sous un buisson de myrte ..." (118) / "I discovered her like a treasure, in a field, under a myrtle bush."⁴ Around her neck Mnasidika wears as protection a nude statuette of the goddess Astarte (119). In a poem describing the statuette, Bilitis proclaims the Goddess as "la Très-Belle," "la Très-Amoureuse" and "la Mère-de-toutes-choses" (120-121). As an incarnation of the Great Goddess, Anne obviously embodies beauty and love but, as we shall see, her role as "Mother of all things" is ambiguous. At the same time, Nathalie's veneration of Anne in the form of a statuette contravenes the Judeo-Christian ethic by breaking the commandment against the worship of graven images. In her book *When God was a Woman*, Merlin Stone emphasizes the widespread destruction of images of the Great Goddess perpetrated by the

Jews and, later, by the Christians, who wished to replace the ancient matriarchal religion with their own, as commanded by the Scriptures (xvii).⁵

Related to Anne's role as graven image is the fetishism of golden hair which Nathalie considers her personal talisman. Anne is often described in reference to her golden hair: "un visage-enfant, blé d'or et clin d'oeil malicieux" (34) / "the haunting memory of a child's face, a flash of golden cornsilk, a mischievous wink" (17). Because of Anne's memory, Nathalie is later drawn to a golden-maned horse (15), to the golden-haired dog Gaspard and then to the ash-blond Sylvia. At the death of Gaspard, Nathalie holds the dog in her arms: "J'étais recouverte d'une chevelure blonde, talisman de ma vie: j'étais «cheveux d'or» comme on est gémeaux ou verseau..." (134) / "Suddenly, I was covered in long, blond hair, like a talisman, the talisman of my life: I was Golden Hair, just as others are Gemini or Aquarius" (68). The synecdoche which concentrates Anne's divine power in her golden hair belongs to the metonymic rather than the metaphoric principle, according to Roman Jakobson's distinction. Ewa Thompson points out the relationship between metonymy and J.G. Frazer's concept of "contagious magic" as expressed in *The Golden Bough*: "things that have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed."⁶ The idea that the golden hair could hold a magical power through its spatiotemporal association with Anne is fundamentally pagan. In an intertextual reference to Guy de Maupassant's short story "La Chevelure," Nathalie asserts her pagan faith in the face of a modern world which can only perceive such a belief as madness:

C'est un conte assez horrible: c'est l'histoire d'un collectionneur qui achète un vieux meuble italien et dans une cachette

de ce meuble, il découvre un jour, une chevelure dorée. Alors, il tombe amoureux de cette chevelure; il fait l'amour avec elle et invente des plaisirs les plus rares ... mais il finit pas se trahir et se retrouve dans un asile d'aliénés. Mais je suis certaine que cet homme n'était pas fou. (126-127) / It's a terrible story about a collector who buys an Italian antique, and in one of the drawers he discovers a golden hair. He falls in love with that hair, he makes love to it, he invents the rarest pleasures ... but he ends up betraying himself and he finds himself in a mad house. But I'm sure that man wasn't mad. (64)

By this implied comparison, Nathalie affirms the sanity of her own belief in the face of a world that sternly imposes its sexual and religious norms and could only see Nathalie's fascination with the golden hair of her idol as a symptom of madness.

Along with its mythic significance, hair symbolism in this novel mirrors the subjection of women. Anne's flowing long hair represents her freedom. Nicole Bourbonnais emphasizes the euphoric nature of Anne's death, "un geste délibéré et joyeux" (Bourbonnais 179), as the young girl dives into the pool of water with her long hair streaming behind her "comme une traînée de poudre lumineuse au soleil" (14) / "like a trail of luminous powder" (8). This luminosity links Anne's hair with the pervasive fire imagery in the novel. Her death represents the magical fusion of fire and water and, as such, parallels Nathalie's later suicide in purifying fire.⁷

The theme of feminine freedom represented by long, unconfined hair reappears in certain images linking hair and birds as symbols of freedom:

je traçais sur le sable, de grandes arabesques de cheveux; cela faisait comme des empreintes d'oiseaux fantastiques que la

mer venait lécher en me rapportant mes sandales. (16) / I was a painter, sketching long arabesques in the sand, like heads of hair, like the tracks of fantastic birds. (9)

J'observe Sylvia: je la sens continuellement comme un oiseau prêt à s'envoler et je ne comprends pas sa présence tenace ni le frôlement léger de ses ailes de cendre sur mon cœur. (115-116) / I observe Sylvia, sensing that at any moment she might break into flight, wondering why she is still here, her ashen wings ruffling my tender heart ... and I fail to understand. (58)

In contrast, the constraints imposed on women by patriarchal society are symbolized by restrictive hair styles. Nathalie's first lover demands that she put up her hair to conform to his vision of womanhood:

Le premier, il a pris les deux tresses que j'avais sur le dos, il n'en a fait qu'une, énorme, me l'a enroulée sur la tête et m'a dit: «Voilà, tu es une femme!» (15) / The first one seized the braids hanging down my back and wound them together, making an enormous coil that he rolled on top of my head, "Now, you're a woman." (8)

When her lover Julien forces Nathalie to visit a lesbian bar as part of his crusade to "cure" her, she notices that the lesbian couples imitate the power structure of heterosexual couples, each couple including a long-haired woman with soft features and a short-haired woman with angular features (37). To her, the relationship between these women is but a travesty of her love for Anne. Long, flowing golden tresses are then fitting symbols of freedom and magic within Nathalie's personal mythology centred on Goddess worship in a patriarchal society that wishes to control women.

Images of Anne are not taken exclusively from a pagan context. Nathalie also envisages

her as a Pantocrater, a Byzantine Christ, in the arch of the Romanesque chapel which Nathalie has rented with Julien and their friends Sylvia and Robert:

Une chapelle romane sans cloître ni cimetière, Sylvia, Robert, Julien, Gaspard et moi, et dans la belle voûte, comme un Pantocrator avec ses grands yeux fixes: Anne que je suis seule à voir. (77) / A Romanesque chapel, without cloister or cemetery. Sylvia, Robert, Julien, Gaspard and myself. And, high in the lovely vault, like a Pantocrator gazing down with large, fixed eyes: Anne, whom I alone could see. (38)

The implied comparison with Christ does not detract from Anne's essential femininity. Rather, this simile subverts the patriarchal Judeo-Christian tenet that God is necessarily masculine, as expressed in this statement by a member of the clergy opposed to the ordination of women, quoted by Stone in *When God was a Woman*: "Christ is the source of Priesthood. The Sexuality of Christ is no accident nor is his masculinity incidental. This is the divine choice."⁸ Furthermore, the unorthodox image of Anne as Pantocrater adored by Nathalie recalls an earlier image in which Nathalie speaks of "le Christ hallucinant au plafond de la coupole" (18) in a church in Decani. Nathalie feels nothing but contempt for the priest of this church who, in her view, represents madness while the architecture itself represents reason. Rejecting Christian theology, Nathalie nonetheless accepts Christian architecture as a fitting setting for her Goddess, an ironic reversal of the early Christian custom of converting pagan temples into their own (Stone xvii-xviii).

Several literary images suggest the divine nature of Sylvia, Nathalie's adult lesbian lover: "C'est une espèce de déesse...." (98) / "She was a sort of goddess" (49); "Sylvia, dans

cette église, prêtresse en collants noirs..." (98) / "A priestess in black tights" (49); "Sylvia, ma déesse!" (137) / "Sylvia, my little goddess" (69). Nathalie sees her as a natural inhabitant of pagan Greece: "Je la voyais comme une elfe à travers des oliviers tortueux et argentés du gouffre de Delphes, ou bien, dansant autour de la petite Tholos de Marmaria, bercée d'un doux air de flûte." (120) / "I saw her as an elf, glimpsed through the twisted, silvery branches of the olive trees on the Gulf of Delphes, or dancing about the little Tholos of Marmaria, rocked by the sweet notes of a flute" (65). Like Anne, she is associated with a statuette of magical powers, specifically a jade princess that Robert has purchased for her birthday. During a trip to Paris where he encourages Nathalie to follow her true lesbian nature by taking Sylvia as her lover, Robert places the statuette in the room as a symbol of Sylvia to sanctify his lovemaking with Nathalie:

Les deux mains croisées sous la nuque, il me regarde en faisant des ronds de fumée bleue, de petits cercles qui s'agrandissent et vont couronner le jade insolite, diamant dans la fange, Sylvia minuscule, déesse du foyer dans cette chambre minable. (110) / His hands clasped behind his head, he gazed at me, blowing rings of blue tobacco smoke, little circles that grew larger and larger and drifted over to crown the strange little jade figure at his side, a diamond in the mud, a minuscule Sylvia, a household goddess ensconced in that pathetic room. (55)

As they make love, Nathalie notices the statuette who seems to respond in a coquettish manner to the scene: "la poupée de jade a relevé son éventail devant sa bouche et j'ai crié: «Sylvia!» à la face de la terre." (116) / "the jade doll raised her fan before her mouth, as I cried 'Sylvia!' to the hidden face of the world" (59). Both lovers see the other as a substitute for Sylvia and their lovemaking constitutes ritual worship of this flawed goddess represented

by a jade doll, a less exalted figure than the timeless statuette of the divine Anne.

Though she resembles Anne in many ways, Sylvia is a less pure incarnation of the Great Goddess. Unlike Anne who was incapable of duplicity, Sylvia lies effortlessly. When Nathalie realizes this, she is in fact relieved since it means that her love for Sylvia does not threaten her worship of Anne, her "idole ancienne" (127) / "her ancient idol." In fact, she finds in this new love a deliverance from the potentially destructive identification with the dark side of the Great Goddess, the "Mother of all things," appearing here as the Terrible Mother who maintains the individual in a state of dependence:¹⁰

Mais je retrouvais aussi, en même temps, une certaine forme d'équilibre, comme si ce bronze ancien au lieu d'adhérer à moi comme ma propre chair, se fut soudain détaché et placé devant mes yeux sans me toucher physiquement: peut-être plus présent et plus visible mais moins lourd et moins destructeur. (128) / At the same time, I had recovered at least a part of my equilibrium, as if that ancient bronze figure that I had once confused with myself had suddenly detached itself from me and become a separate entity, more present and more visible perhaps but infinitely less ponderous and destructive. (64-65)

Sylvia's letters reveal that she perceives Anne as her only serious rival: "Je serai la lumière et la chaleur de ton corps et mes cheveux couleront jusqu'à la pointe de mes chevilles pour effacer le Botticelli de ton parc ensorcelé" (149) / "I shall be the light and the warmth of your body. I shall let my hair grow right to my ankles, to efface the little Botticelli in the park" (74). In her love for Sylvia, Nathalie is finally able to dissociate herself from the Great Goddess figure that she worships and to accept an imperfect, human love.

The intimacy between Sylvia and Nathalie is evident in the echoes of Nathalie's monologue contained in Sylvia's letters; for example, Sylvia's reference here to Anne as Botticelli's creation, a comparison made by Nathalie near the beginning of the novel, as we have seen. Long before the reader, Sylvia has heard Nathalie's life story; she is the preferred narratee, the confidante. Still, Nathalie is unable simply to leave Julien for Sylvia as Sylvia begs her to do. Instead, she aspires to return through suicide in a blaze of fire to her eternal cult of Anne: "Peut-être alors je trouverai une paix ineffable jusqu'à la fin des temps dans l'éclaboussant bonheur de mes quinze ans retrouvés" (157) / "Perhaps, then, I shall find the peace I have been seeking. A peace that will carry me right to the end of time, in the diffuse happiness of my resurrected fifteenth year" (80). Dufault contests the prevalent interpretation that Nathalie commits suicide because of her inability to abandon her obsession with her adolescent idol in order to have a mature relationship. She insists that Nathalie has achieved "a valid adult relationship" with Sylvia as opposed to her adolescent love for Anne (108); rather, it is Julien who puts an end to Nathalie's relationship with Sylvia by confiscating her letters (109). While it is doubtlessly true that Julien's merciless interrogation of Nathalie for days after his discovery of the letters leads her to the murder-suicide, Nathalie's ambivalence over Sylvia's invitation to resume a ménage à trois is already evident, as implied by Sylvia's entreaties:

Mais oui, j'aime Robert et Robert m'aime ... et t'aime aussi! C'est tout simple! Le cœur des hommes n'est-il pas assez grand pour deux? Je t'en prie, ne sois plus malheureuse et perdue et sors de l'étouffement des préjugés et vis ta vie comme tu la sens. (149-150) / Yes, I love Robert and Robert loves me. He loves you, too. It's very simple, really. Isn't the heart of man large enough for two? Please don't

be unhappy and confused. Shake off your suffocating prejudices and learn for once to listen to your instincts. (75)

The relationship offered is rather less than the unique and all-consuming passion that Nathalie and Anne once shared, but Nathalie is tempted. Her love for Sylvia, while permitting her to distance herself somewhat from the more oppressive aspect of Goddess worship, has allowed her to accept the compromises necessary in an adult relationship:

J'ai envie de prendre les gens comme ils sont, avec leurs folies, leurs névroses et leurs caprices et tous les mensonges et toutes les pauvres chimères dont le cœur de l'homme est tapissé comme de monstrueuses orchidées vivaces... (124) / But I had made up my mind to take people as they were, with all the deceptions and poor chimeras that paper the walls of the human heart like monstrous, perennial orchids... (63)

During Julien's interrogation, Nathalie is caught between two visions of the world: "Les vérités de Julien et de Sylvia s'affrontaient dans ma nuit" (157) / "The truths of Julien and Sylvia came face-to-face in my night" (79). In choosing to die, Nathalie returns to her childhood vision of the Great Goddess, the Mother of all things. Her alternate choice of an adult lesbian love cannot be realized in the world dominated by the patriarchal order.

Though there is no textual metaphor identifying her as a goddess, Nathalie herself has magical powers, obtained partly through her association with Anne, often identified in the text as her double: "Anne était vivante... Je l'avais créée: elle était moi-même ..." (13) / "Anne was alive. I had created her. She was my love, she was myself" (8). As Bourbonnais has indicated, this identification occurs particularly through the metaphor of Nathalie as the

dark side of Ophelia corresponding to the golden Ophelia represented by Anne, who drowned before reaching adulthood (179-180). Nathalie is Ophelia gifted with the power to arise from the dead: "Ophélie miraculeuse, sans cesse ressuscitée!" (21) / "miraculous Ophelia, ceaselessly resurrected" (11). Also, Nathalie's true element is not water but fire: "Tout flambe toujours autour de moi; je suis l'amadou qui côtoie l'étincelle" (70) / "Everything bursts into flame. I am the tinder that produces the spark" (34). Having killed Julien, Nathalie resolves to kill herself by setting the house on fire, but she desires to emerge from this fire to rejoin Anne in the mythical time of their adolescence. Ultimately, she can only choose the magical solution: having bought the "poudre magique" (41) to kill Julien, she attains purity through the divine powers of fire, "un grand feu de joie" (157) / "a raging fire of joy" (80).

One male deity intrudes on Nathalie's predominantly matriarchal cult: Robert as Eros. In fact, Nathalie is unsure whether to judge Robert by Julien's patriarchal bourgeois standards or by reference to her own pagan vision: "Qui es-tu, Robert? un horrible dépravé ou bien Eros en personne, dieu de l'Amour, plongé à mes côtés, dans une rêverie souriante et tranquille?" (117) / "Who was that man sitting beside me? A horrid, depraved creature? Or Eros himself, the God of Love, sunk in a tranquil, smiling reverie?" (59). Robert's role in Nathalie's world is obscure: does he serve only himself, seeking to regain Sylvia through Nathalie, a motive that Nathalie attributes to him (115), or does he serve Sylvia as his elusive goddess? In the context of the worship of the great Goddess. In the context of the worship of the Great Goddess, his relationship to Sylvia resembles that between the Great Goddess Astarte and her Consort, generally represented as her lover or son, of secondary importance (Stone 19).

The ambivalent image of Robert corresponds to that of the Father. Nathalie tells Robert of a childhood memory of her father guiding her in a rowboat. Wishing to initiate a lesbian relationship between Nathalie and his wife Sylvia, Robert remarks: "peut-être suis-je cette espèce de bon vieux bonhomme retrouvé au bout de ta barque errante, tout prêt à t'indiquer la route, d'un geste des deux mains." (112-113) / "Perhaps I am that fellow sitting in the end of your boat, ready to guide you with a movement of my hands" (57). Bourbonnais' statement that Robert and Julien respectively come to represent the positive and negative aspects of the Father (178) seems valid but does not take into account the problematic nature of Robert's role in Nathalie's life. However, whether his motives are pure or selfish, Robert shows Nathalie that her road to happiness is through an acceptance of her lesbian nature and of her attraction to Sylvia.

Nathalie admits that she searches for the image of her father in the arms of her male lovers (65). Yet no man ever supplants Nathalie's lesbian lovers. If Anne embodies all the beauty in the world, all Nathalie's male lovers are summed up in a synecdoche of the general for the particular as "l'homme": "j'avais su tout de suite que l'amour c'était cela, pur comme le feu et indomptable [...] et j'en avais connu ensuite toutes les caricatures avec l'homme" (35-36) / "I had discovered love, a thing as pure and indomitable as fire [...] next to which all my experiences with the men I had subsequently known were no more than mere caricatures" (18).¹¹ The search for the Father is, of course, especially destructive when it leads to Nathalie's relationship with Julien.

At first glance, Nathalie's father does not appear to support the conventional Judeo-Christian patriarchal order. It is her mother rather than her father who attempts to teach

her Judeo-Christian doctrine. While her mother does many charitable works, Nathalie detects in her no real love for the poor: "Elle parlera de «ses pauvres» comme elle parle de «ses bijoux», puis elle annoncera: «un cœur!»" (42) / "She would speak of 'her poor' as she spoke of 'her jewels,' then announce 'One heart!'" (21). Christian love here becomes self-righteous possessiveness, just as it does in Julien's crusade to "save" Nathalie. Her mother also teaches her guilt, whispering to her daughter that God punishes wrongdoing: "tu vois: le bon Dieu t'a punie" (120) / "You see, the good Lord has punished you!" (61). In contrast, Nathalie's father refuses all religion and all friendships as a myth and a drug (49). Nathalie adores her father because he treats her as an individual of equal intelligence (43). Yet he is every bit as oppressive as Julien. He is the supreme authority in the household, imposing isolation upon his wife and daughter. Until the arrival of Anne, Nathalie revels in this isolation, though she later comes to understand how much her mother had suffered, needing human companionship (49). Though Nathalie's father accepts Anne as a companion for his daughter, he believes that truly strong individuals stand alone, needing no one. His daughter's worship of the Great Goddess through lesbian love would not conform to his rather rigid precepts.

In opposition to Nathalie's pagan and predominantly matriarchal world, Julien is the principal upholder of the Judeo-Christian, patriarchal tradition. Nathalie emphasizes his inability to rid himself of his traditional Catholic upbringing:

Julien, incertain de lui-même, s'agrippait inconsciemment à un bouquet de préjugés et d'idées toutes faites qu'il s'était vainement appliqué à effeuiller depuis son arrivée en Europe: les fleurs d'une enfance catholique sont vivaces et on ne guérit pas facilement ... (130-131) / Uncertain of

himself, he clung to a bouquet of prejudices and preconceived ideas that he had tried in vain to strip of its petals since his arrival in Europe. As I could have told him, the flowers of the average Catholic childhood are perennials ... (66).

She condemns as simplistic his obsession with the commandment against adultery: "la hantise hystérique du sixième commandement" (131) / "the hysterical obsession with the sixth commandment" (66). As Stone makes evident, the Judeo-Christian prohibitions against infidelity were primarily a way of assuring patrilineal descent and of controlling women, who had enjoyed great sexual freedom within the cult of the Great Goddess (Chapter 9, 180-197). Julien cannot accept Nathalie's love for Anne and he becomes violent over her relationships with Robert and Sylvia. Before returning to his family in Quebec, he marries Nathalie to ensure his complete control over her and later, upon discovering Sylvia's letters begging Nathalie to return, he strikes Nathalie to the ground. He cannot accept that happiness for Nathalie lies beyond his dominion.

Lobdell is inaccurate when he suggests in his article that Julien is the only character who does not undergo metamorphosis through imagery (72). Julien is, in fact, a caricatural incarnation of the Christ figure, as the literary images in this novel make evident. He is a "moine défroqué et nostalgique" (96) / "a defrocked monk given up to nostalgia" (48), a "grand-prêtre alcoolique" (115) / "alcoholic high-priest" (58). Even though Julien condemns the institution of Christianity, he affirms the importance of Christ himself:

Moi, je crois au Christ, c'est-à-dire en tant qu'être humain muni d'un pouvoir magnétique extraordinaire, le Christ de Rénan, homme avant tout, et qui a traversé vingt siècles avec son «aimez-vous les uns les autres». (87) / I believe in Christ, the

larger-than-life figure endowed with an extraordinary magnetism, the Christ of Renan: a man, first and foremost, who has come down to us through the centuries with his everlasting credo of "Love one another." (44)

Robert remarks on Julien's role as self-appointed Saviour: "C'est un type exceptionnel; il nous a tous tirés du fond de l'eau à plusieurs reprises. Tous ses amis sont en dette envers lui. C'est un sauveteur par vocation ..." (102) / "He's an exceptional man, he's pulled us all to the surface more than once; every one of his friends is obligated to him. He's a born saviour ..." (51). However, Julien seems to be motivated more by self-righteousness than by Christian love. He is determined to rescue Nathalie from her own lesbian desires by whatever means necessary. In Nathalie's words, he works toward her "conversion" (96). She complains: "tous ses anciens appétits missionnaires parfumés d'encens et de fleur bleue se sont canalisés sur moi qui ne demandais rien" (131-132) / "All the ancient, messianic fervour, perfumed with incense and blue flowers, had come to be focused on me, who had asked nothing" (66). Julien's role as a harsh, judgemental representative of the Father's law is evident in the image of him reading Sylvia's letters, "blotti dans ses fourrures comme sous une toge ..." (156) / "wrapped in his furs like a sultan" (79), the word "toge" meaning not only "toga" but also "a judge's robes," a meaning not conveyed in Lobdell's translation. At the end of the novel, Nathalie finds a note from him: "je t'aime, Nathalie, et je te rendrai de tout mon amour à une vie saine et normale, Julien." (157) / "I love you, Nathalie, and I am resolved with my love to restore you to sanity and normality, Julien" (80). To be normal is to turn away from her lesbian lover Sylvia, an earthly image of the Great Goddess, and to love man, created according to the Bible in God's image.¹²

The relationship between Julien, Christ figure, and Nathalie, worshipper of the Great Goddess, was doomed to failure from the start, being based on misconceptions on both sides. Finding Nathalie alone and sick, outside in a torrential rain, Julien the self-proclaimed saviour could only suppose that she needed to be saved. For her part, when she awoke in Julien's apartment, Nathalie's first impressions of Julien situated him in her pagan world. The stripes on his shirt reminded her of Greek columns; his physique reminded her of the Greek Alexis Zorba (25-26) and so she might possibly have been forgiven for thinking that she was in the presence of a reincarnated Greek god.

Upon their return to Quebec, Julien returns forever to the patriarchal, bourgeois world from which he had never been able to free himself. His entire family is dominated by a modern idol, television, described by Nathalie as a new incarnation of the trinity: "Zeus, le Veau d'or et Dieu le père tout à la fois!" (144) / "Zeus, the Golden Calf and God the Father all rolled into one!" (72). The masculine character of this new idol is consistent with Nathalie's world view.¹³ Also, Nathalie has only contempt for Julien's sister, an old maid with plastered down hair who studies astrology, a bastardized relic of the pre-Christian tradition. Obviously this patriarchal setting stifles the expression of feminine eroticism and creativity.

To return to her cult of the Great Goddess, Nathalie must destroy the Christ figure who represents the patriarchal order. True to the Judeo-Christian tradition, Julien the Saviour is another incarnation of the Father. Nathalie rejects Julien and his paternal care because, like the tree that was her first love before the arrival of Anne, he has succumbed to the ossifying effects of aging:

C'était au commencement du monde et j'étais amoureuse d'un arbre. Il était jeune et beau et droit. [...] Il est devenu énorme, cet arbre! Je n'aime pas les gens qui engraisent ni les choses qui vieillissent... Julien a grossi (12) / It was at the beginning of the world. I was in love with a tree. The tree was young and fair and straight. [...] That tree became enormous. I don't like people who grow fat, I don't like things that grow old. Julien grew fat. (7).

In rejecting Julien and the aging tree, Nathalie also rejects the Father since, as Bourbonnais has indicated, her love for the tree sprung from the fact that it was planted by her father on the day she was born (177-178).¹⁴ Bourbonnais remarks that in killing Julien, Nathalie commits the ritual murder of the Father which permits the liberation of the self (176). However, if Nathalie's suicide magically releases her into a mythical, intemporal world, the patriarchal order still prevails in the world she leaves behind. The police will arrive, Julien's family will mourn, but Nathalie will have changed nothing in the society that oppressed her.

If Nathalie herself is unable to change her society, Maheux-Forcier's *Amadou* and her subsequent novels have participated in a movement of sexual liberation for women and,

particularly, for lesbians. As Dufault has pointed out (104), Maheux-Forcier writes in the tradition of the Sappho model described by Elaine Marks in her article "Lesbian Intertextuality." This is especially evident in the allusion to *Les Chansons de Bilitis* from the same tradition.¹⁵ The modernity of Maheux-Forcier's perspective manifests itself in her celebration of the Minoan-Mycenean civilization, a perspective that Marks considers typical of the new feminist view of Sappho:

The Minoan-Mycenean civilization that preceded the Oedipal institution of patriarchal law is glorified. What began a long time ago as the domestication of Sappho has become a concerted effort to imagine a world before the domestication of woman, before the deliberate taming of her sexuality and her language. (362)

However, while criticizing the attempt by men to domesticate women, Maheux-Forcier also shows the danger of glorifying the past; Nathalie is most fulfilled when she can maintain the Great Goddess on her pedestal while participating in the flawed world of human love. What Maheux-Forcier celebrates in the ancient civilization of Sappho is a vision of sexual freedom for women, denied to them by the patriarchal, Judeo-Christian order, once a monolithic force in Quebec society.

NOTES

1. In this article, all translations of passages from *Amadou* are taken from David Lobdell's English translation, unless otherwise indicated.
2. The theme of the lesbian lover as an incarnation of the Great Goddess reappears in *Une forêt pour Zoé* which, along with *Amadou* and *L'île joyeuse*, makes up a trilogy. There, the protagonist Thérèse refers to her lover as "Isis," the name of the Egyptian manifestation of the Great Goddess.
3. According to H.P. Clive, the first edition of *Les Chansons de Bilitis* was first published on 12 December 1894, though it bears the date 1895 (110). He discusses Louys' literary deception in some detail (110-112).
4. The translation is mine.
5. Stone cites for example Deuteronomy 12:2,3.
6. Here Thompson (160) quotes J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York, 1963) 12-13.
7. According to Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, the idea of fire as a purifying and regenerating force is prevalent from the Occident to the Orient (435).

8. Stone uses this quotation from Bishop C. L. Meyers in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (25 October 1971) as an epigraph (ix).
9. My translation. Lobdell's translation of "mon idole ancienne" as "my former idol" (64) is questionable. The adjective "ancient" generally means "former" only when used before the noun; when used after the noun, it means "ancient" so that this metaphor is actually related to all the other images of Anne as an ancient statuette.
10. In his book, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, Erich Neumann speaks of the negative function of the Great Mother in "holding fast, fixating, and ensnaring": "the Great Mother in her function of fixation and not releasing what aspires toward independence and freedom is dangerous" (65).
11. Unfortunately, Lobdell's translation eliminates the synecdoche here by using the plural "men."
12. Stone emphasizes the disparagement of women evident in the Judeo-Christian claim that man was created first in God's image, whereas woman was created from man's rib: 219.
13. The Golden Calf, originally a symbol of goddess worship (Stone 177), would seem to represent here only a false idol.
14. The association between Nathalie's birth and the planting by the Father of a tree which is all and straight underlines the traditional phallic connotations of the tree; according to Chevalier and Gheerbrant, the tree as a symbol of force and power, associated with the sun, represents the Phallus, emblem of the father (66). Moreover, the sexual connotations of the tree are also apparent in "Arbre," the first poem is *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, where Bilitis speaks of sitting naked in a tree, astride a branch: "Je sentais le bel arbre vivre quand le vent passait au travers; alors je serrais mes jambes davantage et j'appliquais mes lèvres ouvertes sur la nuque chevelue d'un rameau" (3) / "I felt the beautiful tree live when the wind passed through; then I pressed my legs harder and I placed my open lips on the hair-covered nape of a branch." (My translation.)
15. *Les Chansons de Bilitis* are part of the lyrical tradition which has, as Marks points out, perceived lesbianism more positively than the prose narrative tradition: "The discourse on lesbians in prose narrative tends to reproduce some culturally accepted derogatory point of view on women loving women, whereas the lyric poem tends to represent the lesbian as synonymous with a mysterious world of feminine pleasure" (361).

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