

New Dawn New Creation

by *Philippa Schmiegelow*

L'auteure partage son expérience des rites de célébration des déesses.

Easter morning. The day starts early for many in Newcastle with a sunrise service on the shores of Lake Ontario. People come for different reasons but women have worshipped the sun and moon since time began, and I find myself linked to these women in a bittersweet remembering as the sun bursts over the horizon and rises swiftly into the dawn sky. No longer a member of any traditional faith, I value this moment of spiritual renewal; it is both a tryst with the past and a covenant with the year ahead. It is followed a month later by a celebration of the ancient Celtic May Day festival of Beltane: May Eve.

Now, high on the bluffs above the lake, a maypole hung with ribbons of many colours graces the garden of a feminist artist and her family. Her young son joins the female celebrants as we gather to dance the dance of life

and to celebrate the coming of spring. Our weaving around the maypole leaves something to be desired, but if this resurrected ritual lacks the patina and polish of the familiar it compensates in pure joy—joy in sisterhood, joy in the banishment of winter, joy in the moment of being. Hilarity edges out self-consciousness as the dancing ends and we open the circle to leap over the bonfire burning nearby in a symbolic act of purification and healing. We move inside to share the fruits of a table laden with offerings of wine and honey cakes, with dishes of pasta and fish, of fruit and cheese, to break bread together. We look around and within and find the divine in ourselves, and in our female friends and co-celebrants. Lacking in this highly contemporary version of the ancient rites is the focus on fertility. Sole representative of the god, young Oliver seems sublimely unaware of his symbolic pres(s)ence. Yet, his presence among us reminds me that, in the dawn of pre-history and beyond, the son/lover joined with the chief priestess in a symbolic ritual to bless the crops and ensure fertility of field and flock for the coming year. Now the focus has shifted but, like a butterfly touching down briefly, my mind flits from one aspect to the other finding in both rich food for the imagination.

Sometime between June 20–23 we celebrate Summer Solstice. Last year it took place in a green oasis in the middle of the village. Priestess Sylvia carried a goddess figurine acquired in Avebury, England, whose sagging breasts and bulging buttocks looked as if they could support the world. As Sylvia entered the centre of the circle to light the fire, she placed her goddess laughingly on the flower-bedecked altar. Shielded from the neighbouring houses by a wooden fence, 24 women with garlands of wild-flowers in their hair invoked the goddess and god as they danced the spiral dance to music played on a tape-deck standing nearby.

Once again, we leapt with varying degrees of abandon and agility over the dying fire, passed bread and drink around the circle, then broke to feast on fabulous food, share stories, mourn, and celebrate together. At the centre, a baby girl, Theresa's Sage, Sylvia's granddaughter, formed a living symbol of women's connected-ness and the continuity of age-old rituals that are reconnecting women in a spiritual rebirth that startles and delights.

Here in Newcastle, the Goddess lingers lovingly uniting women of different faiths and differing life styles. We re-imagine creation stories that speak of a female creatrix, and of ancient faiths and sacred belief systems founded on female deities long reduced to the level of folklore and myth. Now, as we weave new stories in an act of creation of our own, we begin to understand the degree to which female symbolism has been subverted and redirected to



Kass Elan Morgain, "Ocean Mother," collage, 14" x 11", 1987.
Photo: Robert Hawkins

support cultures and philosophies dependent, not on mutuality or matriarchs, but on male dominance and the subservience and control of women. What we are about is the creation of new myths, of a new body of knowledge, of female control of the production and transmission of knowledge. Women's history, our story, has been a story of fragmentation and disjuncture, of male control.

In a backwater of southern Ontario, a small but growing group of feminists gather together and miracles happen. Now we dare to speak our truth, dare to challenge patriarchal thought and patriarchal definitions of what it means to be female. We forge, out of mind and body, a body of work that will sustain and nourish and reinforce the work of our daughters and granddaughters, and maybe, just maybe, some of our sons and grandsons. And someday, if our writing is not suppressed and lost as women's writing has been suppressed and lost for aeons, future women and men will read our story with pride and joy and not a little amazement at historical woman's tenacity and endurance. May they sorrow at the misogyny and cultural myopia of the patriarchs.

Philippa Schmiegelow has lived in Newcastle for the past 23 years. She has a BA Humanities and an MA English from York University, and is presently on leave from a PhD programme in Women's Studies. Newcastle, affiliated with the Hamlet of Bond Head on the shores of Lake Ontario, is situated in the Municipality of Clarington, 70-odd kilometres east of Toronto.

Kass Elan Morgain is a visual artist, a weaver of words, and a practicing Reiki Master. She lives near the Rocky Mountains in British Columbia, learning the lessons of letting go as her four children grow into adulthood. Her collages are explorations of her own spiritual journey, and a spiritual practice in themselves. Each work reveals its own true nature in the process of its creation.



"Water," 1995. Photo: Gabriella Moro'

Gabriella Moro' came to Canada from Hungary in 1992 and received her Visual Arts Certificate from Vancouver Community College in 1996. Her work has been shown in many different group shows at Exposure Gallery in Vancouver.

LESLIE TIMMINS

Zita

you loved me like the Lone Ranger
swooped down from six feet up
to kiss me
always on the look-out for a quick
get-away

(no wonder I cling
to fast riders
buck the slow building
of love)

too many secrets ran you
too much to fix—
dinner daddy
I remember the sound
of your wooden shoes
on the wooden stairs
as you washed the basement
at midnight

your love gave me hiccups
sometimes still I hold my breath
hoping your silver horse
will bring you back to me
anyway

Leslie Timmins has published poetry in Room of One's Own, Contemporary Verse II, and The Antigonish Review. She is the editor of Listening to the Thunder: Advocates Talk About the Battered Women's Movement.

SANDRA WOOLFREY

New Dimensions

Flat on our backs on the sand
we look up at the wheeling stars.
So many of them we wonder
if our planet is one of many
that together form Plato's Chair
or some unknown living entity.
We give new dimension to
the microscopic scraps of
intelligence that dwell within us.
Like matrushka dolls of varying forms
life within life within life.

Sandra Woolfrey's poetry appears earlier in this volume.