

## MICHAEL FRALIC

### THE HUNTRESS AND THE HOLY MOTHER: SYMBOLIC INTEGRATION IN BERNI STAPLETON'S *THE POPE AND PRINCESS DI*

This article examines the treatment of symbols in *The Pope and Princess Di*, a recent comic/satiric play by a renowned Newfoundland theatre artist, Berni Stapleton: their inherent organicism, their constant subjection to alteration and hybridization, and their destructive potential when viewed as sacrosanct. The essay examines crucial changes in the self-images of the play's central characters, Bernadette and Diana, two women recently diagnosed with breast cancer. These changes arise from the reconfiguration and re-evaluation of deeply embraced religious, quasi-religious, and cultural symbols as the two women provide each other with new insights necessary for their emotional and spiritual healing. The article draws on Christian and radical feminist analyses of Christian religious symbols and the relationship between symbolism and idolatry and is informed by feminist endorsements of an organic rather than fixed relationship with cherished or otherwise powerful symbols. The article also draws on a vision of historical process articulated by Alfred North Whitehead. According to Whitehead, the dominance over others of particular models of understanding is historically inevitable but is also dangerous because of the high likelihood of a stifling or destructive resistance to crucial new input among those most invested in the status quo. Though change will arise in any case, it will be more humane and nourishing if both the necessity of the new knowledge and the best parts of the old are acknowledged. In accordance with a Whiteheadian vision of change at its best, Stapleton's play challenges prevalent norms and symbols while keeping a critical eye on ways of understanding that would sweep in to replace them. In *The Pope and Princess Di*, the new symbolic order is tentative and rooted in the day-to-day perplexities of lived experience, rather than founded on elusive absolutes.

*Cet article examine le traitement des symboles dans The Pope and Princess Di, une comédie satirique créée récemment par Berni Stapleton, un artiste de théâtre renommé originaire de Terre-Neuve. L'organicisme inhérent des symboles, leur assujettissement perpétuel au changement et à l'hybridation, leur potentiel destructif lorsqu'ils sont perçus comme étant sacro-saints, voilà autant de repères qui*

serviront à l'analyse de *Fralic*. Ce dernier se penche sur des changements importants dans la façon dont se perçoivent les deux personnages principaux de la pièce, Bernadette et Diana, deux femmes qui viennent d'apprendre qu'elles sont atteintes d'un cancer du sein. Cette évolution découle d'une reconfiguration et d'une réévaluation d'importants symboles religieux, quasi-religieux et culturels qui ont lieu quand les deux femmes se proposent l'une à l'autre de nouvelles façons de voir nécessaires pour guérir sur les plans émotif et spirituel. *Fralic* s'inspire d'analyses féministes radicales et chrétiennes portant sur des symboles chrétiens et s'intéresse au rapport entre symbolisme et idolâtrie ainsi qu'à la perspective féministe privilégiant la relation organique plutôt que statuaire avec des symboles chéris ou puissants. Il s'appuie également sur le concept de processus historique tel que l'entend Alfred North Whitehead. Selon Whitehead, la dominance de certains modèles de compréhension sur d'autres est inévitable sur le plan historique mais dangereuse parce qu'elle risque d'entraîner une résistance passive ou destructive chez ceux et celles qui ont le plus investi dans le statu quo. Comme de toute façon des changements devront se produire, ce sera de façon plus humanitaire et enrichissante si l'on peut reconnaître la nécessité d'acquérir un nouveau savoir et retenir le meilleur des anciens acquis. Selon la vision qu'a Whitehead du changement idéal, la pièce de Stapleton défie les normes et les symboles répandus tout en jetant un regard critique sur les modes de compréhension qui viendraient les remplacer. Dans *The Pope and Princess Di*, le nouvel ordre symbolique est provisoire, ancré dans la complexité du vécu quotidien, plutôt que fondé sur des absolus insaisissables.



A prolific writer and performer, Berni Stapleton is a fixture on the Newfoundland theatre scene. Her original works for the stage demonstrate considerable artistry and rich, often mordant humour, as well as an ongoing commitment to the exploration of social issues, often from a feminist perspective. Stapleton's plays include the renowned *A Tidy Package* (co-authored with Amy House), a two-woman show on life in the wake of the Newfoundland cod moratorium,<sup>1</sup> which toured Canada several times. Also notable is Stapleton's one-woman satirical play *Woman in a Monkey Cage*, published in the collection *Voices from the Landwash*. Stapleton has also gained a name as a comedian in Newfoundland and beyond, largely for shows created and performed with Amy House. Along with playwrighting, perform-

ing, and directing for the theatre, Stapleton has authored educational video works, poetry, and non-fiction. Her multi-media publication on post-moratorium Newfoundland with Chris Brookes and Jamie Lewis, *They Let Down Baskets*, won the Newfoundland and Labrador Writers' Alliance Non-Fiction Book Award (1999). And her topical works for organizations such as the Provincial Working Group Against Child Sexual Abuse and the Federal Department of Justice are used as educational materials in public schools. *The Pope and Princess Di* continues Stapleton's abiding integration of public and political concerns into works with a compassionate heart and satirical guts.

Drawing on Stapleton's own experience of breast cancer, *The Pope and Princess Di* was first produced at the St. John's Arts and Culture Centre by Artistic Fraud of Newfoundland in December 2004. Blending social realism, satirical fantasy, and affectionate caricature, the play is complex and intricate, yet also polemical, emotionally accessible, and broadly humorous. It challenges prevalent religious and cultural standards while sustaining a wary appreciation of tradition and a far-reaching skepticism about the ultimate adequacy of any epistemological framework. The play foregrounds symbols' constant subjection to alteration and hybridization, and it suggests that the symbols to which people become attached—even symbols of genuinely important principles—have destructive effects when viewed as sacrosanct. As the play's protagonists experience a painful process of transformation, their most revered symbols come to be seen as properly subservient to an experiential standard of wellness that does not require justification through a given set of ideas or beliefs. Religious and cultural symbols in the play are elaborated and subsequently shattered, only to be reintegrated as useful complements in a new symbolic weave messily adequate to the protagonists' emerging needs.

In developing an analysis of Stapleton's dramatic manipulations of symbols that either are explicitly Christian-religious or have gained a quasi-religious significance, I began to draw more and more heavily on ideas articulated by feminist theologians and religious philosophers. Writings on the subjects of symbolism and sacrifice by Christian feminists such as Kaye Ashe, Anne E. Carr, and Denise Lardner Carmody, radical feminists such as Carol Christ and Mary Daly, and other feminist religious thinkers such as Buddhist writer Rita Gross provide an illuminating foundation for an exploration of the symbolic content of Stapleton's play. The emphasis among these writers on the deep, manifold effects of

symbols and the sense of ontological urgency that often fuels the expression of their ideas make their discussions particularly pertinent to an analysis of *The Pope and Princess Di*. Recalling such writers' critical interrogations of prominent patriarchal religious symbols and their typical advocacy of an organic relationship with symbols in general, Stapleton's play focuses on characters undergoing a radical refashioning of their self-conceptions through crucial reconfigurations and re-evaluations of dearly held religious and quasi-religious symbols.

Warnings against unquestioning devotion to favoured or habituated symbols are common among feminist religious thinkers (Carmody 27; Christ 275; Gross 169). Concordantly, in *The Pope and Princess Di* the damaging idealization/idolization of powerful symbols is a prominent theme. In the play, subservience to idolized symbols is linked to the dangers of a self-sacrificial mode of living. The play's depiction of women in thrall to self-sacrifice recalls the historical analysis of feminist theologians who argue that women, in radical disproportion to men, have long been conditioned to a self-sacrificial model of virtue (Anderson), and need to liberate themselves from its destructive effects (Ashe 37; Christ 284). In Stapleton's play, an overly self-sacrificial stance leads to a morbid rejection of creativity and agency. At the same time, the play also echoes a feminist theological theme in its reservations about individualism as a response to self-sacrifice, due to the limitations individualism can impose on community as well as on mature autonomy (Carr 102).

While works of feminist theology and religious criticism form the central theoretical foundation for this article and are cited extensively, Alfred North Whitehead's philosophical work *Process and Reality* provides another important critical element. Along with the feminist theologians and philosophers listed above, Whitehead embraces the organicism (and, hence, the susceptibility to change) of people's relationships to systems and modes of understanding, and he regards dominant models of thought and belief as powerful and dangerous. According to Whitehead's vision of historical process, the danger arises largely from the condition of dominance itself, regardless of the specific content of the model. That is to say, once they have become dominant, older modes, whatever they may be, *must necessarily* give way to new or once-marginal modes that respond to new needs, or else fall into decadence and abuse (and ultimately give way anyhow). The particular symbolic movements in Stapleton's play are illuminated by Whitehead's process-centred vision, which cautions against an

“enfeeble[ment]” of “the present” (of life here and now) either through the oppressive, continued dominance of ascendant modes that will not admit the new or through a hasty, ill-considered loss of what was best in the old (339).

As Bernadette and Diana are forced to deal with the manifold implications of the breast cancer with which they both have been diagnosed, their sources of strength and understanding are their primary symbols-turned-idols (the Pope and Princess Di, respectively). The continued dominance of these idols far outstrips their real symbolic value for Bernadette and Diana in their new circumstances. The two women gradually come to see clearly the failings and limitations of these symbols and the oppressive character of their own attachments to them. Over time, both Bernadette’s relationship with the Pope and Diana’s relationship with Princess Di become increasingly complicated, and the two women, as well as their idols, begin to influence one another in unexpected ways. Together, as their long-accustomed symbolic attachments are broken and reconfigured according to their real, evolving needs, Bernadette and Diana discover a vitalizing blend of self-assertion and self-sacrifice, fuelled by a newfound sense of autonomy within a supportive female community.

The gradual transformations that the women’s idols undergo suggest the plasticity of symbols. Symbols, initially conceived in accordance with the protagonists’ own wishes and fantasies, are gradually transformed into idols that oppress their adherents by stunting their growth; thus, these figures must be further transformed if healing is to occur. Bernadette and Diana are healed through the access they provide to one another’s perceptual frameworks (Princess Di and the Pope each gradually develop a relationship with the *other’s* adherent). And these frameworks, as a result of the protagonists’ new relatedness, accordingly change their shape (the two idols develop a relationship with each other directly). The play’s multiple symbolic transformations, involve a variety of Christian and classical Greco-Roman figures and archetypes associated with the Pope and Princess Di. These mythically weighted transformations culminate in a couple of crucial integrative images: the shattering and re-gluing of Bernadette’s commemorative teacup of the Pope and Diana’s heart leaving her body and hanging in the sky like a moon.

### **Hardened Symbols: Bernadette, Diana, and their Idols**

Bernadette idolizes a fantasy Pope who would have her live a life of endless self-sacrifice. Diana idolizes an imagined Princess Diana,

who at first is a passive, decorative princess, but who later becomes fiercely, even problematically, independent. During regularly scheduled visits to the oncology ward, the two women provide each other with new insights necessary for their emotional and spiritual healing, even as their bodies get sicker. Strangely and unpredictably, they are helped along their journeys by the Pope and Princess Di, as well as by the chillingly self-denying service of a harried, chemical-addicted nurse and the hectoring wisdom of Bernadette's dead Granny, who has experienced breast cancer herself. The action of the play culminates in a sort-of-happy ending in which Bernadette and Diana sail away into death with Granny at the wheel, the Pope and Princess Di depart together to "help" others, and Nurse leaves her current job to work in a Florida plastic surgery clinic.

The self-sacrificial Bernadette, subject to an historical manipulation of the Christian principle of self-sacrifice that emphasizes its desirability in women especially, begins the play with a stunted understanding of her own needs. The play's Pope symbolizes a patriarchal emphasis on women's self-sacrifice, until a shift in his character occurs late in the play. The Pope begins his life as a convenient fabrication fulfilling Bernadette's youthful need for a sense of personal importance, which she develops using the materials of her Catholic religion. She cultivates an affinity for her namesake Saint Bernadette and a fantasy of personal relationship with the Pope catalyzed by the real-life Pope's visit to bless the fleet in her village. Informed by Bernadette's fascination with the sacrifices of the holy martyrs, her fantasy Pope acquires an enduring place in her psychological makeup and begins to direct and evaluate Bernadette's behaviour as a kind of warped conscience. Bernadette comes to envision fulfillment arising through a religiously framed self-abnegation and manifests this in her domestic life as well as in her self-mortifying response to her illness.

For her part, Diana as a young woman becomes fascinated by the story of Princess Diana's fairy-tale marriage to Prince Charles. She develops a kind of pop-culture devotion to Princess Diana, imagining her own life through a princess-fantasy lens. When her marriage to a breast-fixated man falls apart, Diana tries (somewhat unsuccessfully) to free herself from her fantasy and from patriarchal beauty standards, all the while sustaining a fascination for Princess Diana in secret. Once the play is in motion, after Diana is stricken with cancer, Princess Diana turns up transformed as an Amazon figure with one breast removed. This transformed figure is the titular Princess Di, who represents willpower and self-asser-

tion, and also (along with Granny) a legitimate future without both breasts—though her insistence on toughness and independence hampers Diana's capacity to develop relationships.

Bathed in light and speaking over the humming of a chorus that has just been singing "*Ave Maria*," Bernadette says, "In the beginning, there was me. My name is Bernadette. I'm named after Saint Bernadette of Lourdes. *And I've met the Pope*" (12). Among other things, the introduction to Bernadette's character suggests an innocence and exuberance that clearly contrasts with Diana's introduction: "In the beginning there was a little embryo of malignancy" (18). Diana is critical, bordering on cynical, and uses barbed wit to protect herself from familiar hurts. The contrast between the two characters' attitudes is the foundation for their often difficult journey toward friendship and for the fruitful paradox of their strengthened senses of self and their burgeoning interdependence. This journey requires the disruption of their narrow idolatries to the Pope and Princess Di. As idols, the Pope and Princess Di operate, however inadequately, as absolute principles ("Idol"); the two figures become so identified with the principles they imperfectly "point to" that they are mistaken for them (Gross 169) and, hence, gain the power to distort them. Bernadette's and Diana's growth emerges from the breaking of their idols and their refashioning as softer *symbols*, as well as from the emergent openness of each woman to the psycho-symbolic world in which the other has been trapped.

There are obvious parallels between Bernadette's and Diana's relationships with their respective idols. Both begin with sustained fascination for the *people* who are transformed into their idols, and both have had brief encounters with these people. These encounters are culminations of long anticipation, and they become important elements of the two women's personal mythologies. In addition, both have come away from these encounters with items that become relics, acting as loci of reflection and adoration: Bernadette's is a commemorative teacup of the Pope; Diana's is a scrap of lace that was torn off the train of Princess Di's wedding gown. In addition to their roles as idols, the Pope and Princess Di also function as archetypes in that they represent states of being that are perceived as ideal, toward which each woman strives through the use of her relic as well as through an attendant ritual (Moon). Bernadette's ritual is "tea with the Pope," which she describes as being "like having a hold of God by the ear" (50). Bernadette's tea ritual, presented as safe and reassuring, is parodic of the Eucharist: as a communicant invites the spirit of Christ into

herself through the ingestion of Christ's body and blood (bread and wine), Bernadette invites her Pope, as an archetype of self-sacrifice, into herself through the ingestion of tea marked with his image. This parodic quality is emphasized by Bernadette's assertion at one point that the Pope "is this cup" (33)—a point reinforced when the Pope, in first giving her the teacup,<sup>2</sup> enacts a comically self-aggrandizing parody of Jesus, saying, "Take this in remembrance of me" (17). However comforting the ritual, the self-sacrificial ideal that accompanies it has become self-absorbing and self-destructive for Bernadette.

Diana's archetypal counterpart to Bernadette's tea ritual is drinking martinis: she describes "having a martini [as] like having the world by the balls" (50). It is archetypal in its striving toward an ideal of willpower (in this case, willpower over what Diana describes as the always surprisingly bad taste of martinis) as a means of overcoming the disappointments that largely characterize her life. The will, which is the one means Diana can accept for bearing the weight of her disappointments (75), is embodied in the archetypal figure of the Amazon. Princess Di's description of the martini as "a triumph of elegance over pleasure" (75), however, hints at the ambiguity of Diana's ritual. Princess Di's words can be read as reflective of Diana's longstanding sacrifice of her own pleasure for the sake of a sense of her beauty as it can be objectified by others. Diana's sacrifice of her pleasure on the altar of other people's expectations bears some obvious resemblance to Bernadette's propensity for self-sacrifice, despite the characters' apparent opposition. It is the shadow side of Diana's attachment to her will, to her capacity to endure trials and disappointments.

Following her introduction of herself, Bernadette points out that she is from Lourdes, Newfoundland (a name that may refer to the island village of Lourdes off the west coast of Newfoundland and also to the grotto in the eastern Newfoundland village of Flatrock that is modeled after the grotto dedicated to Saint Bernadette at Lourdes, France) and gives a comical account of the life of her namesake (12). Bernadette says that as a girl, Saint Bernadette "was really sweet and shy and cute and starved for attention" (12). "So," according to Bernadette, "the Holy Virgin Mary Mother of God" appears to Saint Bernadette, and the saint subsequently discovers a holy spring. Then she "lived out the rest of her life being extremely popular and very well known and a very successful Saint" (13). Bernadette's interpretation of her namesake's life reflects her own early, approval-seeking motives for aspiring toward sainthood, motives that also shape the Pope's devotion-

hungry character. Like a stereotypical celebrity (he first emerges as a clericalized Elvis, singing, dancing, and fretting over his blue suede shoes), he is petulant and prideful, his ego easily wounded. Bernadette's early, fantasy Pope threatens to condemn Granny eternally for refusing to indulge Bernadette (15). He even threatens to cancel Purgatory altogether, citing the previous Catholic retraction of the limbo of children: "Remember limbo? All the little dead babies? Null and Void!" (15). As she ages, Bernadette comes to embrace more fully the sacrificial aspect of her saintly aspiration, relinquishing much of her hope for recognition by her peers. And the Pope continues to encourage martyr fantasies even once Bernadette has begun to struggle against them. He encourages Bernadette when she says such things as, "Saints do have to suffer for a while of course. They have to be tortured, mutilated, sometimes boiled in oil" (15). Bernadette's nascent appreciation of herself and her eventual, gradual discovery of the strength of her will are facilitated, to the Pope's surprise and chagrin, by a model of toughness and pride embodied by the ghost of Princess Di.

Bernadette has viewed holiness as inextricably linked to suffering. Her fixation on sacrifice satirically reflects a pan-historical, cross-cultural idealization of "women who disable themselves for the sake of marriage, religion, and social approval" (Anderson). Broadly speaking, "men who sacrifice others and women who sacrifice themselves" have perennially been objects of celebration and admiration (Anderson). Kaye Ashe argues that women, "already prone to an unhealthy self-abnegation, have an obligation to themselves to weigh others' needs against their own" and that women's self-effacement is a sin against the self but also against the community, hindering "the creation of a humane culture in every area of life" (37). Ashe's perspective is reflected in Bernadette's improved relationships with her family once she stops being such a "saint" and learns to admit her own need.

Throughout her process of self re-evaluation, Bernadette has to grapple with the Pope's continued, intimate influence. He lavishly praises Bernadette for her aptitude for self-sacrifice and addresses her with diminutive endearments, continually affirming her self-sacrificial mode. He responds enthusiastically when she says, in response to her ongoing refusal of painkillers, "The Chemo hurts sometimes. It can burn. I offer it up. Like a gift. To God" (26). At one point he suggests that Diana's amputated breast "can sit at the right hand of the Lord" (55), a theme he further explores, in a travesty of Christ taking the sins of others onto himself, when he speaks of the sacrificed breast purifying other, sinful breasts (30).

In the Pope's "allegory," Bernadette's breasts are analogous to Christ, and mastectomy is the cross. The Pope also discourages Bernadette from developing a candid relationship with her newly altered body by discouraging her from looking at herself (22). When Bernadette eventually looks, with her husband, at her post-mastectomy chest—after which they have great sex (86)—her view of surgery as a sacred mortification is disrupted.

When the Pope realizes he is losing his hold on Bernadette, his first response is a narcissistic projection of his ideal, most powerful self. For instance, he responds to Bernadette's nascent sense of self-worth and suspicion of his moral governance by threatening, in a fit of absurdly hubristic pique, to cancel Easter as proof of his own power (66). Viewed as Bernadette's own projected struggle, the Pope's impotent threats are a final, failed internal battle as her old self-image struggles against an emergent one.

As the play progresses, Bernadette begins to make irreverent but fairly innocuous jokes, deriving a seemingly inordinate amount of pleasure from them. During a conversation in which she and Diana list things (mostly body parts) they would rather give up than their breasts, Bernadette, unable to suppress her enjoyment of the sense of freedom she only feels when with Diana, blurts out, "I'd rather give up [my husband] George!" (60). Humour theorist John Morreal argues, "Any prohibition can cause a person to build up an increased desire to do what has been forbidden, and this frustrated desire may manifest itself in pent-up nervous energy" that can be released in laughter when the forbidden desire is mentioned in speech (21). Bernadette's breakthrough is that she allows herself to think in ways she has largely forbidden herself until this point. After she says this, she pauses, then says, "I'm only joking! My Lord. The things I say to you" (61). Morreal writes, "When we look at our own culture with a sense of humour, we see our customs, which we often take for granted as the natural way to do things, as just one possible way of doing things" (102-103). Bernadette's own comment comes as a surprise to her and gives her an opportunity to consider the removal of her breasts in terms other than sacrifice.

Bernadette gradually claims a measure of autonomy and discovers the healing power of the expression and relief, rather than the suppression or sublimation, of grievances. She learns to argue with Diana, decides she is sick of tea (92), complains about being stuck with all the housework despite her sickness (92), and accepts painkillers for pain she no longer frames in sacral terms. On her way into drug-induced relief, she quietly says, "Fuck the

Pope,” inadvertently smashing her Pope teacup in the process (94). When Bernadette’s immune system crashes, Princess Di, having witnessed a change in Bernadette’s character, declares her to be a “[m]artyr. And Amazon” (95).

Earlier in the play, in response to Bernadette’s initial enthusiasm for the Pope, Diana tells her

I’m an atheist. I hate the Pope. [...] Misogynistic old fart. Traipsing around the world, sticking his nose in everybody’s business. Trying to keep us all barefoot and pregnant and prostrate on the altar of his paternalistic bullshit. (33)

This rant accurately reflects Diana’s public persona and its clear contrast to Bernadette’s. However, Diana is unable to free herself sufficiently from her fear of rejection to discard consistently the patriarchal expectations she associates with the Pope. Diana also cannot, despite her own assertion, simply dispense with faith. Diana’s expressions of belief assert an affected cool—“I believe in 40 proof imported Finlandia Vodka. And in science, facts, stats, and odds” (34). But Diana secretly still worships Princess Di, though she is increasingly embarrassed by the particular hope this implies. The Amazonian ghost of Princess Di, who appears part-way through the play, acts as a corrective to Diana’s fantasies of posh romantic fulfillment. However, her hard-nosed strategies also limit Diana’s potential to connect emotionally with others, which she needs to do, especially once she is stricken with cancer. Diana also has to discover in herself a new kind of vulnerability, through which the toughness she has cultivated is transformed by a deepened sense of trust. This vulnerability is that of open-heartedness, exemplified by Diana’s moral support for Bernadette, as well as for Nurse, and by her surprising, sympathetic words to the wounded Pope.

Diana’s marriage has fostered anxiety about what constitutes her “assets.” This anxiety has come to work with her residual hope for romantic rescue to compromise her capacity for autonomy, even as they intensify her conscious need for it. Diana describes her ex-husband:

The love of my life did not love me. He loved my breasts. [...] I wanted long conversations about life and feelings and philosophies. What I got was ‘You have amazing breasts.’ ‘Thanks,’ I’d say. ‘I grew them myself.’ He saved his important conversations for other people. People with less impressive breasts. (38)

Diana emerges from her broken marriage having tacitly submitted to a body-based appraisal of her value, while having consciously determined to revolt against it through the development of a tough, independent persona and a devotion to her career. Despite her aspiration to freedom from patriarchal fetishism, Diana perceives that her success as an upscale real estate agent and in the marriage market relies largely on her appearance: specifically, her breasts. This perception instills in her a high degree of anxiety at the prospect of a mastectomy.

When Princess Di shows up in Amazonian form, she provides a symbolic replacement for the living Princess Di. Carol Christ argues, "Symbol systems cannot simply be rejected, they must be replaced [because] where there is not any replacement, the mind will revert to familiar structures at times of crisis, bafflement, or defeat" (275). Embracing the notion that the divine is ultimately mysterious, feminist philosophers such as Carol Christ assert that symbols for the divine are fluid in nature and can and sometimes should be replaced. She regards a conception of the Goddess as a crucial devotional symbol for women, arguing that "in a Goddess-centered context [...] [a] woman is encouraged to know her will, to believe that her will is valid, and to believe that her will can be achieved in the world" (284). For Carol Christ, an embrace of the will is a crucial corrective in women's spirituality to the self-effacement she sees as endemic for women in patriarchal systems.<sup>3</sup> Diana needs to learn to trust her own will and to see something of her new, powerful ideal self reflected in the object of her devotion. A testament to the fluidity of symbols, Princess Di returns in a new, crucially *one-breasted* form in order to help Diana shape a new self-image as she journeys through breast cancer.

The process of cancer treatment and the anticipation of a mastectomy undermine Diana's confidence in herself as an object of male attraction and as an appealing catalyst for attraction to upscale property: "What kind of a Real Estate agent will I be? Nobody wants to buy a house from a one-breasted wonder" (21); "Who will love me now? Fuck. Now I'll have to rely on my winning charm and sparkling personality. Fuck" (59). As long as Diana can maintain an image very close to a rigidly normalized high-class aesthetic, she continues to feel relatively self-assured about her desirability or at least her professional prospects. But the process of careful correspondence to an aesthetic ideal to which Diana subjects herself creates its own anxieties, especially once her image begins to suffer unforeseen alterations due to her cancer treat-

ments and surgery. She is forced to relinquish an aspiration that has led to unhealthy obsessions: she decides she will have an accepting man or no man (88), comes to see the sensuality of her new body (88), and tells Bernadette, "I'm going back to work soon. I'm opening my own agency. No more Condos. From now on, I'm handling fixer-uppers. Homes that need to start over" (96). Diana's decision to deal in older, flawed/experienced/broken properties resonates with the play's themes of brokenness and renewal, as she directs her professional life along the lines of her personal decision to give her heart to Bernadette (a survivor of a double mastectomy) and to herself. This healing heart-giving is facilitated by Diana's surprising empathy for the newly humbled Pope:

POPE. I'm shattered.

DIANA. She'll get another one [another teacup].

POPE. It was a one of a kind cup.

DIANA. It was a fine cup. (94)

As a humbled, needy person who, like Diana, has maintained a carefully honed image based on adoration by others and whose self-image has ultimately failed him, the Pope is able to be of assistance on Diana's journey toward a healing empathy. Sacrifice (seen now, at its best, as a product of empathy) and its attendant principle, self-transcendence (Carr 102), are necessary for Diana's healing, since these require escape from a narcissism that bears a partial resemblance to the Pope's. From narcissistic self-absorption, Diana moves into a kind of relationship of which she has had little apparent experience. Diana's *new* sacrifice is to stop protecting herself so ardently from the hurt she risks by emotionally connecting with, and supporting, others—especially when these others are in some sense "the enemy." While *The Pope and Princess Di* is critical of exploitative or dehumanizing relationships, its depicted path of escape from these relationships proposes nothing like straightforward self-reliance. The inevitable partialness of any liberation is intrinsic to the play's presentation of autonomy within interdependence.

### **The Heart Beneath the Breast: A Symbolic Reconfiguration**

Granny repeatedly expresses frustration with her own doctor's refusal to follow Granny's intuition about a growth in her second breast. Recalling the Amazon courage that runs through the play, Granny says, "If your frigging doctor won't listen to you, chop your own frigging tit off and shove it down his throat" (20). Elsewhere,

she rails, “Two tits! Two tits for the price of one! But would he listen to me? [...] Told me the lump was nothing to worry about” (16). The implication of these expressions is that the oversight killed her. Granny also believes the same hesitation resulted in the premature death of Bernadette’s mother (16). As the cultural complex of symbolism surrounding breasts is ironically elaborated, Granny’s impatience becomes poignant. She does not identify with breasts as cultural currency. To Granny, they are valued but ultimately dispensable parts of the self. Such a perception, expressed by the play’s crone, enriches the play’s explorations of relationships with breasts. These relationships range from loathing to integration to fetishistic attachment. The twin poles of loathing and fetishism are linked in the play to the notion of the breasts as a source of sexual temptation, linked in turn to a more general historical tendency for patriarchal culture to locate the source of male sexual sin in women.

The fetishistic end of the breast-perception spectrum is reflected in the play’s word lists and word play surrounding the breast as a cultural symbol. Having been fetishized, breasts become separated from the self: evaluated, presented, hidden, altered—objects in their own right, yet with the power to shape perceptions of women as subjects, by others and by themselves. Estella Lauter and Carol Schreier Rupprecht write of the Boston Women’s Health Collective’s decision to name a self-help book *Our Bodies, Ourselves* that they were not expressing an essentialist relationship but were, rather, “reclaiming their bodies on their own terms.” Women’s bodies, they write, “had been described in research informed only by male fantasy for so long that even [women’s] own sense of their bodies had been affected” (227). This legacy is evinced in the play by Diana’s perception that her breasts are her primary sexual lure. It is also evident in Bernadette’s belief that it would be ideal for saints not to have breasts, in keeping with the Pope’s interpretation of the story of St. Agatha, “the patron Saint of breast cancer” (30). At one point early in the play, the Pope offers Bernadette “a teaching Parable”:

This is a story about poor Saint Agatha. Lovely girl. Came from a good Sicilian family. What a little sweetheart. Happy as a lark. But my dears! Wait til I tell you this! She was being courted by a lecherous Judge who wanted to have his wicked way with her. Nudge nudge, wink wink. When she told him ‘no’, he chopped off her breasts. Martyred her. (16)

In the Pope’s telling of the tale, Saint Agatha is essentially blamed

for her own martyrdom because she has, in the Pope's version, tempting breasts. The spiritual privilege of sainthood is transformed into a punishment for built-in sin, as is evident in the moral the Pope derives from the story: "It's better not to have any breasts at all in the first place" (16). The judge is implicitly free from culpability because, as a man, he cannot (or should not have to) control his impulses.

In *The Pope and Princess Di*, word lists associated with breasts constitute an exposure and exorcism of fetishistic patriarchal fantasies, including the association of breasts with sexual temptation. What emerges thereby is a sense of breasts as *parts of the body* that can be related to, and the loss of which can be grieved, but which can also be put to rest. The meaningfulness of the lists is gradually transferred from their specific features, lost in a sea of plurality and contradiction, to their sheer length and detail, which imply a cultural obsession. One such list, provided by Granny, is composed of various colloquial names for breasts: "Tits. Titties. Tough titty said the kitty, made the milk taste shitty. Bite my titty. Bosoms. Bazoombas. Honkers, hooters, hootchies. Knockers. Jugs. Udders. Melons. Puppies. Over your shoulder boulder holders" (46). Linda Hutcheon argues that irony can be "a useful mode by which to acknowledge the force of [a] culture and yet to contest it, in perhaps covert but not ineffective ways" (*Splitting* 99). This list, recalling the list of words for "vagina" in the introductory section of Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* (5-6), illuminates a cultural preoccupation with breasts and breast imagery.

Another list, courtesy of Princess Di, is a testament to the commercial, cosmetic, and therapeutic attention paid to breasts, suggesting an underbelly of fantasy, while telling the audience almost nothing of breasts themselves:

Welcome to our Brassiere Museum. Bustier. Corset. Full support. Light support. Sports. Strapless. Criss-cross. Push-up. Cotton. Silk. Lace. Padded. With water balloons. With blow-up air-inserts. Nursing bras. Starter bras. Gel bras. Cross your heart bras. Training bras. Wonder bras. Merry Widows. All used to encase and hold a little mound of flesh. The hidden garment. The last barrier to the great frontier. (62)

Through its excess, this list rhetorically subverts fetishistic attention to "a little mound of flesh." Princess Di elaborates on the fantasy underlying her list, as the chorus hums the *Star Trek* theme:

To boldly go where no one has gone before! To the breasts!  
Our heaving breasts, our quivering breasts, our pillowy  
bosoms of comfort. The bra unhooks and bliss is unleashed  
on the world like a madness. The door opens to love, to sex,  
to mother's milk, to the center of the universe. (62)

Stapleton's wordplay echoes Betsy Warland's "theorogram" "The Breasts Refuse,"<sup>4</sup> in which Warland describes patriarchal diction as a function of power and asserts her own right and power to rename. But whereas Warland's wordplay is explicitly analytical, grounded in the creative use of etymology, in Stapleton's play the wordplay stops short of overt, analytical overturnings. Instead, it relies on intuitive connections made by the audience and gains its power to trouble via a number of strategies designed to encourage such connections. These strategies include a fetishistic-seeming aggregation of varieties of brassieres, an absurd superfluity of nicknames and general expressions of enthusiasm for "a little mound of flesh," the relationship developed between this obsessive attention and the sin and danger associated with breasts elsewhere in the play, and the play's symbolic reconfigurations that facilitate an atmosphere of questioning.

The breast is linked in the play to the heart, which is framed as the site of both empathy and courage. Identifying the heart as a site of empathy, Bernadette responds to a favourite saying of Granny's—"You're giving me a Royal Pain where my left tit used to be" (13, 15)—by making the link explicit: "Granny . . . often had a Royal pain right where her left tit used to be. Which meant, a pain in her heart. Ever since they cut her breast off, her heart was too close to the surface, and hurt more easily" (16). According to Bernadette's interpretation, Granny's breast has a quite different, more genuinely intimate role to play than that which we see in any of the word lists. Here, the breast protects and insulates the heart. The breast is integral, and its absence hurts, but its loss can be survived and may even have unsuspected benefits. The heart connection is deepened by the emergence of Princess Di as a warrior who, according to the stage directions, floats onstage "dressed as a Greek Amazon" with "[h]er right breast [...] strapped flat by sparkling thick cords" (35), carrying a bow, the use of which is eased by the removal of the breast. In this regard, the loss of the breast comes to represent the transformation and strengthening of spirit that Bernadette and Diana experience through their ordeals, reflecting the dedication of the Amazons to "warfare and the hunt" (Reinhard). As the play goes on, the audience's attention gradually

shifts from the breast to the heart; and these women's journey through breast cancer, through the loss of a body part that is also the object of a massively conflicted patriarchal obsession, becomes a journey of healing and growth through which Bernadette's and Diana's hearts are exposed (Diana's to empathy, Bernadette's to her own will, and each to the other) and ultimately shared.

In the opening scene of the play, Diana hears a heart monitor somewhere and notes, "There are two of us, but I only hear one heartbeat" (6). Diana interprets this in the most obvious way: one of them is dead (9). This turns out to be true, as it becomes apparent at the play's end that Bernadette, now deceased, has come back with Granny to see Diana across the threshold of her own death. But the meaningfulness of the one heartbeat extends beyond its use as a plot point. Through the course of the play, the discreet locations of Bernadette's and Diana's hearts within their own bodies increasingly give way to a rich, new sharing of their hearts dramatized by literal, physical dislocations.<sup>5</sup> Several times, Princess Di mentions that her heart has fallen out. This literal fact—the impact of the crash tore her heart out of place—reflects Diana's feeling that her own heart is falling out. In the end, it *does* come out when the self-protecting Diana offers it to Bernadette. Diana muses, "If a bird shits on it, I'll frigging kill somebody," then wonders, "Now that I've given her my heart, what will I have left for myself" (95). Other hearts must come into play to support Diana now that she has given her own heart away: Princess Di's lost heart, perhaps, which she may have given to Diana in the first place and Bernadette's, repeatedly described as a strong heart, which joins Diana's in the sky at the play's end.

Earlier in the play, Bernadette speculates on a couple of benefits that might come from having a removable heart:

It might be nice to have a heart that you can pop out of place when it's convenient. When you don't want to feel too much. Or when you want to show someone that you love them deeply. You can let them hold your heart. The Virgin Mary's heart is always floating around outside of her body, in all the pictures you see of her. Proof of all the love she feels. (68)

When Diana responds with habitual skepticism—"The Virgin Mary never looks very happy, if you ask me"—Bernadette displays the wisdom underpinning her sacrificial orientation, despite its lack of measure. She remarks, "Love and happy are not the same thing" (68). The culminating image of Diana's heart is striking. The play develops a polytheistic "cosmology" of sorts, inhabited by

multiple spirits creatively interacting, leading to surprising new symbolic integrations. Though Diana combats patriarchal pressures via the emulation of an Amazonian archetype, she offers her heart like the Virgin Mary. This heart now oversees Bernadette's no-longer sacrificial sufferings as a moon, infusing the Virgin Mary's love with the self-assertion of the Huntress.<sup>6</sup>

### **Humbled Idols: Symbolic Integration as a Product of Relationship**

In *The Pope and Princess Di*, the developing relationship between the title characters is used to reflect the growth and relationships of the protagonists. In turn, these protagonists develop new relationships with their habituated symbols and with foreign or resisted symbols. As the play progresses, the Pope and Princess Di engage in a series of agonistic bragging exchanges in which they outline their supposed virtues. The Pope argues he is "the power of prayer" and "the physical manifestation of the power of [...] belief" (41). He associates himself with "the relief there is, in looking outward, to God" and the "force of faith" (51). And he asserts about the nature of life and the cancer-stricken state of the protagonists, "It's purpose. [...] It's faith. [...] It's how you play the cards. [...] It's knowing when to fold 'em, and knowing when to hold 'em. [...] It's divine intervention. [...] It's life after death. [...] It's me!" (73-74). Princess Di calls herself "the power of life" and "the fecking [*sic*] ghost of Christmas Past" (41). She aligns herself with "the power there is in looking inward, to the self" and with "force of will" (51). And she argues about life and the protagonists' cancer, "It's random. [...] It's genetic. [...] It's how the hand is dealt. [...] It's keeping an ace up your sleeve. [...] It's self-motivation. [...] It's life *now!* [...] It's me!" (73-74). Satire theorist George A. Test writes that participants in a satirical *agon* "may both be condemned by their own words." (129) The Pope and Princess Di are thus condemned, in that their pretensions become increasingly ridiculous and they both ultimately resort to egotistical defences. But the effect of their bragging exchanges is not wholly satiric: the two characters also make substantive claims to symbolic merit, reflecting in simple terms the struggles lived out by Bernadette and Diana.

While the two women are amply complex, "human" characters, the two spirits are tied directly to particular principles, so when their principles collide the spirit characters themselves collide in quite a direct and uncomplicated way. And once they harmonize, they straightforwardly align themselves with each

other. In a comically simplistic way, the eventual, eager alliance of the two spirits reflects the successes of the relationship between the two human protagonists, despite false starts and half-achieved understandings. Late in the play, the Pope moves beyond narcissistic displays of power and acknowledges he is losing his hold on Bernadette, who is drawn increasingly to Princess Di. He laments, "I miss the days of infallibility. She [Bernadette] heard you." Strikingly, considering their relationship to this point, Princess Di's response is productive rather than petty. Recognizing that she cannot save Diana on her own, that she needs the Pope's help, she says, "So now *you* get through to the other one [Diana]. Are you up to it?" (74). In the end, the principles Princess Di and the Pope promote collectively help to save the human protagonists, as the spirits begin to work together.

In *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience*, Anne E. Carr argues, "An adequate feminist [religious] interpretation [...] is suspicious as it unmasks the illusory or ideological aspects of symbols that denigrate the humanity of women, and it is restorative as it attempts to retrieve the genuinely transcendent meaning of symbols as affirming the authentic selfhood and self-transcendence of women" (102). According to the play's cosmology, the "illusory or ideological" aspects of the Pope's symbolism include his encouragement of sacrifice as deference to an unconsultative authority within a gendered power context. For her part, Princess Di embodies an unrealistic solution to socially mediated suffering, based on an excessive reliance on the strength of the individual will. But faith and will, sacrifice and autonomy, empathy and courage, are nonetheless presented as "genuinely transcendent" in their capacity to lead to a healthful combination of "authentic selfhood and self-transcendence," a pairing that captures the essential dynamic within and between Bernadette and Diana.

The Pope and Princess Di are transformed from idols to helpers, from objects of direct worship to symbols of principles that are deeper, more elusive, yet more enduring, than the images that have represented (and obscured) them. This accords with Rita Gross's description of idolatry. For Gross, idolatry arises from a lack of recognition that the language of religion is inescapably metaphorical in character, because the objects of religious worship are not ultimately articulable or reducible to human perception. She writes, "Every [religious] statement contains a bracketed 'as if' or 'as it were'" (169). If the recognition of religious language as a set of "linguistic conventions" is lost sight of, Gross writes, "if what is

focused on is the metaphor, instead of what it points to, religion becomes idolatry” (169). This is not to assert that Stapleton’s play presents a clearly religious perspective; it does not. Rather, it draws on the culture and history of Christianity as well as on aspects of Christian and classical mythology to facilitate a dramatic exploration of, among other things, the personal and political power of symbolism. This symbolism, largely but not exclusively religious, intersects with experiences that operate in creative tensions with it. These intersections stop short of an utter chaos of colliding principles, while calling into question the value of symbolic orthodoxies through problematic depictions of “idolatrous” worship.

In the wake of their persistent but waning idolatries, Bernadette’s and Diana’s abiding mutual influence is affirmed in their exchange of relics near the play’s end: Diana gives Bernadette the piece of lace from Princess Di’s dress that functions as her relic, and Bernadette gives Diana the Pope teacup, which she has glued back together. Though they do not pretend to be resoundingly compatible companions, they provide a crucial solidarity. Links are forged, and walls, symbolized by the characters’ idolatries, come down, as the two characters struggle through a new set of challenges together.<sup>7</sup> A funny exchange elucidates their struggle to relate to one another:

BERNADETTE. It’s not like we’re best friends or anything.

DIANA. It’s not like we’re bosom buddies, or anything. I don’t even really like you a whole lot.

BERNADETTE. I don’t even really like you a whole lot too! We have so much in common! (61)

The characteristics that make Bernadette and Diana difficult for each other are the same traits that make them valuable to one another. Diana’s irritation with Bernadette’s attachment to self-mortification is transformed but does not dissipate once Diana begins to have empathy for her. Diana’s irritated responses to Bernadette’s behaviour draw from Bernadette a measure of self-assertion and a willingness to be critical (initially through defending herself to Diana). Equipped with these new tools, Bernadette begins to question her perceptual framework and is drawn out of a morbid stability into a surprising relationship with someone whose priorities are far removed from her own. Conversely, Bernadette’s enduring if flawed relationships raise questions for the self-protecting, lonely Diana. In addition, Bernadette’s general incapacity to see herself as valuable outside of a self-sacrificial

framework gives Diana's strength somewhere to go, gives her someone else to serve, in a more profound sense than that to which she has been accustomed. Bernadette undermines Diana's insistence on independence while strengthening her capacity for it. Self-sacrifice and the principle of empathy, dramatized as moral necessities in a world characterized by persistent and inevitable error, are symbolized through Bernadette's description of the Virgin Mary's external heart. And their implied complementarity and compatibility with autonomy and strength of will are symbolized by Diana's (and later, Bernadette's) heart floating like a moon in the sky.

### Conclusion

The humbling of the Pope relative to the play's female characters (and the legitimacy of his symbolic role in this humbled capacity) combines with the richness of the play's female archetypes to acknowledge "the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power." This is how Carol Christ describes the "simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of Goddess" (277). A central image for the play's negotiation between its rejection of male-originated or male-defined salvation and its embrace of sacrifice as a necessary principle (however exploited it has been) is the shattering and subsequent re-gluing of Bernadette's commemorative teacup of the Pope. The Pope is vulnerable now, stripped of deferential privilege, his symbolism of sacrifice falling into its proper place as a child of empathy. And, once the Pope is broken, they are *all* broken, since Princess Di has been missing her heart since the accident, and Bernadette and Diana lose breasts but have also lost the brittle comfort of their habitual modes of perceiving themselves and their relationships to the world around them. The process itself of new symbolic integrations symbolizes transformative growth and a kind of necessarily limited, morally weighted liberation from oppressive relationships to symbols and power.

Despite its affirmation of women's need and right to subvert oppressive symbolism creatively, *The Pope and Princess Di* ultimately problematizes the idea that one can adequately make or choose one's own symbols or objects of worship. It does this by depicting not only the Pope as the representative of a crucial element of Diana's healing, which she cannot foresee and in fact actively resists, but also Princess Di's equally unforeseen influence on Bernadette. The characters do not have a thorough understanding of their own needs, and their habits and predilections resist

principles essential to their well-being. Due to the limits of its characters' self-awareness, the play depicts transformative growth through a process of piecemeal intersections between symbols and experiences, rather than in clear epiphanic moments. This interplay is crucial to the play's implicit suggestion that ethics cannot remain too pure and also be genuinely helpful for people living in a rather vexing and messy world. The kinds of ethics the play embraces as a result are characterized by paradoxes. The play's presentation of a range of paradoxes—sacrifice and autonomy, faith and will, death and life, brokenness and wholeness—suggests creative tensions that do not need to be (or perhaps cannot be) resolved into singular principles, that do not need to be “solved.” In *The Pope and Princess Di*, symbols are fluid, and the paradox of vulnerable interdependence and cagey self-preservation leads to both personal growth and community building. Accordingly, the play questions, in accord with the work of radical and Christian feminist theologians, the appropriateness for women of a model of service heavily oriented toward self-sacrifice. Conversely, it cautions against an excessive emphasis on the individual self, which is depicted as a frequent source and symptom of narcissistic insecurities and, hence, as a roadblock to autonomy within community.

Within this context of crucial moral tensions, the play's undermining of the privileged status of dominant symbols, without an utter relinquishment of their importance, recalls Alfred North Whitehead's vision of historical change at its best. Whitehead argues that it is necessary and good, whenever any “principle” (embodied by social, political, or religious organizations) becomes dominant, for a new “principle of refreshment” to emerge. According to Whitehead, it is an historical truism that “[t]he moment of dominance, prayed for, worked for, sacrificed for, by generations of the noblest spirits, marks the turning point where the blessing passes into the curse” (339). It is the illuminating struggle that is good; hence, a new struggle must emerge to prevent the falling into decadence of the previously sought-after, now-dominant principle. In Stapleton's play, the troubling of old orthodoxies is portrayed as necessary for the shaking loose of symbols that, shaped by “the old dominance” (Whitehead 339), have come to act more as shackles than supports and for the providing of access to new possibilities. Ideally, for Whitehead, the dominant order will recognize the need for an infusion of newness. He argues, “It belongs to the goodness of the world, that its settled order should deal tenderly with the faint discordant light of the

dawn of another age” (339). In a healthy transformation, access to the new does not undermine the value of the waning order, but builds on the “firm foundations” of what is best in it, in a striving toward “the faint discordant light” that is inevitable in any case, and in the movement toward which the “requirements” of the old order ought to be handled “tenderly” as it gradually “sinks into the background before new conditions.” In Whitehead’s view, this gentle transition is far from an inevitable process. He acknowledges the prevalence of two errors that disrupt such “tender” transformations and writes, “In either alternative of excess, whether the past be lost, or be dominant, the present is enfeebled” (339). In *The Pope and Princess Di*, the past has been dominant and has enfeebled Bernadette’s and Diana’s capacities to deal with new chapters in their experience. But the Pope (and to a lesser extent Princess Di), while at first resistant to the giving way of the entrenched to the new, ultimately comes to see the insufficiency, for the creation of a healthy new arrangement, of his own habitual ways. And Diana’s and Bernadette’s new Huntress/Holy Mother hearts, the emergent alliance of the Pope and Princess Di who leave together to help “the faint of heart” (86), and the anecdotal presence of Granny throughout the play depict a world in which the old has not been sacrificed at the altar of the new, but instead has nourished it organically.

In *The Pope and Princess Di*, the new symbolic order is tentative and rooted (despite its fantastical elements) in the perplexities of lived experience. Granny repeatedly undermines the adequacy of any singular approach by emphasizing life’s messiness and by embodying an eclectic wisdom. And no one saves Nurse from her ambivalent fate. Nurse relinquishes “the truth” and embraces a future in plastic surgery because she is exhausted from being an overworked, underappreciated witness to suffering, which is the only meaningfulness “the truth” currently has for her. Perhaps Nurse is the “faint of heart” whom the Pope and Princess Di are off to help, but her future is uncertain. The transformations that have brought Bernadette and Diana through a crucial epoch do not help Nurse. Her refusal to be labelled as either a martyr or an Amazon (95) suggests that she has her *own* needs. And like the others, her own vision of salvation is not sufficient for these needs. The world of cosmetic “improvements” toward which she aspires, while understandable given her experience in oncology, is, like Bernadette’s and Diana’s initial fantasies of fulfillment, embedded in damaging, patriarchal expectations and shows all the signs of being receptive to idolatry. Ultimately, the play presents symbols—

any symbols, no matter how privileged—as servants to experience. If the Pope and Princess Di are to help Nurse, they will have to reconfigure once again, because it is *her* need that must be served, not theirs.

*The Pope and Princess Di* reflects a detailed, feminist engagement with the perception-shaping power of symbols. It manifests a far-reaching epistemological skepticism, though it also dramatizes a necessary negotiation of ethics and political relations within this uncertain context, as per the feminist and postcolonial writers Linda Hutcheon describes in her book *The Canadian Postmodern*. According to Hutcheon, such writers embrace postmodernism's deconstructive potential without committing themselves to the politically useless nihilism that lurks at its extreme (70). Concordantly, Stapleton's creative realignments and integrations of existent symbolism declare a kind of creative agnosticism, or something akin to the symbolic fluidity of Goddess feminists for whom symbols are crucial to a healthy spirituality, but are also inextricable from (and often subservient to) questions of political relations. ❁

## NOTES

- 1 In 1992, the Government of Canada “announced a moratorium on the commercial exploitation of Northern cod” due to the drastic depletion of cod stocks from “[d]ecades of overfishing” (Higgins). The effects of the moratorium on the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador were dramatic. An article on the economy from the same web site describes the impact:  
In 1992, the species that was the mainstay since the sixteenth century reached a point of near commercial extinction in Newfoundland waters, and a moratorium was placed on the fishing of Atlantic cod. Other species continue to be fished, but the moratorium removed the main source of employment and income for hundreds of small communities. (“Economy”)
- 2 This is an aspect of Bernadette's fantasy; her Pope is not the real-life Pope, and the real-life Pope did not give her the teacup. The cup was actually given to her by Granny.
- 3 Catholic feminist Denyse Lardner Carmody argues that the Goddess has symbolic value, even for women with more mainstream religious beliefs, because of its “linking [of] women to a female sacral power,” which helps women to perceive “that what makes God God is as much in her as in men” (27).
- 4 It is a poetic essay, or a discursive poem.
- 5 In the December 2004 Artistic Fraud production, much of this is

muted, apparently due to technical choices that omit visual cues Stapleton scripted.

- 6 Although Diana is also frequently a symbol of chastity, this does not appear to be meaningful in Stapleton's play.
- 7 In her book *Pure Lust*, which legitimates women's desire as a positive, creative force, Mary Daly defines her coinage "Be-Friending" as a kind of ontological befriending that is subversive of patriarchal, patronizing, and controlling "befriendings" of those perceived as needy by those with power. For Daly as for Stapleton, Be-Friending does not operate on the premise "that every woman, or even every feminist, can 'be a friend to' or 'be friends with' every other woman." Daly argues, however, that all women can share "the work of Be-Friending," which implies the creation of an atmosphere in which women are enabled to be autonomous friends. Every woman who contributes to the creation of this atmosphere functions as a catalyst for the evolution of other women's creative potential and for the forming and unfolding of genuine friendships (373-74).

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