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# Study and analysis of "woman.life.song" by Judith Weir

Heather Drummon Cawfield

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

STUDY AND ANALYSIS OF *woman.life.song*  
BY JUDITH WEIR

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Arts

Heather Drummond Cawlfeld

College of Performing and Visual Arts  
School of Music  
Music Performance

May 2015

This Dissertation by: Heather Drummond Cawlfeld

Entitled: *Study and Analysis of “woman.life.song” by Judith Weir*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Arts in College of Performing Arts in School of Music, Program of Vocal Performance

Accepted by the Doctoral Committee

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Accepted by the Graduate School

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## ABSTRACT

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The song cycle, *woman.life.song*, by Judith Weir, is a unique composition because it was a collaborative effort written by women about women’s lives. With financial backing from Henry Kravis, Jessye Norman commissioned the composition in 1997 for a Carnegie Hall performance in 2000. She enlisted authors Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Clarissa Pinkola Estés to write new poems based on stages of a woman’s life: childhood, love, puberty, loss, maturity. Acclaimed Scottish female composer Judith Weir set these texts to music. The songs of the cycle are, in order, “On Youth” (Angelou), “Breasts!! Song of the Innocent Wild Child” (Estés), “The Edge” (Morrison), “Eve Remembering” (Morrison), “Mothership: When A Good Mother Sails from This World: Stave I and Stave II” (Estés), and “On Maturity” (Angelou).

Despite the fame of the collaborators, this work has only had six public performances since its debut in March of 2000. There are also no public recordings of the work, although there are at least two recordings owned by the publisher that are available by special permission. The purpose of this dissertation is to bring more public awareness of this song cycle and to encourage more performances. The dissertation includes information about the origin and performance history of the song cycle, a musical analysis of the work with a focus on the distinct compositional technique related to, and organized according to, the texts by the three authors, and a study of the compositional elements Weir uses to unify the cycle as a whole. An assessment of the cycle’s success as a composition is included in the conclusion along with an enumeration of possible reasons why the work has not been performed more often. The appendix includes a transcript of an email interview with Weir.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my family and friends for their love and support throughout this process. My husband Topher and my children Emilyn and Aileen deserve special thanks for their understanding while I needed to sacrifice family time for writing. Thanks to my dad Malcolm for his helpful support, and to my friends, Carol and Juanita, fellow doctoral students and dear friends, for their encouragement during these past four years.

I am grateful to Judith Weir for her prompt and gracious responses to my questions. I also thank her publisher, Victoria Small, for giving me access to unpublished recordings of *woman.life.song*. Also thanks to Music Sales Classical for permission to use copyrighted text and musical examples in this work.

I dedicate this work to my mother, Linda Banning Drummond, who “sailed from this world” in 2009.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement and Significance of the Topic

This is a study and analysis of the work *woman.life.song* by Judith Weir, specifically focusing on the collaboration of the composer with singer Jessye Norman, and authors Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Clarissa Pinkola Estés.

This composition is unique because it was a collaborative effort written by women and about women's lives. Norman conceived of the project and asked the poets and composer to be a part of it. She assigned each author specific themes dealing with landmarks that occur in every woman's life. Angelou wrote about youth and maturity, Estés about puberty and the loss of one's mother, and Morrison about the experiences of love. Weir took the texts and composed the music as a song cycle for soprano (Norman) and chamber orchestra. Norman found financial backers for the work and performed it in Carnegie Hall in April, 2000.

My purpose is to bring more public awareness of this piece and to encourage more performances of the work. Despite the fame of the collaborators, the work has only been performed five times in public (with a sixth partial performance) and there are no public recordings. The work requires study to be appreciated, but lack of performances, public recordings and analysis make study difficult. Throughout my research I intend to provide

information and analysis so that the work may be studied more easily, gain more public acceptance and earn a place in the performance repertoire.

### **Incidence of the Topic**

I first learned of this work while doing research on contemporary female opera composers, during which I discovered Weir's name among the list. I had never heard of her but was intrigued at her choices of material to set to music, especially Scottish folk stories (as I also have a Scottish heritage). While researching Weir I found an interview with Weir and Charlie Rose that was posted online, from Rose's PBS television program. This interview was about *woman.life.song* and also featured Norman, Estés, and Morrison. I found the poetry and the topic of this cycle intriguing, especially the two poems dealing with the loss of a mother. Another intriguing aspect was the collaborative method used to create this work. Because the work seemed worthy on so many levels, I decided that a thorough analysis was warranted to discover whether the work stands cohesively as a complete cycle or whether the songs work better as stand-alone pieces.

### **Review of Source Material**

Source material includes Jessye Norman's autobiography, *Stand Up Straight and Sing!*, published in 2014 by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, as well as two recorded interviews with the composer, poets and performer that were broadcast on television and on the radio. One is an interview with Norman, Weir, Estés and Morrison on the Charlie Rose program that aired on March 20, 2000. In this interview, Rose talks with Norman and the writers about the texts and how Norman worked with the poets and the composer to create the work.<sup>1</sup> The second source is an interview of Norman conducted by Martha Kearney for BBC Radio in August of 2000 (a

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<sup>1</sup> "A discussion about "woman.life.song." *Charlie Rose (March 20, 2000)*. DVD. Charlie Rose Inc. 2006.

week before the UK premiere). In this interview, Norman comments on the reason for commissioning the work. She states, "...there is so little music that I know that talks about a woman's life in the way that these marvelous intellects are able to talk about it, Clarissa Pinkola Estés, Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison, from the beginnings of one's experiences, and to old age. To have that spectrum done by women is most unusual."<sup>2</sup> In this interview, Norman reflects on the texts of certain of the songs and defines them in her own words. It is important and necessary to understand how the performer relates to the text of the work as it comes across in her singing of the piece.

Other source material includes seven written reviews of the performances. One is for Norman's New York premiere, and three are for her London premiere. The remaining three are for the performances by Rowan Hillier: two for the "Judith Weir: Telling the Tale" festival in 2008 and one for the Bregenz Festival in Austria in 2011. Other reviews are quoted on the publisher's website for *woman.life.song*, but the original British sources are not archived online so I was not able to access the full reviews.

Since there were so few written sources, I attempted many times throughout the course of this research to obtain interviews from those involved, with little success. As most of those involved in the project are public figures, their only contact was through publicists or managers. I was unable to locate contact information for Morrison, and although I did reach Estés' publicist, after a short interchange she ceased replying to my emails. In February, 2014 I contacted Maya Angelou's secretary at Wake Forest University, but my request for an interview was denied, most likely due to her declining health that resulted in her death the following May. I contacted Jessye Norman's manager to request a phone interview with Norman in late May,

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<sup>2</sup> "BBC Radio: Jessye Norman interview," *YouTube*, online audio clip, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1IKD5o2MHk>. 2009; accessed 22 March 2014.

2014. However, according to her manager, Norman was busy with a book tour and performances, and was unable to grant me an interview. Judith Weir graciously agreed to an email interview. I asked her about the compositional technique and the collaborative method used. The full transcript of the interview is in Appendix A.

Two scores are available through Chester Music, part of Music Sales group. The full orchestra score is available for rental and the publisher graciously allowed me to borrow it for study purposes only. The vocal score with a piano reduction is available for purchase. Two recordings exist, but are not available publicly. I emailed Weir's publisher asking about recordings, and obtained two directly from her as digital downloads. One is a recording of Jessye Norman's performance at the BBC Proms,<sup>3</sup> and the second recording is of a performance of Rowan Hillier singing the work.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jessye Norman, soprano, *woman.life.song*, by Judith Weir, conducted by David Robertson, London Sinfonietta, (unpublished MP3 recording, used by permission of Music Sales Classical, August 6, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Rowan, Hellier, soprano, *woman.life.song*, by Judith Weir, conducted by André de Ridder, Guildhall Chamber Orchestra, (unpublished MP3 recording, used by permission of Music Sales Classical, January 20, 2008).



## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHIES

#### Judith Weir

Judith Weir, one of the most distinguished living British composers, was born on May 11, 1954 into a Scottish family and was raised near London. Inspired by her family's heritage, she grew up with a love for her ancestral Scotland especially its stories and folk music.<sup>5</sup> Her musical education included playing the oboe with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, followed by private composition studies with John Tavener and with Robin Holloway at Cambridge University. In 1975 she was awarded the Koussevitzky Fellowship to study with Gunther Schuller at Tanglewood. She taught at Glasgow University from 1979-82 and was the Guinness Composer-in-Residence in Glasgow at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama from 1988-1991. In 1991 she was awarded first prize at the Opera Screen Festival in Helsinki (1991) for *Heaven Ablaze in His Breast*, based on ETA Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, a dance opera collaboration with Second Stride dance company. She moved to south London and became the artistic director of Spitalfields Festival from 1995-2000. In 1995 she received an honorary Doctorate of Music from University of Aberdeen. She received the Queen's Medal for Music in 2007 and the Incorporated Society of Musicians' Distinguished Musician Award in 2010. She has been a visiting professor at Cardiff University since 2006.

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<sup>5</sup> Samuel Rhian, "Judith Weir," *Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*, (London: Macmillan Press, 1995), 488.

Weir's compositions include vocal works (chorus, art song, opera) and instrumental works (full orchestra and chamber orchestra). Her works are frequently performed across Europe and America. Rather than using an *avant garde* style, she combines the traditions of folk music from different cultures. She incorporates musical style from diverse sources such as Iceland, Bayeux, China, Serbia, Spain, and Scotland. Weir doesn't simply imitate the folk music but instead creates her own version and, by mixing the exotic with the familiar, creates a sense of community with the listener. All her music incorporates aspects of storytelling and “scene-painting.” Weir is also credited with developing the Scottish technique of *piobaireachd*, which is a “model of extended variation form structures generated from a limited interval set.”<sup>6</sup> Her most well known operas include *A Night at the Chinese Opera* (1987), *The Vanishing Bridegroom* (1990), *King Harald's Saga*, *Blond Eckbert* (1994) and *The Black Spider* (children's opera, 1984). Art songs include the sets *Scotch Minstrelsy* (1982) and *Songs from the Exotic* (1987). She composed *woman.life.song* for Jessye Norman in 2000. Her most recent opera is *Miss Fortune*, which premiered at the 2011 Bregenz Festival.<sup>7</sup>

### Jessye Norman

Jessye Norman, an African-American soprano, was born on September 15, 1945 in Augusta, GA. She studied at Howard University, the Peabody Conservatory and the University of Michigan. Her teachers include Pierre Bernac and Elizabeth Mannion. In 1968 she won the Munich International Music Competition and debuted the following year at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin as Elisabeth in Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. She performed throughout Europe including the title role in Verdi's *Aida* in La Scala and the title role in Vittorio Gnegchi's *Cassandra* in Covent

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<sup>6</sup> David C.H.Wright, “Judith Weir” *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. by Stanley Sadie and J. Tyrrell (London: Macmillan, 2001), vol. 27, 246.

<sup>7</sup> “Judith Weir – Long Biography,” Music Sales Classical, <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer/long-bio/Judith-Weir>, accessed 21 March 2014.

Garden. Her American stage début in 1982 was with the Opera Company of Philadelphia performing Jocasta in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* and Dido in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. She reprised her role of Cassandra at the Met in 1983. Other roles include Strauss's Ariadne, Gluck's Alceste, and Wagner's Sieglinde. She has recorded many famous roles including Countess Almaviva, Leonore, Euryanthe, Carmen, Ariadne, and Salome. She has also recorded *mélodies* and *Lieder*, including the *Vier letzte Lieder* by Strauss. Norman is a strong advocate of contemporary music. She is famous for including jazz and spirituals in her concerts. In 1990 she recorded a concert with her frequent collaborator, Kathleen Battle in Carnegie Hall called "Spirituals in Concert," with an orchestra and chorus conducted by James Levine. She has won several awards and honors during her lifetime including over 35 honorary doctorates, the prestigious Kennedy Center Award in 1997 (she was the youngest recipient at the time), several Grammys and the Grammy's Lifetime Achievement award for classical music in 2006. In February of 2010 she was awarded the 2009 National Medal of Arts for her achievements by President Obama. She is praised as having a commanding stage presence and the "ability to project drama through her voice."<sup>8</sup>

Norman is also well-respected for her humanitarian efforts. She started the Jessye Norman School of the Arts in her hometown of Augusta for middle school students. It is a tuition-free after-school program offering music performance, writing, drama, dance, and graphic art. She serves on the Board of Directors for many organizations including the New York Public Library, the Dance Theater of Harlem, the Augusta Opera Association and Carnegie Hall. She is also the national spokesperson for The Lupus Foundation and The Partnership for the Homeless. She recently wrote an autobiography entitled, *Stand Up Straight and Sing*, published in 2014.

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<sup>8</sup> Martin Bernheimer and Alan Blyth, "Jessye Norman," *Oxford Music Online* (last updated 15 May 2009), <http://0www.oxfordmusiconline.com.source.unco.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/20074>, accessed 21 March 2014.

## **Maya Angelou**

Maya Angelou was one of the most celebrated of American writers in the contemporary age. She is most known for her series of autobiographies as well as her collections of poems. She is also acclaimed for her acting and film work including the miniseries “Roots.”

Angelou was born Marguerite Johnson on April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri. She and her older brother were sent to live with their grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas at a young age. She witnessed firsthand the racial discrimination of the South at the time, but embraced the values and faith of African-American traditions and community. Inspired by her brother and one of her school teachers, she had a rich love of literature and poetry. She became a single mother to her son, Guy, shortly after graduating from high school. While living in San Francisco she took a series of jobs in order to support him. She married a Greek man named Tosh Angelos for about three years, and when her marriage ended, she began a career as a nightclub dancer under a new name, Maya Angelou. Soon the right people and opportunities started coming her way. She was hired as a dancer in the 1956-7 European touring company of “Porgy and Bess,” moved to New York City, joined the Harlem Writers Guild and became involved with Martin Luther King Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference as the Northern coordinator. She met the South African freedom fighter, Vusumzi Make, fell in love, and in 1961 moved to Cairo with her son and her “husband” Make (although they never officially married). A year later she separated from Make and moved to Ghana, enrolling her son at the university there. She became an administrator at the University of Ghana and also did some freelance writing for the Ghanaian Times. During her years in Ghana she met and befriended Malcolm X. She returned to the US in 1965 and planned on helping him with the civil-rights organization, the Organization of Afro-American Unity, however shortly after her return, Malcolm X was assassinated. She lived in

Hawaii for a short time, working as a singer, then returned to Los Angeles as a market researcher in Watts, witnessing first-hand the riots in 1965. She returned to NY and continued to write and act in plays, renewing some dear friendships in James Baldwin and Jerry Purcell. Purcell gave her a stipend to support her writing. Martin Luther King Jr. asked her to organize a march, and while she was considering the offer, he was assassinated on her birthday in 1968. Although devastated, she was encouraged by Baldwin to continue her writing. That year she wrote, produced and narrated a ten-part documentary series called “Black, Blues Black”, about the connection between blues music and the African heritage. She also wrote the first of seven autobiographies, published in 1969, the highly acclaimed best-seller, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, in which she talks about her youth and challenges growing up in the racially charged south.<sup>9</sup>

In 1993 Angelou was asked to recite her poem “On the Pulse of Morning” conveying the message of hope and unity, for President Bill Clinton's inauguration. She held over 30 honorary degrees and was the Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University.<sup>10</sup> Angelou continued to write, act, and produce until her passing on May 28, 2014.

### **Toni Morrison**

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford on Feb 18, 1931 in Lorain, Ohio. Her parents instilled her with a love of reading, music and folklore. Because she lived in an integrated neighborhood, she was not aware of racial divisions until in her teens. Majoring in English literature, she attended Howard University for her Bachelor's degree and Cornell University for her Master's degree, where she wrote her thesis on the works of Virginia Woolf

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<sup>9</sup> Maya Angelou, *The Collected Autobiographies of Maya Angelou*, Modern Library Edition (New York: Random House, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> "Marguerite Annie Johnson," *Bio*, A&E Television Networks, 2014; <http://www.biography.com/people/maya-angelou-9185388>; accessed 10 December 2014.

and William Faulkner. She taught English at Texas Southern University and in 1957 returned to Howard University to teach English. There she met and married her husband Harold Morrison in 1958, giving birth to their sons, Harold, in 1961, and Slade in 1964. After separating from her husband in 1964, when he moved back to Jamaica, she worked as a textbook editor in Syracuse, NY. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* was published in 1970. Her subsequent books, *Sula* and *Song of Solomon*, were published in 1973 and 1977, respectively. She was appointed to the National Council for the Arts in 1980, and the following year *Tar Baby* was published. In 1987, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Beloved*, considered to be one of her finest masterpieces, was published. *Beloved* was made into a movie in 1998 starring Oprah Winfrey, and in 2006 it was named as best novel of the past 25 years by *The New York Times Book Review*. Morrison was professor at Princeton from 1989-2006 and received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. Her latest novel, *Home*, was published in 2012. She also collaborated on the opera *Desdemona* with opera director Peter Sellars and songwriter Rokia Traore, which premiered in London in the summer of 2012.<sup>11</sup>

### Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Clarissa Pinkola Estés, an American poet, psychoanalyst and post-trauma specialist, was born on January 27, 1945. She is a first-generation American with tribal Mexican and Spanish heritage who was adopted by a Hungarian family and grew up in the Great Lakes region of Michigan in a small rural village.<sup>12</sup> She grew up around nature and most of her writing is influenced by nature's lessons and the folklore of her family people (both original and adoptive). She is a *cantadora*: keeper of the old stories in the Latina tradition. She uses these stories and her poetry as therapy in her work as a Jungian psychoanalyst. Her doctorate is in ethno-clinical

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<sup>11</sup> "Chloe Anthony Wofford." *Bio*. A&E Television Networks, 2014. <http://www.biography.com/people/toni-morrison-9415590>; accessed 22 March 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women who run with the wolves* (New York: Random House, 1995), 2.

psychology (the study of social and psychological patterns of cultural and tribal groups) from the Union Institute and University. She has authored many books on life and soul, and *Women who Run with the Wolves* was a NY Times best seller for 145 weeks in 1992. In the 1960's she served as a post-trauma specialist with war veterans, and in the 1970s she taught writing classes for prison inmates. She worked with the Columbine High School community after the massacre from 1999-2003 and she continues to work with 9/11 survivors and families. She has received many notable awards including the *Las Primeras* Award from the Mexican American Women's Foundation and, as a Colorado resident, is a 2006 inductee into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame.<sup>13</sup> Her newest book, published in 2014 is *Untie the Strong Woman: Blessed Mother's Immaculate Love for the Wild Soul*.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés: Biography,” <http://www.clarissapinkolaestes.com/index.htm>, accessed 21 March 2014.

<sup>14</sup> “Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estés: Featured Books and Spoken Word Audio,” <http://www.clarissapinkolaestes.com/index.htm>, accessed 3 December 2014.

## CHAPTER III

### ORIGIN OF THE WORK *woman.life.song*

In 1997, Jessye Norman met with Judith Aron, the former artistic director of Carnegie Hall, about possible future works to be performed there, and was presented with the idea of a commission. Norman states in her interview with Charlie Rose: “so I was meant to go away and think about what I would like to have as my sort of greatest possible gift. By the time I returned with an idea, we had someone all ready to pay for the commission.”<sup>15</sup> This “someone” was American businessman Henry Kravis, who paid for the work as a birthday present for his wife, Marie-Josée Kravis. The idea was a song cycle about a woman’s life from youth to maturity, with text written by three of Norman’s favorite authors, Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison and Clarissa Pinkola Estés, and with music by Judith Weir. Norman had met Weir in 1996 as they had both been presented with honorary degrees at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. Norman spoke about this meeting in her autobiography:

In speaking with [Weir] and shortly thereafter becoming acquainted with her music, I knew that I wished to work with her in some way. And when Carnegie provided the opportunity, it was easy to call upon these three great friends to compose texts for the different stages of womanhood. We were a happy group. The results of this collaboration uplift and inspire me every day.<sup>16</sup>

Norman contacted the writers to solicit their participation and gave them each assignments to write poetry on specific stages of life from a woman’s perspective. Angelou

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<sup>15</sup> “A discussion about “*woman.life.song*.”

<sup>16</sup> Jessye Norman, *Stand Up Straight and Sing!* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 191.



wrote the text for “On Youth” and “On Maturity” based on her own autobiographical experiences. For her assignment on youth, Morrison wrote the text for “The Edge,” about first love and a woman’s first sexual experience. Her poem on the middle stages of life is “Eve Remembering,” about a woman reflecting on the choices of her youth. Estés wrote her youth poem on the experience of pre-pubescence and wanting breasts. Her other poem was separated into two distinct parts, “Mothership: When a Good Mother Sails from This World (Stave I and II).” Stave I is about a woman watching her mother die and Stave II describes the spiritual journey she takes through this process. The poems were sent to Weir as the authors completed them, and Weir composed the songs as she received the texts, out of chronological order. When asked about this process, Weir stated in her email interview: “...the words of the three authors arrived at different times, and, although planned and discussed well in advance, the whole project in the end was assembled very close to the deadline date. (The delays were caused by the authors' agents rather than the authors themselves.)”<sup>17</sup> Norman also spoke about the process of working with Weir in her autobiography. She stated:

Part of what was deeply satisfying about the process was our ability to work together to find solutions to create the best composition possible. For instance, I could say to Judith, “It is difficult to pronounce a word like that so high above the scale,” and we would put our minds together and derive a mutually satisfactory solution.<sup>18</sup>

The authors and composer talked about this process with Charlie Rose in a TV interview that aired shortly before the premiere in March of 2000. They spoke of the historic element of this particular collaboration of great female talents in the world of literature and music. Estés stated:

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<sup>17</sup> Judith Weir, personal email, 12 October 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Norman, *Stand Up Straight and Sing!*, 190.

I really wanted to write with Toni and with Maya, something that would be about women, something that we all would have experienced somehow in our lives. I felt utter faith in writing with Maya and with Toni, that somehow it would come together and we would put forth our experiences of what it really meant to live as a woman in this lifetime. In this past century and in this present one. Something that would be in the realm of what in Spanish we would call *el duende*. Which is a universal experience that each person can understand easily because everyone has had a portion of it in some way.<sup>19</sup>

In this interview, Weir also spoke about this historic event and also about the unique collaborative process involved. She stated:

Well, this has been an extraordinary job for me, you know to have these amazing texts appearing, and I think also to make them into a whole, because everybody has written about very specific things, but I suppose I had to find a musical language for the whole lot. And also in a way we have one character (I am thinking a little bit like an opera). There is one person here but they've done so many things in their life, so really a huge range of music is called for, and it's a long work too.<sup>20</sup>

Although Norman chose the poets, text themes and composer, it was Weir's task to combine all of the disparate elements together in a short period of time to create a whole and unified composition that reflects the life of a woman in *woman.life.song*.

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<sup>19</sup> "A discussion about "woman.life.song."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER IV

### PERFORMANCE HISTORY

#### 1. Premiere

The song cycle was premiered on March 22, 2000 at Carnegie Hall by Jessye Norman and by the Orchestra of St. Luke's conducted by David Robertson. It was programmed as the second half of the concert, which was originally intended to include works by Ravel and Schoenberg. However, in place of the other musical compositions for the first half, the authors of the poetry were invited to read the texts aloud. The purpose of this was to give the audience a chance to hear the words spoken by their authors before hearing it set to music. Estés stated in her interview with Charlie Rose: "It's like an x-ray of the creative process to do it this way. To show how the bones of everything are constructed. To open up the whole process to the audience, so they can see it too." According to Allan Kozinn, the music reviewer for *The New York Times*, Norman made the choice during the rehearsal process with the orchestra to drop the originally scheduled works by Ravel and Schoenberg and to have the authors read their poems. Kozinn also mentioned that between the poetry readings pianist Ursula Oppens played interludes from the "Carnegie Hall Millennium Piano Book".<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Allan Kozinn, "MUSIC REVIEW; No Schoenberg? Let Me Out of Here", *The New York Times*, March 25, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/03/25/arts/music-review-no-schoenberg-let-me-out-of-here.html>, accessed 12 December 2014.

## 2. Critical reception

The only review for the premiere performance was the review by Allan Kozinn of *The New York Times*.<sup>22</sup> In this review, Kozinn was mostly critical of the fact Norman had eliminated the Ravel and Schoenberg from the first half of the program. He mentioned that “at least a few concertgoers felt shortchanged and left to demand refunds before the performance began.”<sup>23</sup> Apparently the change was made at the last minute, and his disappointment probably colored his enjoyment of the song cycle.

However, Kozinn had some positive remarks about the performance. He described Estés’s “Mothership” poems as “touching”. He also commented that Weir’s music seemed to complement Norman’s singing style and range, and that Norman “sang the cycle with a directness and clarity that one has missed in many of her recent performances.”<sup>24</sup> His final comment was directed to the orchestra, which he stated “seemed to revel in Ms. Weir’s colorfully scored and often lengthy interludes.”<sup>25</sup>

## 3. Other performances

There have been six public performances of the work since its premiere. The second performance of *woman.life.song* occurred on August 6, 2000 at Royal Albert Hall in London as a BBC Proms concert. Jessye Norman sang and David Robertson conducted the London Sinfonietta. An interesting side note about this performance is that Norman decided not to have the poetry read, as in the Carnegie Hall performance, but placed the Schoenberg and Ravel pieces that had been omitted in New York back on the program for the second half. Although not publically available, there is a recording of this UK premiere performance, which is owned by

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

the publisher Chester Music Limited, part of Music Sales Classical. There were at least seven reviews of this performance, and five of the positive reviews appear on the publisher's website.<sup>26</sup>

One of these reviews stated that "Weir's music draws happily from popular forms - the silky swing of Brazilian jazz, the slow back-beat of soul - with some marine ripples of Ravel for good measure, and generously gives the poetry centre-stage."<sup>27</sup> One particular fan of Weir and

Norman, Andrew Clark, wrote a glowing review of this performance in *Financial Times*. He stated:

Ranging from a quiet guitar and clarinet duo to an ocean-deep bass clarinet motif and beguiling flute and piano arabesques, Weir's fastidious accompaniments glisten with atmosphere. As a vehicle for Jessye Norman, *woman.life.song* is seriously flattering. As an addition to the song-cycle repertory, it should appeal to many other big-hearted sopranos. As an example of Weir's art, it is irresistibly direct in appeal.<sup>28</sup>

Another reviewer, Margaret Davies, was a little more critical of Norman's performance due to the intimate nature of the piece being inadequate to fill the large performance hall. She stated:

It obviously communicated with the Prommers at the front of the arena, but even seated in the stalls I felt remote from some of its effects, which may have been completely lost in the Gallery. Its emotional appeal and the intimate, private sentiments it expresses would have exerted a more powerful grip in a smaller auditorium and, in spite of Jessye Norman's close involvement with the cycle, from creation to birth, she sometimes gave priority to producing lovely sounds at the expense of the words, while we strained to capture the meaning of the text.<sup>29</sup>

The third and fourth performances of *woman.life.song* took place in January of 2008 for

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<sup>26</sup> "Judith Weir – *woman.life.song* (2000)" Music Sales Classical, <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer?category=Works&workid=2764>; accessed 10 December 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Anna Picard, [Review of *woman.life.song*], *The Independent on Sunday*, August 13, 2000, quoted in "Judith Weir – *woman.life.song* (2000)" Music Sales Classical, <http://www.musicsalesclassical.com/composer?category=Works&workid=2764>; accessed 10 December 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Clark, "Weir's music rises to Big Jessye's challenge THE PROMS," *Financial Times* (London: 08 Aug 2000), 12. <http://0-search.proquest.com.source.unco.edu/docview/249041876?accountid=12832>; accessed 21 November 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Davies, "Prom Reviews," *Musical Opinion*, December 2000, <http://0-search.proquest.com.source.unco.edu/docview/474686?accountid=12832>, accessed 21 November 2014, 42-43.

the “Judith Weir: Telling the Tale” festival.<sup>30</sup> The performer was British mezzo-soprano Rowan Hillier with the Guildhall Chamber Orchestra, conducted by André de Ridder. The performance on January 17<sup>th</sup> took place at the Guildhall School of Music, and the performance on the 20<sup>th</sup> took place at Jerwood Hall, in the LSO (London Symphony Orchestra) St. Luke’s. This performance was recorded for BBC Radio 3. A copy of this recording is owned by the publisher and is not commercially available. While one reviewer (Andrew Clark) gave a short but positive review<sup>31</sup>, another, Richard Whitehouse, didn’t particularly like the work, calling it “controversial,” “imposing” and “long,” especially the “sprawling texts by Clarissa Pinkola Estés.” However, he didn’t criticize the performers: “Not that Rowan Hellier was other than at-one with the poetic sentiments expressed, while André de Ridder's conducting was an object-lesson in unforced momentum. A flawed work, then, but a necessary revival in a retrospective such as this.”<sup>32</sup>

The fifth performance was on August 20, 2011 for the Bregenz Festival in Austria.<sup>33</sup> The location of the concert was the Theater am Kornmarkt in Bregenz, and the orchestra was the Vorarlberg Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Nicholas Collon. Although Dutch mezzo-soprano Tania Kross is listed as the singer for the work according to the publisher’s website and

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<sup>30</sup> “Judith Weir – woman.life.song (2000)”

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Clark, “Varied Voice for a Festival Finale.” *Financial Times*, Jan 22, 2008. <http://0-search.proquest.com.source.unco.edu/docview/250068532?accountid=12832>, accessed 21 November 2014. 17.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Whitehouse, “Judith Weir: Telling the Tale – Songs and Tales... Woman.Life.Song... Earth and Sky,” Classical Source, [http://www.classicalsource.com/db\\_control/db\\_concert\\_review.php?id=5411](http://www.classicalsource.com/db_control/db_concert_review.php?id=5411), accessed 21 November 2014.

<sup>33</sup> “Judith Weir – woman.life.song (2000)”

the festival program, Rowan Hillier was a last minute substitution, according to one review of the performance in German.<sup>34</sup>

The sixth performance was a partial performance of the work. Tania Kross performed “Breasts!!” with pianist Reinild Mees in Amsterdam on March 8, 2012. This performance was part of a “Musical Marathon” on International Women’s Day. The concert consisted of compositions by women composers performed by female soloists at the Small Hall of the Concertgebouw. It was broadcast on Dutch Radio 4. Although there were announcements of the concert and broadcast in Dutch, no reviews of this performance were found.

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<sup>34</sup> Silvia Thurner, “Wenn Solisten der Musik den Rang ablaufen – beim Porträtkonzert mit Werken von Judith Weir wurde in erster Linie der Pianist Aaron Pilsan gefeiert,” Kultur website, 21.08.2011, <http://kulturzeitschrift.at/kritiken/musik-konzert/wenn-solisten-der-musik-den-rang-ablaufen-2013-beim-portraetkonzert-mit-werken-von-judith-weir-wurde-in-erster-linie-der-pianist-aaron-pilsan-gefeiert>; accessed 21 November 2014.

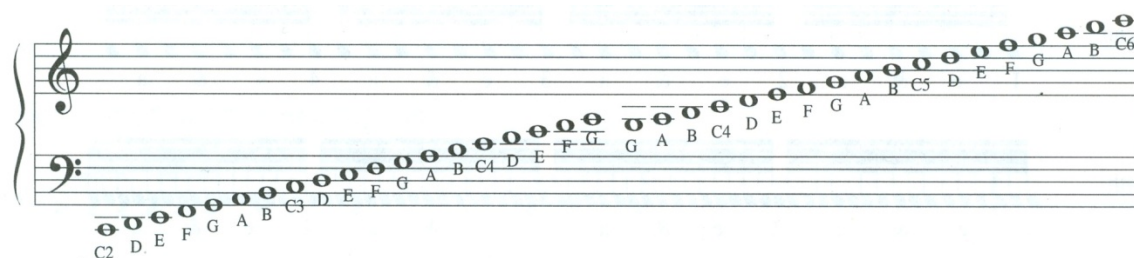
## CHAPTER V

### ANALYSIS

#### Method of Analysis

The method for musical analysis of the work considers the following components: melody, harmony, rhythm, texture, form, instrumentation/color and text influence. *Guidelines for Style Analysis* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) by Jan La Rue is a reference, as well as *Understanding Post-Tonal Music* by Miguel A. Roig-Francoli. Using specific examples in the music, each song in the cycle is analyzed according to how the composer set each individual poet's work. This chapter is organized by author rather than chronologically by song in order to fully show how Weir expresses the unique voice of each poet through the musical components above. In the concluding section of this chapter, large-scale connections between songs are explored to determine how Weir has constructed the song cycle to work on a holistic level.

When referencing pitches in this dissertation, C4 represents middle C. C3 indicates the C below middle C (progressing downwards), and C5 represents the C above middle C (progressing upwards). The pitches in the musical examples are not transposed unless indicated (for example, a middle C written in the clarinet part would sound middle C.)





### Maya Angelou Texts

Although Maya Angelou is most recognized for her autobiographies, the poems she published between her biographies also reflect the emotions and turmoil of her experiences. Deep and often shocking, many express the turbulence of the civil rights movement in the 1960's as well as identity and racial pride. In "Exuberance as Beauty: The Prose and Poetry of Maya Angelou," Rachel Thomas makes a comparison between her autobiographical works and the nature of her poetry: "Where her autobiographies describe in detail the events of her existence, her poetry captures the essence, the raw impressions of her memory."<sup>35</sup> She further adds:

...her style may be better appreciated when read with an unfocused lens rather than one attuned to structural correctness. She writes most often of the everyday, bringing out the color and rhythm that one might otherwise overlook, or of the emotional threads common in her life, and captures the sensible aspects of those fleeting sentiments. Angelou also plays with one's familiar associations, mixing common with radical for the sake of creating the most accurate sensation.<sup>36</sup>

Angelou's two poems in *woman.life.song* are written in prose style, which is appropriate as they both are related more closely to her autobiographical works than her poetry. Yet her poetic language through descriptive words and uses of metaphors capture the color and sensation of her poetry. Thomas writes: "Complex and colorful sensations such as this are at the root of Angelou's poetry, and her ability to express the nuances of human experience in vibrant color is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of it."<sup>37</sup> "On Youth" expresses color and sensation through the description of the aroma of roasting peanuts, the sound of the spirituals, and the satisfying glass of milk. "On Maturity" compares the years of life to shards of thin crystal. These shards also act as seashells and communicate memories, some happy and satisfying, others darker and cruel.

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<sup>35</sup> Rachel Thomas, "Exuberance as Beauty: The Prose and Poetry of Maya Angelou," in *Bloom's BioCritiques: Maya Angelou*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 2002), 67.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Angelou is widely known for dramatic recitations of her poetry. Weir captures this in her settings, as much of Angelou's text is spoken rather than sung. "On Youth" is spoken in measured rhythm that imitates the natural rhythm of the words, and the last few lines of "On Maturity" are spoken in a natural unmeasured rhythm. The performer of these songs will need to capture the theatrical nature and style of Angelou's readings to fully express the poem as it requires. Mary Jane Lupton comments on Angelou's style as orator, specifically referring to her performance at President Clinton's inauguration in 1993 when she recited her poem "On the Pulse of Morning," written for the occasion:

Her theatrical rendering of "On the Pulse of Morning" is, in a sense, a return to African American oral tradition, when slaves like Frederick Douglass stood on platforms in abolitionist meeting halls to register their concerns about the slave system. The ode also echoes the rhetorical grace of the African American sermon, as practiced and modified by Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Jesse Jackson, Louis Farrakhan.<sup>38</sup>

Angelou's poem "On Youth" begins the song cycle. The following is the text of the song:

The stride of young legs and the stretch of limber arms were my wealth. My clear and powerful eyesight and my acute hearing were my treasures. I confess that the coins in my purse were scarce or altogether not there, and others may have thought me poor, but when my old grandmother threw a clump of raw peanuts on the floor of the hot oven, and as the air became perfumed with the friendly aroma of roasting nuts and my uncle, sitting happily in a dark corner, began to hum the old songs of the spirit: the aroma of the nuts, the sound – the heavy silk sound of the ancient spirituals, a glass of cold milk in my hand, my young body – obedient to my will – made me rich beyond measure and my heart was filled with gladness.<sup>39</sup>

This text is most likely a memory from Angelou's past. Those who have read *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* would be familiar with her grandmother and uncle, whom she mentions in this text. Angelou reminisces about her grandmother in her book *Letter to my Daughter*:

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Jane Lupton, *Maya Angelou: A Critical Companion* (Westport CN: Greenwood Press, 1998), 17.

<sup>39</sup> Maya Angelou and Judith Weir, "On Youth," *woman.life.song* (London: Chester Music Ltd, 2000) 1-5. Reprinted by permission of Chester Music Limited.

My paternal grandmother who raised me had a remarkable influence on how I saw the world and how I reckoned my place in it. She was the picture of dignity. She spoke softly and walked slowly, with her hands behind her back, fingers laced together. I imitated her so successfully that neighbors called me her shadow.<sup>40</sup>

The grandmother is clearly a comforting link to Angelou's ancestral past. The memory in “On Youth” may not be a specific one, but the events most likely happened more than once in her childhood. They depict a happy memory of sitting by the fire with her grandmother, smelling hot peanuts roasting while her uncle hummed old spirituals. She writes from the perspective of one who is advanced in years, with the maturity to recognize that monetary wealth is nothing compared to the treasure of youth: to have youthful energy, acute eyesight, strong hearing, and to be limber and fast. She uses descriptive words such as “friendly” aroma of the peanuts and the “heavy silk sound” of the spirituals. She states her “young body” was “obedient to my will” - as opposed to an old body which is no longer always obedient to her will. Her “heart was filled with gladness” to feel the comfort of taste, smell, sight and hearing – all five senses connecting her with her ancestral past, with the bond of family.

The music begins with tambourine and bongos in a steady, pulsating rhythm of eighth notes and triplets. The bongos play a 3/8 rhythm syncopated against the 4/4 of the congas. The tempo is lively, and the syncopated rhythm creates the impression of a fast gallop. This rhythmic motive is played first by the bongos and then repeated by the instruments after the word “treasures” (examples 1 and 2).

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<sup>40</sup> Maya Angelou, *Letter to my Daughter* (New York: Random House, 2008) 12.



simple accompaniment of chords and bongos under the lyrics “I confess that the coins in my purse were scarce or altogether not there” (example 3). In measure 26, the vocal line pauses and the complex motives return with syncopated rhythms in the piano and bongos. The sense of complexity increases with the use of a hemiola-like passage in measure 30 and the addition of a 5/4 measure in measure 32 (example 4). This complexity expresses the growing excitement and anticipation of the young girl in the poem as she waits for the roasted peanuts.

25

Vibra-  
phone

Bongos

Piano

Voice

and oth-ers may have thought me poor

Ex. 3. Weir, “On Youth,” mm. 25-27. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Texture change to chords in piano and vibraphone under spoken text, rhythmic triplet figure returns after the word “poor.”

30

Flutes

ff

f

f

mp

3

Alto Flute

ff

f

f

mp

3

3

3

but when my old grand-moth-er

Ex. 4. Weir, “On Youth,” mm. 30-33. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Syncopated, hemiola-like rhythm in flutes.

Weir's harmonies include the use of quartal chords. In this piece the quartal harmonies emulate a primal, pure, ancestral feel, in a similar manner as Copland's *Appalachian Spring*. Paired with the rhythmic motive is a repeating chordal motive as seen in measure 30 in example 4 above, comprised of quartal chords moving in parallel motion (example 5). The repetition and building of this motive almost amounts to minimalism. This motive also reflects the jazz practice of “comping,” a technique where the pianist or guitar player plays repeated chords under an improvised solo.

29

Piano

ff

3

3

3

3

Ex. 5. Weir, “On Youth,” mm. 29-30. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Use of quartal harmonies in piano.

The treatment of the rhythmic motives, their repetition and climactic escalation express the energy and spontaneity of youth in the text. A shift happens in measure 33 with the line “But when my old grandmother...” The texture reduces to bongos and sustained chords, and in measure 39 just before “and my uncle” in the alto flute, the first truly lyrical melody appears, emulating the humming of the “old songs” spoken in the text. This tune is not a known “spiritual,” but resembles characteristics of the African-American style, capturing the spirit and feeling of the text. The lyrical melody is in two phrases: measures 39-41 act as a “question” (example 6), and measures 43-44 are the “answer” (example 7), using an F major tonality. The piece itself is not considered tonal, however this melody evokes tonality. It has characteristics of a “swing” style song, with familiar even phrases, and the tune is later hummed by the soprano in measures 67-78. This melody is developed in the next few phrases. The “question” phrase is repeated in the pickup to measure 45, with an alteration of the last two notes, and the reiterated “answer” extends the phrase by repeating the last two notes of the melody. The second repeat of the lyrical melody is played in four-part harmony with the strings, in between the text “spirituals” and “glass.”

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Alto Flute and Voice. The Alto Flute part is in 4/4 time, starting at measure 39. It features a melodic line with triplets and a dynamic marking 'p'. The Voice part is also in 4/4 time and has lyrics: "and my un-cle, sit-ting hap-pil-y in a dark cor ner, be-gan to".

Ex. 6. Weir, “On Youth,” mm. 39-41. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Lyrical melody in alto flute, “question” phrase.

42

Alto Flute

3

3

3

3

3

3

Voice

hum the old songs - of the spir-it;

Ex. 7. Weir, “On Youth,” mm. 42-44. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Lyrical melody “answer” phrase in alto flute.

Weir incorporates different musical devices to enhance the drama of the text. She uses pauses in the text for dramatic effect, reflecting the oratorical nature of Angelou's works, for example, in the long pause between “spirit” and “the aroma,” (measures 44-46) and longer pause between “spirituals” and “a glass” (measures 51-55). In the final phrase, the rhythm of the speech slows down, taking extra rests between words to match the gradual crescendo in the music. There is a dramatic build in the voice on the climactic words “heart is filled with gladness.” The instruments pause and the vocal climax is spoken *a cappella*, a texture that gives dramatic focus to the word “gladness” (example 8).



61

Flute 1

Flute 2

Alto Flute

Vibra-  
phone

Congas

Bongos

Piano

Voice

and my heart was filled with glad-ness

Ex. 8. Weir, “On Youth,” mm. 62-63. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Rests on downbeat of measure 63 for “gladness” in voice.

With this pause, Weir creates the atmosphere of the emotional moment described in the text. The winds and piano follow with accented quarter-note triplet chords in an augmented version of the rhythmic motives found at the beginning of the piece. There is a full sonority of

harmonies including sevenths and chord clusters, which adds an element of atonality to the F Major melody. This phrase is repeated four times offset by the lyrical “humming” melody from earlier, played softly by the strings and hummed by the voice (example 9).

The musical score for Example 9, measures 67-70, is arranged in six staves. The top staff is for Vibraphone, followed by Piano and flutes, Voice, Violins, Viola, and Cello. The Vibraphone and Piano/flutes parts feature loud, complex chords (ff, mf, f) with triplets. The Voice part is a soft, lyrical melody (p) with triplets. The string parts (Violins, Viola, Cello) play a soft, lyrical melody (p, pp) with triplets. The key signature has one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4.

Ex. 9. Weir, “On Youth,” mm. 67-70. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Winds, piano and vibraphone with loud seventh chords against the soft melody in strings and voice.

Weir continues the dramatic moment with a shift in measure 79 to a percussion trio, comprised of suspended cymbal, glockenspiel (played with knitting needles), and tambourine/triangle. The glockenspiel plays the opening syncopated dotted triplet rhythm on its highest notes, using knitting needles to create a high clicking sound. Along with the cymbals, these syncopated, percussive elements give the listener an image of the fire crackling or peanuts roasting in the oven. This section alludes to the rhythms of the beginning of the piece, however there is more rhythmical repetition and, although still syncopated, it is much more regular and metrical. This removes the feeling of uneasiness, and expresses more of a sense of security, as the young girl is feeling the peace and happiness of her surroundings (example 10).

The musical score for Example 10, measures 83-85, is presented in three staves. The top staff is for the Tambourine, the middle for Cymbals, and the bottom for the Glockenspiel. All staves are in 4/4 time. The Tambourine and Cymbals parts use a syncopated dotted triplet rhythm. The Glockenspiel part, played with knitting needles, features a syncopated dotted triplet rhythm on its highest notes.

Ex. 10. Weir, “On Youth,” mm. 83-85. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Percussion trio with glockenspiel playing opening syncopated rhythm.

Angelou's other contribution to the work, her poem “On Maturity,” concludes the cycle.

The text of the poem is also in prose form, and is below:

The years are broken across my body like thin crystal. Their shards reach my knees in pretty, shiny piles and I know each one with a dainty intimacy. Some were friends, and I pick them up and hold them to my ear like seashells, and they whisper to me of great love, of promises, of debts paid. Some were hateful and they speak without the intent to conceal, of the blows of death, the loss of love, friendship betrayed and golden youth ravaged by the weight of time. There appears an image of wisdom. Surely I have learned how to live with some grace,

some compassion, some mercy and some style. Will these lessons serve me as I face the next adventure?<sup>42</sup>

This text reflects a different aspect of aging than two of Angelou's other poems about maturity, "On Aging" and "When Old Folks Laugh." In these earlier poems, she focuses on the aging body and its betrayal with time. "On Aging" speaks of "stiff" and "aching" bones, and the embarrassment of no longer being mobile and self-sufficient. There is a sense of anger when she states, "Don't bring me no rocking chair," as seen in this stanza from "On Aging":

When my bones are stiff and aching,  
And my feet won't climb the stair,  
I will only ask one favor:  
Don't bring me no rocking chair<sup>43</sup>

"When Old Folks Laugh" talks of the "wobbling" of "brittle necks" of the elderly, and this time Angelou treats the subject of aging more with amusement than anger. Yet in this poem there is more of a sense of acceptance of age with the line "their laps are filled with memories," as seen in this stanza of the poem:

Saliva glistens in  
the corners of their mouths,  
their heads wobble  
on brittle necks, but  
their laps  
are filled with memories.<sup>44</sup>

These previous poems show Angelou's progression of thought regarding aging, but they both show her concern for the physical deterioration that occurs with age. In comparison, "On Maturity" focuses on the memories and the experiences of the past, rather than the body. This is a deeper reflection of the end-of-life moments. It is an acceptance of the journey of life. The

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<sup>42</sup> Maya Angelou and Judith Weir, "On Maturity," *woman.life.song*, 61-66. Reprinted by permission of Chester Music Limited.

<sup>43</sup> Maya Angelou, "On Aging," *The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou* (New York: Random House, 1994) 170.

<sup>44</sup> Angelou, "When Old Folks Laugh," *The Complete Collected Poems*, 227.

years are akin to shards of thin crystal, “pretty, shiny piles,” beautiful, rather than old wrinkles of time. These memories have a “dainty intimacy” and are like friends that whisper to her of pleasant happy times as well as hateful and hurtful times. She is preparing herself for death, as her life images pass before her. She asks whether or not she has learned from her experiences. This question is asked to an “image of wisdom.” This is quite different from “When Old Folks Laugh” which also touches on the idea of dying: “When old folks laugh, they consider the promise of dear painless death, and generously forgive life for happening to them.”<sup>45</sup> In this poem she experiences death as a passive observer rather than being an active participant and chooser of destiny. In contrast, “On Maturity” reviews and reflects on the choices made throughout life: “Surely I have learned how to live with some grace, some compassion, some mercy and some style. Will these lessons serve me as I face the next adventure?”<sup>46</sup>

Weir creates the atmosphere of contemplation through ascending glissandi in the harp, guitar and strings against descending sixteenth-note harmonic minor scale passages in the piano. This creates an eerie, timeless effect. This use of glissandi is commonly indicates a flashback to a past memory in television shows and movies. However, here it is also descriptive of a rippling effect of reflections in water or in glass, like light sparkling off the shards of crystal. Weir indicates “Faint, distant,” at the beginning, as if the memories are not altogether clear yet, just distant and dreamy. “Pale, toneless” is indicated for the voice, to express this sense of going inward mentally, as in a dream-like state (example 11).

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Angelou and Weir, “On Maturity,” *woman.life.song*, 61-66.

Faint, distant  $\text{♩} = 72$

The musical score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Piccolo, Glockenspiel, Guitar, Harp, Piano, Violin (I and II), Viola (I and II), Cello (I and II), and Contrabass. The tempo is marked 'Faint, distant' with a quarter note equal to 72 beats per minute. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The score shows ascending glissandi in the strings and a descending harmonic minor scale passage in the piano. Dynamics include p, mp, and pp. The piano part features a descending harmonic minor scale passage in the right hand and a sustained bass line in the left hand.

Ex. 11. Weir, “On Maturity,” *woman.life.song*, mm. 1-2. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Ascending glissandi in strings versus descending harmonic minor scale passage in piano

The vocal line in the first half of the song is sung rather than spoken, in contrast with the latter part of the song where the vocal line is spoken as in “On Youth.” The melody is neither entirely lyrical nor altogether disjunct. There is some stepwise motion and some leaps of thirds and fourths, but the melody is definitely atonal. The opening leap on the words “the years” ends on a  $G\flat^5$  which is dissonant against the G-natural and G-sharp in the woodwinds. Combining with the closed forward [i] vowel, it gives the notion of aging a strident, harsh feel. This jarring

opening combined with the mezzo-piano, “pale, toneless” expression combines to create an eerie, otherworldly effect (example 12).

9

Flutes

Clarinet

Vibraphone

Voice

*p*

*p*

*mp*

pale, toneless;

The years are broken a-cross my bo-dy

Ex. 12. Weir, “On Maturity,” mm. 9-10. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. G $\flat$  on “years” dissonance against G $\sharp$  and F in 2<sup>nd</sup> Flute and 2<sup>nd</sup> Clarinet.

The harmonies consist of hidden triadic chords against non-chord bass notes, often following the vocal line in parallel motion. For example, in measure 12 there is an F major chord descending to E $\flat$  augmented chord, against G $\flat$  to F under the words “thin crystal.” These bitonal harmonies add to this sense of otherworldliness – feeling the sense of two different keys at the same time, like being present in two different worlds at the same time: the “here” and “hereafter” (example 13).

Flutes *mp* *p*

Clarinets *mp* *p*

Vibraphone *p* *mp*

Voice *mf* *mp*

like thin cry - stal.

Ex. 13. Weir, “On Maturity,” m. 12. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. F Major chord with G $\flat$ , to E $\flat$  augmented with F in flutes and clarinets.

Weir uses text painting several times throughout the next sections of text. For the text “of the blows of death” there is a strike on the tam-tam immediately before the words, foreshadowing the “blows.” The seventh chords move chromatically in parallel motion, evoking the denseness and heaviness reflected in the mood of the text: of death, love lost, and betrayal (example 14). The pizzicato strings and the tam-tam played on the word “weight” sound like a ticking and gong of a clock. The percussive strikes also give the impression of blows to the heart, the damage that these unhappy memories do to the soul (example 15).



30

Flutes

Clarinets

Tam-tam

Harp

Guitar

Voice

*mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *mp*

*f*

*mf* *f* *mf*

of the blows of death, the loss of love friend-ship be-

Ex. 14. Weir, “On Maturity,” mm. 31-32. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Text painting of tam-tam hit before “blows,” chromaticism in winds.

33

Flutes

Clarinets

Tam-tam

Voice

Violins  
Violas

Cellos

*mf* *mp* *pp*

*mf* *mp* *pp*

*f* *mp*

trayed, and gold - en youth ra vaged by the weight of time.

pizz

pizz

*f* *mf* *mp*

Ex. 15. Weir, “On Maturity,” mm. 33-36. Pizzicato strings and tam-tam hit under “weight of time” text.

For the final section of the poem, the music includes a lively, fast percussive rhythm, a very similar pattern of triplets as in “On Youth.” It breaks from the dense, chromatic heaviness and returns to a youthful minimalistic energy. The vocal line is spoken, as in the opening of “On Youth,” but this time it is spoken without measured rhythm, in “natural inclination and pace.” There is a hint of this rhythm earlier in the piece when the text spoke of the happy memories from the past: “Some were friends.” The piano, first violin and piccolo briefly quote the motive and rhythm from “On Youth” before returning to the dense chromatic chords and dissonances (example 16).

18

Piccolo Violin

*mp* *p* *mp*

Piano

*p* *mp* *p*

Voice

in ti ma cy.

Some were friends,

with more warmth: *mf*

Ex. 16. Weir, “On Maturity,” mm. 18-19. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Piano, violin and piccolo quoting triplet rhythms from “On Youth.”

In this concluding section, the harmonies return to the minimalist, open-fifth and quartal harmonies from the first song. The text states: “There appears an image of wisdom.” The rhythms alternate between steady triplet and sextet ostinato passages and held “timeless” chords during the spoken text. The lower strings play harmonics, adding to the eerie atmospheric sound (example 17).

50

Flutes

Vibraphone

Harp

Piano

Guitar

Voice

Violins

Violas

Cellos  
Bass

(spoken) Surely I have learned how to live  
with some grace, some compassion, some mercy  
and some style.

*mf* *mp* *p*

Ex. 17. Weir, “On Maturity,” mm. 49-52. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Harmonics in lower strings and vibraphone chord for spoken text.

The instruments conclude the piece after the final question, “Will these lessons serve me as I face the next adventure?” They do not give a satisfying answer to the question, however. The harmony consists of slowly repeated A minor chords in first inversion rather than root position.

Although this conveys a sense of finality with the elongation of the rhythm, the repeated chords, and the crescendos from forte to fortissimo, the final chord contains a short octave F in the bass range of the piano. Against the A minor chords, this accented bass note leaves the listener with a feeling of uncertainty at the end. This is not only the conclusion of the song but also of the entire work; it is an element that adds to the intrigue of this piece as a whole, yet may also detract from its audience appeal.

### Toni Morrison Texts

Although she has written several poems, Toni Morrison is mostly known for her novels. These novels are primarily about African-American stories and characters, exploring their culture, histories, lives, and communities.<sup>47</sup> At times the content is explicit and shocking, for example, in the book *Beloved*, the main character is a woman who killed her own child to protect the child from a life of slavery. Many of her novels explore love and sex in all its forms, and several of her characters experience something shameful or become a pariah in their community. The subjects of love, sex and passion are also inherent in her two poems from *woman.life.song*. “The Edge” describes a young girl's first sexual experience. In “Eve Remembering,” although considered a shameful act in the Bible, Eve regards her bite of the apple from the tree of knowledge as a pleasurable experience and regrets nothing.

An interesting aspect of Morrison's writing is that the sound of the word is just as important as the meaning. She speaks about this in an interview with Christina Davis:

...my efforts to make aural literature – A-U-R-A-L – work because I do hear it. It has to read in silence and that's just one phase of the work but it also has to *sound* and if it doesn't *sound* right... Even though I don't speak it when I'm writing it, I have this interior piece... in my heart that reads... so that the way I hear it is the way I write it... The point is not to need the adverbs to say how it sounds but to have the sound of it in the sentence, and if it needs a lot of footnotes or editorial

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<sup>47</sup> Carmen Gillespie, *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: A Literacy Reference to her Life and Work*, (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 419.

remarks or description in order to say how it sounded, then there's something wrong with it.<sup>48</sup>

The words Morrison chooses for “The Edge” and “Eve Remembering” show the careful crafting based on sounds. For example, in “The Edge,” Morrison chooses words unique for their pronunciation such as “grist” rhyming with “risk” and “mist.” The rhyme and rhythm of the words and phrases of the poem flow naturally when sung. This aspect of poetic writing was an important part of the inspiration for Weir's composition. She commented on this in her interview with Charlie Rose:

It's wonderful for setting to music. I think what Toni said is so true that in a way the best lyricists have to leave some space for the music to happen, and I feel people [Angelou, Morrison and Estés] have so generously done that...<sup>49</sup>

The Edge is the third song of the cycle and is the third that tackles the subject of youth, with the following text:

He was a boy – just a boy –  
 and I was a very young girl.  
 In blazing light and shadows trimmed in gold  
 we took the risk of love  
     the grist of love  
     the dreamy, steamy mist of love  
 For he was a boy – just a boy –  
 and I was a very young girl  
 racing to the edge of love  
     the bed of love  
     the love-me-til-I'm-dead of love.  
 He was a boy – just a boy –  
 and I was a very young girl.

We were new to time  
 and dreams were real.  
 We could play out the line  
 [Get] to the edge of life

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<sup>48</sup> Christina Davis, “Interview with Toni Morrison,” *Toni Morrison: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates, JR. and K. A. Appiah, (New York: Amistad, 1993), 412-420.

<sup>49</sup> “A discussion about *woman.life.song*”

the bed of life  
 the love-me-til-I'm-dead of life.  
 For he was a boy – just a boy –  
 and I was a very young girl.<sup>50</sup>

As previously mentioned, Morrison often deals with uncomfortable issues in her writings. This piece musically portrays the tension of a first sexual experience, with the building suspense of the physical act of love-making. The text speaks of the “edge of life” vs. the “edge of love.” The woman is racing to the edge of love to get to the edge of life. The “blazing light” and shadows “trimmed in gold” depict a sunrise and speak of new beginnings. Being “new to time” expresses the excitement of youth and innocence, where dreams are real and she is only in the moment. There is no thought of consequences in “we could play out the line.” She feels freedom in going to the edge and crossing over that line of innocence.

Although the other songs in this cycle are analyzed sequentially according to when the musical events occur within the song, this song is better analyzed according to the musical elements (harmony, melody, rhythm, form, etc.) By looking at the piece as a whole as well as breaking down its individual parts, we can see how Weir combines each musical element to create this musical expression of a sexual experience. The analysis begins with a discussion of the overall momentum of the accompaniment, followed by the specifics on the melodic motives used throughout the piece that are highlighted in the vocal melody and developed in the instrumental interludes. Next comes a study of the rhythmic aspects and complexities, followed by a discussion of the development of the tonal centers. The analysis concludes with a discussion of the form of the piece, and how all the musical elements together create the dramatic subtext.

Weir marks the piece “Energetic, forceful,” which expresses this first sexual experience. The orchestration consists of guitar, harp and strings, with the rhythmical pizzicato of guitar and

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<sup>50</sup> Toni Morrison and Judith Weir, “The Edge,” *woman.life.song*, 18-25. Reprinted by permission of Chester Music Limited.

harp giving a percussive edge. The unusual rhythms – quintuplet and septuplet eighths, convey unsettled excitement and tension. Throughout the song and during long instrumental passages, the accompaniment paints the scene between the young lovers, expressing the subtext of the poem. For example, the chromatic ascending and descending motives of the violins in measure 5 and the parallel glissandi against the chromatic scales in the violins in measure 4 create the effect of sighs and moans. These elements are shown in Example 18.

The musical score for measures 4 and 5 of 'The Edge' by Weir is presented in a multi-staff format. The key signature is one flat (B-flat), and the time signature is 3/4. The instruments are arranged as follows:

- Gtr. (Guitar):** Measure 4 has a glissando (marked *sf*) and a quarter note. Measure 5 has a glissando (marked *sf*) and a quarter note.
- Hp. (Harp):** Measure 4 has a glissando (marked *sf*) and a quarter note. Measure 5 has a glissando (marked *sf*) and a quarter note.
- Voice:** Silent in both measures.
- Vln. 1 (Violin 1):** Measure 4 has a glissando (marked *ff*) and a quarter note. Measure 5 has a glissando (marked *mf*) and a quarter note.
- Vln. 2 (Violin 2):** Measure 4 has a glissando (marked *ff*) and a quarter note. Measure 5 has a glissando (marked *mf*) and a quarter note.
- Vla. (Viola):** Measure 4 has a quintuplet (marked *mp*) and a quarter note. Measure 5 has a quintuplet (marked *p*) and a quarter note.
- Vc. (Violoncello):** Measure 4 has a quintuplet (marked *f*) and a quarter note. Measure 5 has a quintuplet (marked *sf*) and a quarter note.

Ex. 18. Weir, "The Edge," mm. 4-5. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Chromatic triplet passages against glissandi in violins in measure 4, and descending chromatic "sighs" in violins, measure 5. Also quintuplets in viola and *pizzicato* guitar and harp marked with *sforzando* accents.



The chromatic passages gradually build from smaller note motives to longer chromatic ascending and descending passages, in “arcs.” These passages include the use of an augmented second, between F and G#. This interval is borrowed from the harmonic minor scale and gives an exotic flavor to the motive (example 19, mm 16-17).

The musical score for Example 19, measures 16-17, is presented for Violins 1 and 2, Violas, and Violoncello. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The score features chromatic ascending and descending arcs in the violins, with dynamics marked *f*, *mf*, and *f*. The Viola and Vc parts also feature chromatic passages, with an augmented second interval (F to G#) highlighted in the Viola and Vc parts. The score includes fingerings (5) and slurs for the chromatic passages.

Ex. 19. Weir, “The Edge,” mm. 16-17. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Chromatic ascending and descending arcs in violins, addition of other strings to texture, augmented second between F and G#.

There are several moments in the music where the rhythmic momentum is interrupted by repeated tone clusters, as in measures 8-12 (example 20). Here the dynamics crescendo to fortissimo, maintaining this level for a measure before dropping to mezzo forte. This creates a musical depiction of sexual climax and release.

8

Gtr.

Hp.

Voice

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

sf sf sff

sf sf sff

sf sf sff

ff ff mf mf <f <ff f =

ff f mf mf <f <ff f =

mf f mf mf <f <ff f =

mf <f <ff f =

p mp<sup>5</sup> p

p mp<sup>5</sup> p

11

Gtr.

Hp.

Voice

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

*mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

*mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

*mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

*mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

*f* *ff* *mf*

*f* *ff* *mf*

Ex. 20. Weir, "The Edge," mm. 8-12. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Building climax to repeated tone cluster chords, followed by sudden drop in sound.

Weir creates a melodic motive for the entrance of the vocal line “he was a boy” in measures 20-23 (example 21). It follows the chromatic arcs of the strings, with an added leap of a fifth on “was a” and leaps on “very young girl.” There are added accents on the word “boy.” This melodic motive for the phrase recurs for each repeat of the text, with a variant on the final repetition “and I was a very young girl” in measures 41-43. The motive acts as a musical reminder of the text that emphasizes that the boy and the girl in the poem were very young in the following ways. First, the refrain is a major part of the poem not only because of its structure but because it repeatedly points out the fact of their youth, and so Weir uses this melodic motive not only for the refrain but also as a structural part of the music. For example, the first four notes of the motive are foreshadowed in the strings twice before the vocal entrance, once in measure 7 and again in measure 12. This introduces the listener to the motive even before it is sung with the words. Second, the chromatic nature of the motive also adds tension and suspense to the idea of their youth, suggesting that this act could be dangerous as well as exciting.

20

Guitar

mp

f

mf

mf

mp

Voice

He was a boy, \_\_\_\_\_ just a boy, \_\_\_\_\_

Vln.1

mp

mf

mp

Vln.2

mp

mf

mp

Vla 1

mp

22

f

mf

f

mf

mp

and I was a ve-ry young girl. \_\_\_\_\_

mp

mf

f

mp

mf

f

mp

mf

f

mp

Ex. 21. Weir, "The Edge," mm. 20-23. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. "He was a boy" motive in voice, doubled in guitar and strings.

The excitement and tension of the poem is expressed in the difficulty of the vocal line. The melody is primarily disjunct with awkward leaps, challenging the singer technically and musically. For example, for the words “In blazing light and shadows trimmed in gold,” there is a minor sixth ascending leap on “blazing,” followed by a whole step descent on “light” (example 22). From “blaz-” to “light” is a tritone, one of the most difficult intervals to sing. However, the strings double the vocal line for the most challenging interval leaps. The vocal line for “and shadows” descends in major thirds, outlining an augmented triad. “Trimmed in gold” contains a whole step followed by a leap of a major third.

The musical score for Example 22 consists of three staves: Voice, Vln. 1, and Vln. 2. The time signature is 3/4. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by a triplet of eighth notes (F#, G, A) on the word "In", then a triplet of eighth notes (B, C, D) on "bla", and a triplet of eighth notes (E, F, G) on "zing". This is followed by a whole note (A) on "light", then a triplet of eighth notes (B, C, D) on "and", and a triplet of eighth notes (E, F, G) on "sha". The string accompaniment (Vln. 1 and Vln. 2) doubles the vocal line for the most challenging intervals, including a tritone leap (D4 to G#4) on "blaz-" and "light.".

Ex. 22. Weir, “The Edge,” mm. 24-26. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Musically challenging leaps in vocal line. The strings double the voice for the tricky intervals, including playing a tritone leap (D4 to G#4) on “blaz-” and “light.”

The tension and intensity of the poem is also reflected in the complex rhythms of the song. These rhythms consist of alternating triplet eighth notes with sixteenth notes and the occasional quintuple sixteenths, as seen in measure 29 in the violas (example 23). The sense of meter is disguised by these alternating patterns and tied notes over the barline. The orchestra often doubles the vocal line and, although this helps the singer with pitch, it creates complexity for the ensemble to stay rhythmically together and requires a careful eye on the conductor.

Ex. 23. Weir, “The Edge,” mm. 29-30. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Quintuple sixteenths in violas, alternating sixteenth notes with triplet eighths in voice.

At times in the piece, Weir creates sections of steady rhythms and pulse to contrast with the metrical ambiguity in the “he was a boy” sections. One example is the rhythmic pulse during “racing to the edge of love,” (measures 34-37), where the pattern shifts to a steady triplet rhythm, depicting a race or gallop. Another example where the rhythm invokes a steady pulse is in the instrumental interlude that precedes the next text, “We were new to time,” measures 45-51. The meter changes from 3/4 to 4/4, and the half notes are divided into septuplets, played by alternating half-steps in the guitar. In the second stanza, the septuplets give a feeling of unease and being out-of-time, reflecting the “new to time” phrase of text. The vocal line enters with triplets against these pulsating septuplets, and the meter returns to 3/4 (example 24). The septuplets alternate with triplet eighths in the accompaniment. As the drama builds to a climax,

the subdivisions shorten in duration from sixteenth notes to triplet sixteenths, giving the effect of increasing speed (example 25).

50

Gtr.

Hp.

Voice

*mf*

*mp*

We were new to time,

Ex. 24, Weir, “The Edge,” mm. 50-52. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Entrance of vocal line on triplet eighths against steady septuplet pulse in guitar and harp.

Vc.

Vc.

*ff*

*f*

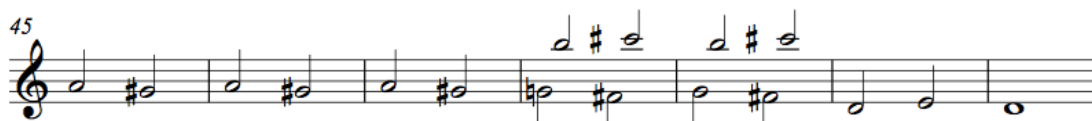
*mf*

Ex. 25. Weir, “The Edge,” mm. 62-64. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. The subdivisions shorten from sixteenths to triplet sixteenths in the cello parts.

Although this piece does not follow established rules of tonality, there are tonal “centers” that shape the form of the piece. The first section, including the “he was a boy” motive, builds clusters around the pitch C#, which is sustained in the bass during the instrumental



introduction. This is the primary key center for the song, since the song is structured around the melodic motive. A change happens at the end of this section, prior to the instrumental interlude (measures 41-44). The tonal center moves from C# to A# to A, and in the first instrumental interlude from measures 44-51, the tonal center shifts from A to D, as outlined in Example 26. Instead of just a half-step shift from C# to D, this extended interlude prepares the listener for a new idea, expressed in the “We were new to time” text. The harp plays these pitches in alternating octave notes, while the guitar plays the pitches alternating with the half step below.



Ex. 26. Weir, “The Edge,” mm. 44-51. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Tonal center outline, the additional higher notes on mm. 48-49 are other chord tones played by the harp and viola.

Since the primary key center for the song is in C#, due to the melodic motive being structured around C#, the “we were new to time” section provides an interesting contrast by being in a different key. There is a short shift to E in measures 63-65 before returning to C# for the second instrumental interlude (beginning at the *più mosso* section, measures 66-79). Then the tonal center remains in C# through the return of “he was a boy” in measure 82, the common key of the refrain. In the conclusion to the song, the notes from the “he was a boy” motive, C#, D, A, G# and F, return in a disguised form, built into a tone cluster in the strings (example 27).

Ex. 27. Weir, “The Edge,” mm. 89-90. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Tone cluster in strings built with notes from “he was a boy” motive: C# D A G# and F.

The form of the song is A B A', broken into subsections following the lines of the poem.

The form is outlined below:

A					B		A'		
Intro – a – b – a' – c – a"					Instrumental interlude – d		2 <sup>nd</sup> inst. interlude – a'''		
mm. 1	20	24	31	34 39	45-51	52-65	66-79	82-95	
Pitch centers					C# – A		A – D – (E)		
							C#		

This matches the structure of the poem: the A section corresponds to the first stanza, and the B section corresponds to the second stanza, except for the last two lines of the poem, the refrain, which comprises the final A'. The lower case letters refer to the text of the poem. The “a” subsection corresponds to the “he was a boy” refrain. The “b” subsection corresponds to the “In blazing light” lines, and the “c” subsection comprises the “racing to the edge of love” lines. The “d” subsection includes the “we were new to time” text.

This analysis of the form shows how the first A is the most extensive section, consisting of the first 44 measures. It includes an instrumental introduction where the “he was a boy” motive is introduced in fragments in the strings, as well as three iterations of the refrain. This establishes the refrain music as the central musical material of the song. The B section is only twenty measures and includes the instrumental interlude followed by the “we were new to time” lines of the poem. The brevity of B reflects the brief shift of thought in the poem, however it functions as an important contrast in the song from the A section, including steady rhythmic pulses and a change in tonal center. The final A’, a truncated version of A at only 29 measures, returns to the melodic motive material for the final “he was a boy” refrain, reiterating once again the important theme of the song.

The overall momentum of the song imitates the woman's first sexual experience. The chromatic rising and falling phrases depict climactic waves, interrupted by rhythmic pulsating tone cluster chords. The dynamics continually build and rise to *forte* or *fortissimo* followed by a quick, sometimes immediate drop to *piano*. There are several smaller climaxes before the final vocal climax on “love me till I'm dead of life,” measures 60-65. The first is measure 36-37, a climax after the “racing” rhythm (example 28). The vocal line ascends to an F5 in “love me til - I'm-dead of love.” The dynamics crescendo to *fortissimo* and the rhythm changes to the pulsating tone cluster chords (using the “he was a boy” notes C#, A# F and G). The dynamics decrescendo quickly in measure 38 and the music returns to the “he was a boy” motive. A few measures later, the vocal line reaches another climax on a G5: “and I was a very young girl (measures 41-42) accompanied by heavy, repeated tone cluster chords that continue for an additional measure after the vocal line ends (measures 43-44, see Example 29).

36

Gtr. *f* *ff*

Hp. *f* *ff*

Voice *f*  
bed of love, — the love me til I'm dead of love.

Vln. 1 *mf* *f*

Vln. 2 *mf* *f*

Vla. *mf* *f*

Vla. *mf* *f*

Vc. *f*

Vc. *f*

The musical score for Ex. 28, measures 36-39, is written for guitar, piano, voice, and strings. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 3/4. The score is divided into two systems of measures.

**Guitar (Gtr.):** Measures 36-37 feature a rapid sixteenth-note arpeggiated pattern in the right hand, with a *mf* dynamic and a *5* (fifth) fret marking. Measures 38-39 show a melodic line in the right hand and a single note in the left hand, with a *mf* dynamic.

**Piano (Hp.):** Measures 36-37 feature a rapid sixteenth-note arpeggiated pattern in the right hand, with a *mf* dynamic and a *5* (fifth) fret marking. Measures 38-39 show a single note in the right hand and a single note in the left hand, with a *mf* dynamic.

**Voice:** Measures 36-37 are silent. Measure 38 features a vocal line starting on a whole note, with the lyrics "He was a boy,". The dynamic is *mp*.

**Violins (Vln. 1, Vln. 2):** Measures 36-37 feature a melodic line in the right hand, with a *mf* dynamic and a *mp* dynamic marking. Measures 38-39 feature a melodic line in the right hand, with a *mp* dynamic and a *3* (triple) marking.

**Violas (Vla.):** Measures 36-37 feature a melodic line in the right hand, with a *mf* dynamic and a *mp* dynamic marking. Measures 38-39 feature a melodic line in the right hand, with a *mp* dynamic and a *3* (triple) marking.

**Violoncello (Vc.):** Measures 36-37 feature a melodic line in the right hand, with a *mf* dynamic and a *mp* dynamic marking. Measures 38-39 feature a melodic line in the right hand, with a *mp* dynamic and a *3* (triple) marking.

Ex. 28. Weir, "The Edge," mm. 36-39. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. First climax, vocal line ascends to F5, dynamics increase, repeated chords, followed by quick decrescendo to "he was a boy."

41

Gtr. *f* *mf* *f* *mf* 3 *f* 3 *mp*

Hp. *f* *mf* 3 *f* 3 *mp*

Voice *mf* 3 *f* *mf*  
and I was a ve - ry young girl

Vln. 1 *mp* 5 *mf* *f* *mf* 3 *f* 3 *mp*

Vln. 2 *mf* *f* *mf* 3 *f* 3 *mp*

Vla. *mf* *f* *mf* 3 *f* 3 *mp*

Vla. *mf* *f* *mf* 3 *f* 3 *mp*

Vc. *mf* *f* *mf* 3 *f* 3 *mp*

Vc. *mf* *f* *mf* 3 *f* 3 *mp*

Ex. 29. Weir, "The Edge," mm. 41-44. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Second climax.

In measures 60-65, the most dramatic climax, the vocal line ascends to a high A♭5 on the word “life.” The dynamics quickly move from mezzo piano to fortissimo in these two measures.

The rhythmic intensity increases in the accompaniment from fast sixteenth note passages to

sixteenth triplets combined with the pulsating heavy tone-cluster chords. As in measures 43-44, the accompaniment “climax” continues after the vocal line ends, and sustains its intensity for two and a half more measures before the release and decrescendo (example 30).

60

Gtr. *mp* *< mf* *< f* *< ff*

Hp. *mp* *< mf* *< f* *ff*

Voice *mp* *< mf* *< f* *f* *< ff*  
the love me til I'm dead of life.

Vln. 1 *mp* *< mf* *< f* *f* *ff*

Vln. 2 *mp* *< mf* *< f* *f* *ff*

Vla. *mp* *< mf* *< f* *f* *ff*

Vla. *mp* *< mf* *< f* *f* *ff*

Vc. *f* *< ff* 5

Vc. *f* *< ff* 5



The musical score for measures 60-65 of "The Edge" by Weir is a complex orchestral arrangement. It features the following instruments and parts:

- Gtr. (Guitar):** Measures 60-61 feature a series of eighth-note triplets starting on a low E, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic.
- Hp. (Harp):** Measures 60-61 feature a series of eighth-note triplets in the bass clef, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. Measure 62 features a half-note chord marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic.
- Voice:** The vocal line is silent throughout these measures.
- Vln. 1 (Violin 1):** Measures 60-61 feature a series of eighth-note triplets, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 62 features a half-note chord marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic.
- Vln. 2 (Violin 2):** Measures 60-61 feature a series of eighth-note triplets, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 62 features a half-note chord marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic.
- Vla. (Viola):** Measures 60-61 feature a series of eighth-note triplets, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 62 features a half-note chord marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic.
- Vc. (Violoncello):** Measures 60-61 feature a series of eighth-note triplets, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 62 features a half-note chord marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic.
- Vc. (Double Bass):** Measures 60-61 feature a series of eighth-note triplets, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. Measure 62 features a half-note chord marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic.

The score is written in 4/4 time and features a complex texture with multiple layers of triplets and dynamic markings such as *f*, *mf*, and *mp*.

Ex. 30. Weir, "The Edge," mm. 60-65. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Final climax.

The conclusion of this song has a twist. Although there were releases after the first two climaxes, there is not a feeling of release and satisfaction after the final climax in measure 65,

implying that this experience was not entirely pleasurable for the woman. The final five measures conclude the song with an anti-climactic diminuendo in the strings, accompanied by a triplet figure in the guitar (example 31). The F to B interval in this figure comprises a tritone, leaving the listener with an unsettled, unfinished impression of this first sexual encounter.

94

Gtr. *mp* *p*

Hp. *mf*

Voice

Vln. 1 *p*

Vln. 2 *p*

Vla. *mp* *p*

Vla. *mp* *p*

Vc. *p*

Vc. pizz *mp* *p*

Ex. 31. Weir, “The Edge,” mm. 94-96. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Concluding chords with tritone figure in guitar.

Toni Morrison's two poems directly follow one another in *woman.life.song*. The second poem is called “Eve Remembering.” Here the woman is reflecting on the memory of losing her innocence. This song describes the transition from youthful thinking to a worldly understanding:

I tore from a limb fruit that had lost its green.  
 My hands were warmed by the heat of an apple fire red and humming insight  
 I devoured sweet power to the core.  
 How can I say what it was like?  
 The taste! The taste undid my eyes  
 And led me far from gardens planted for a child  
 To wilderness deeper than any master's call.

Now these cool hands guide what they once caressed;  
 Lips savor what they have kissed.  
 My eyes now pool their light  
 Better the summit to see;  
 Better the summit to see.

I would do it all over again:  
 Be the harbor and set the sail  
 Loose the breeze and harness the gale,  
 Cherish the harvest of what I have been,  
 Better the summit to scale.  
 Better the summit to be.<sup>51</sup>

The poem makes reference to the biblical Eve and her experience in the Garden of Eden, biting the apple from the tree of knowledge. This is a metaphor for the loss of the innocence of youth. The woman is imagining herself as Eve, the apple is the knowledge of adulthood. The knowledge of the world is sweet and powerful, and she is so hungry for it she “devours” it. The “taste” opens her eyes to see the world in a way she had never experienced as a child. She is “led far from gardens” of protection. The second stanza of the poem expresses her current understanding of this knowledge. In the line “savor what they have kissed,” she is using the knowledge to her advantage, it is pleasurable, and she is enjoying the experience. She guides the learning rather than is being guided by it.

In the line “better the summit to see,” she states she is better as a result of her choice. She would rather have had the adventure of life, its risks and dangers, than always be safe and never

---

<sup>51</sup> Toni Morrison and Judith Weir, “Eve Remembering,” *woman.life.song*, 26-35. Reprinted by permission of Chester Music Limited.

have experienced any of it. There are no regrets, and “I would do it all over again.” Jessye

Norman talks about this stanza in her interview with Martha Kearney:

If you don't try it you will never do it. So therefore why look back and say I'm sorry that I did that? I'm not sorry about anything that has happened, everything has been a fantastic experience, and I would never have had those incredible highs had I not really gone for it. And I think that's what life is about. I really love that Toni particularly chose to write those words.<sup>52</sup>

“Be the harbor and set the sail” uses a sailing metaphor, which coincidentally is also used in the two Estés songs of *woman.life.song* set to the bipartite poem “Mothership.” “Cherish the harvest of what I have been” describes being grateful for the experience and relishing in it. The text “harness the gale” infers that although there is freedom in her choice, she is also controlling and steering her life, not just letting it run wild. The phrases “Better the summit to scale” and “Better the summit to be” express not just seeing the peak, as in the previous stanza, but climbing up to it, and becoming it.

The song is divided into four musical sections: the first is a long instrumental introduction and the following three comprise each stanza of the poem, as outlined in the following diagram:

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<sup>52</sup> “BBC Radio: Jessye Norman interview,” *YouTube*, online audio clip, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1IKD5o2MHk> (2009), accessed 22 March 2014.

Section	Intro	Stanza 1	Stanza 2	Stanza 3
MM	1-52	53-78	79-124	125-end
Tempo	qtr= 52	qtr=56	qtr=66	dotted qtr =66
Meter	3/4	3/4	3/4	9/8
Mood	Languid, luxurious	<i>Poco più mosso</i>	<i>Più mosso</i>	(not specified)
Form	introduction nature sounds	free song form “fire red” chord motive	A A' <i>klangfarbenmelodie</i> accompaniment  quartal harmonies	A A' Rhythmic pulse, vamping syncopation,

In the introduction, comprising the first 52 measures, Weir musically sets the “Garden of Eden” scene, building in intensity and excitement, in anticipation of the “apple bite.” The opening musical direction states “Languid, luxurious.” In the first measure, the bass clarinet is marked “repeat as fast as possible, not fluttertongue” on a low F, creating the effect of insect or frog sounds. The marimba chords, played as a tremolo, the cymbal crashes, and the ascending scales in the strings, add to the increasing excitement of the scene (example 32). The flutes, piano, and glockenspiel add their pastoral sounds beginning in measure 22. The flutes play bird-like patterns of scales and trills. The bass clarinet plays a repeated trill-like motive imitating frog sounds. In measure 47, melodic elements emerge in the alto flute, viola and cello. These resemble a fanfare, announcing the entrance of the voice in measure 53 at the *Poco più mosso* (example 33).

**Languid, luxurious** ♩ = 52

Bass Clarinet (Bb)  
[sounds 9 lower]  
*mp* repeat, as fast as possible  
not fluttertongue

Marimba  
*mp* Languid, luxurious ♩ = 52

Cymbal  
*mp*

Tam-tam  
*mp*

Viola  
*mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp*

Viola  
*mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp*

Cello  
*mp* *mf* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf*

Cello  
*mp* *mf* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf*

Contra-bass  
*mp*

Ex. 32. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” *woman.life.song*, mm. 1-4. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. “Scene” painting, bass clarinet repeated notes, marimba and percussion, scales in cellos, trills in violas.

Ex. 33. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 51-52. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. “Fanfare” triplet figure in violas and alto flute.

The second section incorporates the first stanza of the poem, reliving the memory of the first bite of Eve's apple. Weir uses a short harmonic motive that accompanies the voice in measure 58 on the words “fire red.” The motive consists of the notes A-C# moving to F#-G#-B over a pedal D (example 35). The violas and woodwinds first introduce the motive in measure 55, with the violas and flutes using a repeated sixteenth note rhythm. This motive repeats every



three measures in this section, occurring between the vocal phrases (except for the text “undid my eyes”), with an extension at the conclusion of the section (measures 75-78.)

The musical score is for measures 58-60 of "Eve Remembering" by Weir. It is written in 3/4 time. The score includes parts for Flute, Alto Flute, Clarinet, Voice, and Viola. The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The tempo is marked "mm." (moderato). The score shows a "fire red" motive in the woodwinds and strings, which is parallel with the voice on the words "fire red". The motive is highlighted in boxes for the Flute, Alto Flute, and Viola. The voice part has the lyrics "ap-ple fire red and hum-ming in - sight". The Flute part has dynamics *p* and *mp*. The Alto Flute part has dynamics *p* and *mp*. The Clarinet part has dynamics *p* and *mp*. The Voice part has dynamics *mp* and *p*. The Viola part has dynamics *p* and *mp*. The score is numbered 58 at the beginning of the first measure.

Ex. 34. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 58-60. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. “Fire red” motive in viola, flutes, and clarinets (flutes and violas boxed) in parallel with voice on words “fire red.”

Weir uses melodic and rhythmic complexity in the instruments to build suspense during the line “I devoured sweet power to the core,” the dramatic moment when Eve flaunts authority by consuming the apple. The piano plays an ascending and descending chromatic scale pattern in measures 62-63 and 68-69, which includes the exotic flavor of the augmented second between E $\flat$  and F $\sharp$ . The harp and guitar play repeated octave Ds in complex rhythms of duple-against-triple in measures 61-62, and quintuple eighths against even eighths in measures 62-63. The vocal line doubles the same scale notes as the piano in a triplet rhythm with the harp, beginning and ending in D to match the repeated D ostinato pattern. The ostinato and the ascending chromatic vocal line combined with the rhythmic complexity of the piano, guitar and harp, express this powerful moment of the text (example 36).

61

Marimba

Guitar

Harp

Piano

Voice

*mf* *f* *mp*

*mf* *f* *mf*

*mp* *mf* *f*

*mp* *mf* *f*

*mf* *f* *mp*

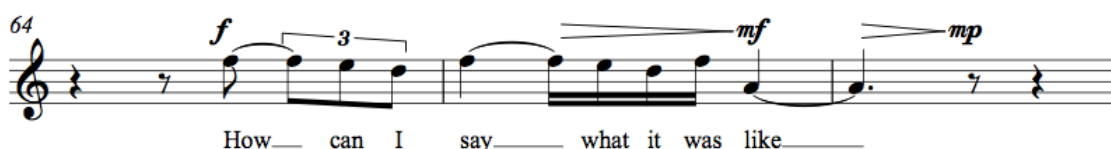
I de-voured sweet pow'r to the core.

Ex. 35. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 61-63. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Piano scale figure, harp and guitar octave Ds in complex rhythms.

The strings and woodwinds accompany the vocal melody with sustained chords during significant dramatic moments of the text. For example, under the word “say” in measure 65, under the text “led me far from gardens,” in measures 70-71, and again in mm 73-74 under the word “deeper.” Another sustained dramatic chord is on the word “heat” in measure 57. Weir writes a G minor 7 chord with the F in the bass (third inversion) creating tension and suspense.



words “how” and “say” are on F5s. The duration of these notes are extended to give emphasis to the words (example 37). In addition to dramatic ability, this song also requires the singer to quickly negotiate wide leaps. There are several instances where the melody begins high in the vocal register and suddenly drops down a large interval. One example is the drop from F4 to A3 on the words “was like” in measure 66 (see previous example). Another example is measures 69-71: “and led me from gardens planted for a child.” The phrase begins in the high register, ascending from D5 to G5 on “and led.” There is a drop of a fifth on the word “gardens”, and the phrase ends with an octave drop to a D4 on “a child” (example 38).



Ex. 37. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 64-66, vocal line. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Emphasis on words “how” and “like.”



Ex. 38. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 67-71, vocal line. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Wide range and large interval leaps in vocal line.

The dramatic climax of this section appears in measures 67-69 with the text “The taste, the taste undid my eyes.” The vocal line ascends to F#5 on the word “eyes.” The music builds suspense as the dynamics crescendo from mezzo forte to forte in the accompaniment and the voice. The “fire red” motive enters on measure 69 with the word “eyes,” the only time it is played during the vocal line. The harp, guitar and marimba also crescendo to forte at this dramatic point in the music (example 39).

The musical score for Ex. 39, measures 67-71, is a reduced version of a larger work. It features a variety of instruments: Flutes, Clarinets, Guitar, Harp, Piano, Voice, Violins, Violas, Cellos, and Contrabass. The score is written in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. A specific melodic motif, referred to as the "Fire red" motive, is highlighted with a black box in measures 69 and 70. This motive is played by the Flute and Viola. The Flute part starts in measure 67 with a *mf* dynamic, while the Viola part begins in measure 69. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings (*mf*, *f*, *p*, *mp*). The voice part has lyrics: "The taste, the taste un - did my eyes and led me far from gar dens plant ed for a child".

Ex. 39. Weir, "Eve Remembering," mm. 67-71 (reduced version). © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. "Fire red" motive boxed in violas and flutes.

The third section begins in measure 79 with completely different music. It symbolizes a change from the past memory to the present, as reflected by the language of the poem moving from past to present tense. The "fire red" motive is abandoned, along with the rhythmic and harmonic complexity of the previous music. The rhythm for this section consists mostly of steady quarter notes. The melodic material in the orchestra consists of scale-like passages, however the notes of the melodic line alternate between instruments creating a

*Klangfarbenmelodie*. The flutes, clarinets, violins and violas play held notes against pizzicato punctuations by the harp, guitar and piano. Measures 79-81 show the opening passage, which spells F G Bb C# D E F G below (example 40a and 40b).



Ex. 40a. Notes of the *Klangfarbenmelodie* in Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 79-81.

q=66 Piu Mosso

79

Fl.

Cl. (in Bb)

Glock.

Gtr.

Hrp.

Vln.

Vla.

Ex. 40b. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 79-85. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited.  
*Klangfarbenmelodie* in orchestra spells scale notes: F G Bb C# D E F G.

This ethereal sounding orchestration expresses the text “My eyes now pool their light.” The high registration of the orchestration and the omission of bass orchestration give a sense of light and high altitude. The omission of bass registration adds to the feeling of floating and



lightness. This reflects ascending to the top of a mountain, as described in the repeated text:

“better the summit to see.” This phrase is sung on repeated notes with held chords, accompanied by harmonics played by the cellos and bass, adding to the floating effect. Because of the mid-range to high orchestration, the voice often blends with the strings and flutes (example 41).

The musical score for measures 94-101 of "Eve Remembering" by Weir is presented. The score includes parts for the following instruments: Flutes, Alto Flute, Clarinets, Glockenspiel, Guitar, Harp, Piano, Voice, Violins, Violas, Cello, and Contrabass. The voice part has the lyrics: "My eyes now pool their light better the sum-mit to see, better the sum-mit to see." The score features various dynamics (mp, mf, f, p) and articulations (accents, slurs, triplets). The piano part includes a treble registration in accompaniment and lower string harmonics.

Ex. 41. Weir, "Eve Remembering," mm. 94-101. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Treble registration in accompaniment, lower string harmonics.

Beginning in measure 102, there is a restatement of the second stanza text with alterations in the orchestrations and the vocal melody. Weir creates extra emphasis of this particular text in this second reiteration. The lower strings add pizzicato punctuations, and the first cello doubles the vocal line. The vocal line stays primarily in the high register with two G5s in this variation. The dynamics, mostly *mezzo-piano* in the first statement, increase to *mezzo-forte* and *forte*. The phrase, “My eyes now pool their light,” show a climax and intensity in drama and excitement in the vocal line (example 42). The repeat of this text with the added elements emphasize the difficulty and intensity of the “light,” or knowledge. It does not necessarily feel comfortable, especially the more the woman learns, and it can be overwhelming, but this knowledge is still a necessary part of her growth.

115

Flutes

Alto Flutes

Clarinets

Glockenspiel

Guitar

Harp

Piano

Voice

Violin

Viola

Cello

Cello

Contrabass

My eyes now pool their light bet-ter the sum-mit to see, bet-ter the sum-mit to see.

Ex. 42. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 115-121. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. High vocal register (begins and ends on high G), expressive dynamic range in voice, woodwinds and strings.

The fourth section begins in measure 125 with new music to reflect the text “I would do it all over again.” It returns to the repetitious rhythmic, primal, dance-like pulse and quartal harmonies of other songs such as “On Youth.” The text uses metaphor of sailing, “be the harbor and set the sail,” and the music expresses the feeling of sailing through the rhythmic pulse,

sweeping melodies, and the “sea shanty-like” triplet-feel of compound meter. The meter changes to 9/8 with syncopation on beat two and the third eighth of beat three. The flutes and violas alternate between two quartal chords, F-Bb-F and G-D-G. The guitar, harp, violins and cellos play off-beat quartal chords in step-wise motion (F-D-E-D-C) as seen in measures 125-129 (example 43). The flutes play scale-like passages in parallel thirds and fourths, imitating the feeling of winds and waves on the sea (example 44). The vocal line also follows arc-shapes in steps and leaps, for example, the phrase “Loose the breeze” shows an arc-shaped phrase beginning on G5 (example 45). The notes for the subsequent vocal phrases remain high in the register, often beginning the phrases on E5 or G5. This expresses the continuing idea of height and altitude from “better the summit to see,” which is repeated again at the end of the song.

[illegible]

Ex. 43. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm 125-130. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. 9/8 meter, rhythmic pulse, off-beat chords, quartal harmonies.

Ex. 44. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 135-138, flute parts. Parallel thirds and fourths, sweeping arc phrases.

Ex. 45. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 137-139, voice part. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Arc-shaped phrase beginning on high G.

In the final verse of the song, the elements that express the waves of the sea combine with the elements of ascending to the summit. The accompaniment stays in the treble range, including the cellos. The voice sings an ascending scale on “better the summit to scale,” demonstrating an example of text painting (example 46). The music crescendos and decrescendos in wave-like patterns, imitating waves of the sea. The clarinets echo the sweeping melodies of the flutes. Beginning in measure 150, there is an increase of drama and intensity, which builds until the final chords of the piece. Instruments are added to the texture, such as percussion, tubular bells (chimes) and vibraphone. The piano doubles the percussion chords (example 47).

Ex. 46. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 161-164, voice part. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Ascending scales, example of text painting.

The musical score for measures 152-157 of 'Eve Remembering' by Weir is presented. The score includes parts for Clarinet, Vibraphone, Tubular Bells, Glockenspiel, Guitar, Harp, Piano, Voice, Violin, Viola, and Cello. The music features dynamic markings like *mp*, *mf*, and *p*, and includes a vocal line with the lyrics 'gain: Be the har - bor and set... the sail,'.

Ex. 47. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm. 152-157. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Added percussion instruments such as vibraphone and tubular bells, doubled in piano part. Clarinets echo the sweeping melodies of flutes. Dynamics in clarinets and violas show wave-like crescendos and decrescendos.

This final section of the piece draws to a dramatic and triumphant close in measures 168-174 with fortissimo quartal chords, playing on alternating beats, and ending on an open-fifth chord in C (example 48). This relatively simple ending, compared to the complexity of the

previous sections, evokes the final exultant arrival to the summit. The ending is significant in the work as a whole, as it is the only song to end with a dramatic climax rather than ending quietly.

The nature of the last words “better the summit to be” has a strength and finality that only a powerful conclusion such as this can truly express.

The musical score for measures 168-174 of "Eve Remembering" by Weir is a complex orchestration. It begins at measure 168. The Flutes, Clarinets, and Bass Clarinet (sounding an octave below) play a melodic line with dynamics increasing from *mf* to *p*, then *f*, and finally *ff*. The Vibraphone, Tubular Bells, and Glockenspiel provide a rhythmic and harmonic foundation, with dynamics increasing from *mp* to *f* and finally *ff*. The Guitar and Harp play a rhythmic pattern, also increasing in dynamics from *mp* to *f* and finally *ff*. The Piano plays a harmonic accompaniment, increasing from *mp* to *f* and finally *ff*. The Violin and Cello play a melodic line, increasing from *mp* to *mf*. The score ends with an open-fifth C chord.

Ex. 48. Weir, “Eve Remembering,” mm 168-174. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Final chords in piece, instruments alternate beats, quartal harmonies, dynamics increase from mezzo piano, to forte, to fortissimo, ending with open-fifth C chord.



### Clarissa Pinkola Estés Texts

Clarissa Pinkola Estés wrote two poems, the second divided into two staves, that Weir set in *woman.life.song*. These songs are located in a central place in the work, as well as having a figurative central role. The first song, “Breasts!! Song of the Innocent Wild-Child,” is located in the middle of the group of three songs about youth, “On Youth” and “The Edge.” The Mothership songs represent the emotional climax of the work, showing the mental turmoil as well as the spiritual growth of the woman as she grieves the loss of her mother.

“Breasts!!” is told in the voice of a pre-pubescent girl who is longing to develop breasts.

The text of the poem follows. (The bracketed sections are not in the song):

I have been waiting  
and I have been waiting,  
and all over the world,  
are millions, just like me...  
We are all waiting –  
just waiting and waiting,  
for the most important thing ...  
Breasts!!

Oh when shall I receive my breasts?  
Will they be like  
the tiny hearts of birds beating?  
Or, sonorous,  
even ponderous,  
like majestic bells  
swaying and  
ringing across the land?

Oh Breasts!!  
They will be so beautiful...  
Do you suppose,  
even though mine do not yet show,  
that they are all ready,  
and just waiting,  
deep inside of me?  
And if I squeeze my waist, like this,  
or if I tense my wrists together,

will they  
just –  
pop –  
out??!! –  
visible at last?

Oh, Breasts!!  
you are what I dream about – yet, wait...  
Does a beloved ocean have breasts ...?  
Does an ocean even need them?  
No, an ocean has its crests, and  
every current needed for dreaming.  
Does a butterfly have breasts?  
No, but still everyone thrills  
to the sunlight through her wings.

Oh, Breasts!!  
If I had breasts I would wear them  
ever so smartly,  
I would use them to proudly point with,  
or flash them in distain, or lift them up in joy –  
but I would never flaunt them,  
nor stuff them,  
and especially, never fluff them...  
except on special ceremonial occasions...  
when I would wear ruffles cut  
“down to here”,  
every chance I got!

Oh, Breasts!!  
the testers of my patience  
Everyone has them, but me...  
Chinese, Zulus and Haitians  
Hawaiians, Aleuts and Transylvanians,  
Balinese, Russians and Romanians...  
Everyone, but me...

Oh Breasts!!  
In fairytales, they say  
giantesses have breasts so long  
they can throw them over their shoulders.  
Will mine be like that?  
Will they be like two young candles glowing  
in every dark and gloaming?  
or like sweet and tasty dark cherries swelling from the branches,

or maybe they'll be cone-shaped like shy little tulips,  
 or maybe they'll be mellow like ripe and dusky melons,  
 or maybe they'll be "this big" and take up all the room –  
 in any room I'm in.

Will having breasts change my voice?

Will breasts make me taller?

When will I receive them?

for with breasts, I am certain that,

I will rule the world! –

[Oh breasts!!

the only flowers

that blossom in the coldest air.]

Come! O Lady of my body,

for I am blessed amongst women –

untie the ribbons of my body,

so it can swell in the way it is meant to...

Oh, Moulder of Breasts,

Untier of Ribbons

Singer to Flowers Unfolding,

please, please, come to me soon?

Breasts!

Tempestuous,

Breasts!!

Holy Mothers of every living creature,

holy with desire,

holy and on fire!

Breasts-to-be!

Be alive!

Now!!

MMM-mmm-mmm.<sup>53</sup>

This text is quite different in nature from the other poems in the cycle. It is more instinctual in language, simpler, repetitive, spontaneous, and humorous in tone. The subtitle gives a glimpse of the nature of this pubescent girl's thought: "Song of the Innocent Wild-Child." The word "wild" here makes reference to Estés' book, *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. In this book, she explains her use of the term "wild" as it relates to women: "I call her Wild Woman, for those very words, *wild* and

<sup>53</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estés and Judith Weir, "Breasts!! Song of the Innocent Wild-Child" *woman.life.song*, 8-25. Reprinted by permission of Chester Music Limited.

woman create ... the fairy-tale knock at the door of the deep female psyche.”<sup>54</sup> This “Wild Woman” is very meaningful to Estés and to her work in psychology. She states:

“The archetype of the Wild Woman and all that stands behind her is patroness to all painters, writers, sculptors, dancers, thinkers, prayermakers, seekers, finders – for they are all busy with the work of invention, and that is the instinctive nature’s main occupation. As in all art, she resides in the guts, not in the head. She can track and run and summon and repel. She can sense, camouflage, and love deeply. She is intuitive, typical, and normative. She is utterly essential to women’s mental and soul health.”<sup>55</sup>

This description helps in understanding the character of this song, her nature and essence.

The “Wild-Child” is the youthful version of this “Wild Woman.” The spontaneity of her thought changes from one question to the next, reflecting the instinctive and intuitive “right-brained” thinking Estés mentions in her book. The girl is consumed with the thought of developing breasts, not so much for reasons of physical beauty but to identify herself as a woman and as female. She asks a series of questions, as she wonders about the phenomenon of breasts. She reasons that oceans don’t need breasts because they have waves and crests. Butterflies are beautiful because they have wings, and this trait is integral to their identity. Her breasts will be an honest expression of her unique identity, and therefore she does not want to flaunt or alter them.

The girl mentions fairy tales in the line, “In fairytales, they say/ giantesses have breasts so long/ they can throw them over their shoulders.” This is a direct reference to *Women Who Run with the Wolves*: “Also all over the world, various fairies, nymphs, and giantesses have breasts so long they can throw them over their shoulders.”<sup>56</sup> Estés’ primary scholarly work was the gathering of fairy tales from her Hispanic and Hungarian background. She states:

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<sup>54</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995), 5.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 175.

“Fairy tales, myths, and stories provide understandings which sharpen our sight so that we can pick out and pick up the path left by the wildish nature. The instruction found in story reassures us that the path has not run out, but still leads women deeper, and more deeply still, into their own knowing. The tracks we all are following are those of the wild and innate instinctual Self.”<sup>57</sup>

The “wild-ness” of the girl in the poem evokes the instinctive nature of women to resist the cultural and social binding-up of women, as expressed in the line “untier of ribbons.” This represents a loosening of bonds, to be free and not be subject to repression of creativity and invention. By having breasts, she wants to be counted among women, and believes that this mark will enable her to rule the world. As Estés states in *Women Who Run With the Wolves*:

“when we understand the wildish nature as a being in its own right, one which animates and informs a woman’s deepest life, then we can begin to develop in ways never thought possible.”<sup>58</sup>

The dramatic challenge for the singer in this song is to credibly act like a young girl. Many of the poetic images invite comedic gesture. For example, in the phrase “I would never flaunt them... except on special ceremonial occasions... when I would wear ruffles cut ‘down to here’,” the singer could motion to her chest as modestly or immodestly as she would like. In another phrase, “And if I squeeze my waist, like this, or if I tense my wrists together, will they just pop out??!” the singer could physically act out these lines, using creative ways to add drama and humor to the song.

The overall form of the piece closely follows the sections of the poem and is dominated by a musical style that evokes Latin dance music, especially with the use of the rhythmic guitar. However, the irregular meter and accents that constantly change are uncharacteristic of true Latin dance rhythms. The harmonies are built on seventh, ninth, and occasionally eleventh chords. The style of each section reflects the nature of the text in an eclectic combination, to represent

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 9.

the different, quickly changing thoughts of the girl. However, the Latin-esque rhythm returns like a refrain throughout the song, and, omitting the introduction, the form resembles a rondo: A B A A'C A'.

The introduction comprises the first eighteen measures and includes the first stanza of text. In contrast with the syncopated rhythmic A sections, the clarinets and strings in the orchestra play static chords, expressing the “waiting” in the text. The first four notes (E F# A B) are repeated four times for the words “I have been waiting” and “we have been waiting.” This evokes the girl’s impatience and immaturity, as she needs to constantly repeat her frustration over and over again like a broken-record. Weir uses an pentatonic melody, creating an exotic flavor (example 49).

The musical score for Example 49 is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 1-4, and the second system covers measures 5-8. The key signature has one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 3/4. The voice part is written in a soprano clef, and the accompaniment is for Clarinets and strings (reduction). The lyrics are: "I have been wait - ing and I have been wait - ing and all o ver the world are mil lions just like me...". The dynamics are marked as *mp*, *mf*, *p*, and *f*.

Ex. 49. Weir, “Breasts!! Song of the Innocent Wild-Child,” *woman.life.song*, mm. 1-10. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Held chords in accompaniment (clarinets and strings), notes E F# A B in melody.

Under this repetitive melody is a series of chords centering around E that includes several jazz chords and suspensions. The third of the chord, G, is omitted until measure 19, which creates a sense of modal ambiguity and adds to the suspense and emptiness of waiting. Following is an outline of the harmonies in this section:

mm	1-3	4-6	7-8	8-9	10-12	13-15	15-18	19
Chord	E	C#m9	Bm7	Bm11	C#m9	E9sus4	Bm7	E7

These chords alternate between E and the dominant B (minor), but the sevenths and suspensions lack finality and clarity. The actual resolution follows the Bm7 chord in measures 15-18, under “most important thing.” This Bm7 chord is extended for twelve beats, increasing the tension and suspension. While the orchestra holds this chord, there is silence in the vocal line, adding additional suspense before the punch line, where the Bm7 chord finally resolves to a brief E7 chord on the word “Breasts” (measure 19). This quick resolution on an accented eighth note, plus the slightly risqué topic of the text, creates a moment of humor (example 50).

15 *mf*  
Voice wait - ing, for the most im - por - tant

Clar & Str *mp*

17 *f*  
Voice thing... Breasts!!

Clar & Str

Ex. 50. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 15-20. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Bm7 chord in accompaniment, resolving to E7.

The first A section, measures 19-43, includes stanzas two and three of the poem and introduces a rhythm reminiscent of the Latin *clave*. The *clave* is a rhythmic pattern, usually two measures long, and forms the foundation of Latin dance rhythms. These rhythms often group the eighths together in twos and threes, depending on where the accents fall in the measure. The two-bar patterns repeat throughout the song. However, in Weir’s song, the pattern does not repeat in a predictable way, changing the groupings from measure to measure. This reflects the sense of frantic thoughts in the text (example 51).



Ex. 51. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 22-24. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Rhythm in guitar and bass, the numbers above the staff represent how the eighth notes are grouped into twos and threes, reminiscent of the *clave* rhythm.

The chords in the accompaniment are repetitive and harmonically static, using seventh and ninth chords. The string bass plays pizzicato notes that often alternate beats with the guitar syncopation. The melodic line contrasts from the lyrical phrasing of the first section to alternating seconds, following the patter-like fast text. This expresses the fast flowing thoughts of the girl as she wonders what her breasts will be like. The notes of the melody begin in the lower register and slowly ascend by steps for each phrase. Even though the rhythm of the vocal line consists of steady eighth notes, the syncopated off-beat entrances of the phrases juxtaposed against the accented guitar creates difficult entrances and requires careful counting.

Measures 44 through 50 form a transition section that includes the text “You are what I dream about, yet wait.” The music briefly evokes a romantic waltz, reflecting the young girl’s dreamlike imagination. The rhythm shifts to triplets, with the bass notes falling on the first triplet quarter note and the chords on the second quarter note, as in the waltz. The melody is lyrical with longer note values and slightly larger intervals (thirds and fifths rather than seconds). The singer pauses in thought after the words “yet wait...” after singing a crescendo on the word “wait.”

Though there is a pause in the vocal line, the rest of the music does not wait. The guitar triplet

chords continue for another three measures, gradually descending in pitch and diminishing in volume, as the thoughts of the girl shift direction (example 52).

44

Guitar

Voice

Breasts!! You are what I dream a-bout yet, wait...

Cb

pizz

48

Poco rit.

mf

mp

Poco rit.

Ex. 52. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 43-49. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Triplet waltz-like rhythm, descending pattern in guitar.

The B section follows this transition. Here the music is a complete contrast from the rhythmic A sections. Although the meter changes to 5/4, the rhythm is less complicated, using steady quarter notes instead of syncopation. The music captures the romantic grandiose thoughts in the text. For example, the text states, “Does a beloved ocean have breasts,” and the lyrical arc-shaped melodies emulate these ocean waves. Although this B section is vastly different in style than the previous music, Weir cleverly connects the two sections together. The guitar hints at the A section by quoting a fragment of the A section vocal line every few bars. The chords are

similar to the harmonies in the introduction, using the C#m9, the E9sus4, the Bm7 and the E7 chords (example 53).

The musical score for Example 53, measures 51-57, is presented in four staves. The key signature is one flat (B-flat major or D minor), and the time signature is 4/4.

- Clarinet:** Measures 51-53 show a descending arc-shaped melody starting on B-flat, moving to A-flat, G-flat, and F. Dynamics are *p* and *mp*. Measures 54-57 show a similar pattern with dynamics *p* and *mp*.
- Guitar:** Measures 51-53 show a descending arc-shaped melody starting on D, moving to C, B, and A. Dynamics are *mf* and *mp*. Measures 54-57 show a similar pattern with dynamics *f* and *mp*.
- Voice:** Measures 51-53 show a descending arc-shaped melody starting on D, moving to C, B, and A. Dynamics are *mp* and *mf*. Measures 54-57 show a similar pattern with dynamics *f* and *mp*.
- Strings (reduction):** Measures 51-53 show a descending arc-shaped melody starting on D, moving to C, B, and A. Dynamics are *mp* and *mp*. Measures 54-57 show a similar pattern with dynamics *mp* and *mp*.

The lyrics for the voice part are: "Does a be-lov-ed o cean have breasts...?" (measures 51-53) and "Does an o cean e ven need them? No, an o cean has its crests, and" (measures 54-57).

Ex. 53. Weir, "Breasts!!," mm. 51-57. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Arc-shaped melodies, alternating seconds in guitar, seventh and ninth chords in strings and clarinets.

The second A section comprises measures 68-97 and includes stanzas five and six of the text. The text returns to the patter-like style and the music returns to the rhythmic pulse of the A section but with some instrumental changes. The guitar plays the rhythm and notes of the bass, while the clarinets play held chords, breaking into occasional syncopation, as in measure 75 (example 54). The melody returns to the alternating seconds, gradually rising in pitch to an E on “except for ceremonial occasions.” During this phrase, the guitar plays syncopated Em9 chords to highlight the words. The melody suddenly drops on measure 80 for “when I would wear ruffles cut down to here” – an example of text painting (example 55).

73

Clarinet

Clarinet

Clarinet

Guitar

Voice

point with, or flash them in dis dain, or lift them up in joy - - but I would ne ver flaunt them, nor

Ex. 54. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 73-76. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Syncopated rhythms in guitar and clarinets.

78

Clarinet

Clarinet

Clarinet

Guitar

Voice

ne verfluff them... except on special ce re - mo ni al oc - cations where I would wear ruf-fles "down to here",

Ex. 55. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 78-81. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Alternating seconds in voice, Em9 chords in guitar, text painting in voice.

The fourth section (A' in the schematic above) includes the text for the next three stanzas. This section continues the fast patter-like pace of the A sections, but builds in intensity as the thoughts of the girl become more excited. In order for the music to build in parallel with the text, Weir adds density to the orchestration and composes variations on the melodic line. The guitar is joined by the piano, the strings complement the guitar rhythm with pizzicato chords, and the clarinets play staccato eighth notes on the accented beats. The marimba and xylophone play steady eighths punctuated by accents in unison with the rhythm of the guitar and strings (example 56).

99

Clarinet

Clarinet

Clarinet

Marimba

Guiro

Xylophone

Guitar

Piano

Voice

In fai-ry-tales, they say gi ant es ses have breasts so long they can throw them o ver their shoul ders.

Violin

Violin

Viola

Viola

Cello

Cello

Contrabass

Ex. 56. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 99-103. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Increased orchestral density.

To vary the melody, the vocal line begins in the higher notes of the octave, gradually descending rather than ascending as in the previous A sections. The phrase “In fairy tales they say” begins on a high D# (D#5) in measure 100, and each phrase begins a step down, until measure 118 where the phrase “will having breasts change my voice” begins on C4. Several times for text emphasis, the melody leaps up at the end of the phrase, including up a fourth on the words “this big” and on the word “voice,” and also up a minor sixth on the word “taller.” There is also an eighth rest before “this big,” slightly offsetting the rhythm for comic timing (example 57).

100  
Voice  
In fai-ry-ales, they say gi-ant-es-ses have breasts so long they can throw them o-ver their shoul-ders.

104  
Will mine be like that? Will they be like two young can-dles glow-ing in ev-ry dark and gloam-ing?

108  
or like sweet and tas-ty cher-riesswel-ling from the bran-ches, or may-be they'll be cone-shaped like shy lit-tle tu-lips,

112  
or may-be they'll be mel-low like ripe and dus-ky mel-ons, or may-be they'll be "this big" and take up all the

116  
room in a-ny room I'm in. Will ha-ving breasts change my voice? Will breasts make me tall-er?

Ex. 57. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 110-120, voice only. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Descending melodic line, leaps up on “this big”, “voice” and “taller,” and eighth rest before “this big” for comic timing.

The harmony for this section becomes less and less important as the rhythm takes a more primary role. The chords serve more as percussive accents rather than contributing to a harmonic progression. They begin with the E9, C#m9 and C#m11 chords, as well as the F#m7 and the Bm7 chord, as in the previous sections. However as the melody descends lower, more notes are

added to the chords, creating tone clusters, as seen in the piano notes F# E G#A#D# in measures 110-111 (example 58).



110

Clarinet

Clarinet

Clarinet

Marimba

Guiro

Xylophone

Guitar

Piano

Voice

or may be they'll be cone shaped like shy lit tle tu lips, or may be they'll be mel low like ripe and dus ky mel ons,

Violin

Violin

Viola

Viola

Cello

Cello

Contrabass

Ex. 58. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 110-113. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Chord clusters in accompaniment.

The momentum builds to a climax in measures 121-125 with the words “For with breasts I am certain that I will rule the world,” followed by a fermata over a rest. This could easily sound like the end of the piece for the audience. However this is not the main climax of the piece, or of the text, and Weir’s writing reflects this difference. The melody is not sung on high pitches, rather it is sung in the middle of the voice. “The world” is sung on B4, close to the singer’s *passagio*. Although the dynamics crescendo to fortissimo, the singer is most likely overshadowed by the fortissimo accented tone cluster chords in the orchestra. Therefore this music expresses the ever-shifting thoughts of the text, building tension before a sudden change of direction (example 59).

122

Clarinet

Clarinet

Clarinet

Marimba

Guero

Xylophone

Guitar

Piano

Voice

Violin

Violin

Viola

Viola

Cello

Cello

Contrabass

For with breasts I am cer tain that I will rule the world! Come! O La -dy of my

Colla voce

*mf* *f* *ff*

Ex. 59. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 122-127. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Full orchestra, chord clusters, dramatic climax followed by sudden pause and solo voice.

Section C begins with a fermata, and the music that follows represent a brief pause in this whirlwind of thought. The voice sings “Come O Lady of My Body” in triplet quarter-note rhythms. For the first three phrases, the voice sings *a cappella*, with only a single guitar stroke between the phrases, providing a stark contrast from the previous sections. The melodic line is chant-like and repetitive, using the notes B, A and D until measure 134, where it adds the notes F#, E and C#. This stark texture and repetitiveness evokes the call-like petition-prayer of the text. The guitar plays steady, repeating E9 chords for the majority of the section except for measures 133-135, where it adds F#m7, Bm7, and F7b5 on the words “so it can swell in the way it was meant to.” These chords highlight the idea of the “swelling” in the text (example 60).

131

Guitar

Voice

un-tie the ribbons of my body, so it can swell in the way it is meant to... Oh,

136

Moun-der of Breasts, Un - ti - er of Rib-bons, Sing - er to Flow - ers Un -

Ex. 60. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 131-138. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Chant like melody, repeated E9 chords in guitar, change of chords for “so it can swell in the way it is meant to.”

The final lines of the poem represent the last petition to the “Lady of my Body” for breasts. The music returns to the rhythmic syncopation of the A section with full orchestration, reflecting the intensity and urgency of the girl’s pleas. However, Weir makes an unusual choice

in this variation. The melody, in alternating seconds, begins in the upper register of the voice and descends with each phrase, in a similar fashion to the previous A section. Normally a melody builds to a climax by ascending in pitch, here the melody ends on an E above middle C (E4) for the word “alive”. However, the orchestra creates the climax in intensity. The instruments play syncopated and accented E7 chords in rhythmic unison with the guiro, while the marimba and xylophone maintain a steady eighth note pulse with the singer. These culminate in a final crescendo to fortissimo, followed by a solo declamatory “Now!” in the voice. This last word is marked “spoken with emphasis” on G5, as the girl has one last desperate plea. Following the exclamation are two quiet glissandi in the cello, descending from E2 to C2. (example 62). These glissandi serve two functions. First, they provide a transition to the next song, “The Edge,” which begins in C#, a half-step difference from the tonal area of C that ends “Breasts!!” Second, they provide a quiet ending in contrast with the fortissimo “Now!” of the singer.

142

Clarinet *mf* *f* *mf*

Clarinet *mf* *f* *mf*

Clarinet *mf* *f* *mf*

Marimba *f* *mf*

Guiro *mf* *f* *mf*

Xylophone *f* *mf* *mf*

Guitar *mf* *f* *mf*

Piano *mf* *f* *mf*

Voice *mf* *f* *mf*

Breasts! Tem pes tu ous Breasts!! Ho - ly Mo thers of ev - 'ry li - ving crea - ture, ho - ly with de sire, ho - ly

Violin *mf* *f* *mf*

Violin *mf* *f* *mf*

Viola *mf* *f* *mf*

Viola *mf* *f* *mf*

Cello *mf* *f* *mf*

Cello *mf* *f* *mf*

Contrabass *mf* *f* *mf*

146

Clarinet

Clarinet

Clarinet

Marimba

Guiro

Xylophone

Guitar

Piano

Voice

and on fire! Breasts - to - be, be a live! Now!!

Spoken, with emphasis

Violin

Violin

Viola

Viola

Cello

Cello

Contrabass

*f*, *ff*, *mf*, *p*, *gliss.*

Ex. 61. Weir, “Breasts!!,” mm. 142-146. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Final chords, descending pitches in voice, final “now” spoken on high G, solo glissando in cellos.

The next text by Clarissa Pinkola Estés entitled “The Mothership: When a Good Mother Sails From this World” is divided into two staves, and composed as two distinct songs, the penultimate songs of the work. These songs deal with a daughter’s loss of her mother. The text of the first staff is below. (The bracketed text is not in the song):

Sanctu, Sanctu, Sanctu.

Down at the shores,  
the long lines are forming,  
the old ones patiently waiting  
for the journey over water  
back to their “truest home”.

My mother is my heart.  
My mantra for years has been,  
“Don’t die, don’t die, my Dearie,  
my good mother.”  
But now I must bow to your angels,  
and say to you,  
“Lean on me”.

Lean  
on  
me.

I will row us past the ripping tides,  
I am strong and younger than you.  
I will take you to that far horizon line,  
beyond which,  
I cannot go.

Ohhhh... Ohhhh

Lean  
on  
me.  
Lean  
on  
me –  
till the last  
moment.  
“Don’t cry,  
don’t cry”,



says someone,  
 not myself.  
 "Do not be afraid.  
 Am I not here  
 beside you?  
 Do not fear;  
 you are under my protection."  
 Whose voice is this?  
 Whose voice is speaking?  
 Is it myself? or my mother?  
 or our dearest *Madre Maria*,  
*La Virgin de Guadalupe*?  
 She Who Holds Me, holds my mother,  
 holds me as I hold you,  
 my smaller, and smaller mother...  
 you take on more and more the shades of water,  
 your soul sparkling against the night sky.

Come, let me hold you  
 and birth you  
 through this storm.  
 [You, who brought me through the door of your body.  
 Now, I am bringing you through the door of my spirit.]  
 and I will –  
 see you –  
 through...  
 I will see you through...  
 to the new morning I say –

to my beloved Big Momma, [I say – ]  
 to *mi madre pequeña*, [I say – ]  
 to the mother of my bones, [I say – ]  
 to the mother's magic touch  
 making all colors jump, [I say – ]  
 to the Ma of nightlight rooms, I say –  
 I will see you through,  
 I will see you through,  
 to the new morning, I say –

to the mother of the lightning sky, [I say – ]  
 to the mother of the serpent strike, [I say – ]  
 to the mother of *remedios*,  
*mi yerba buena* mother, [I say – ]  
 to the mother who speaks with the spirits, I say –

I will see you through  
to the new morning, [I say – ]

to the *omah* of the blood red roses, [I say – ]  
to mother midnight nurse, [I say – ]  
to the mother of the body's pleasure, [I say – ]  
to the most beloved chocolate-grand-ma'am, I say –  
I will see you through

to the frugal mother, turning her socks over  
so the mended holes will not show, [I say – ]  
to the mother, the lover,  
who made thunder under the sheets, [I say – ]  
to the Madonna of the grottos  
of the ever-full sink and stove, I say –

to the kitchen-table terrorists, [I say – ]  
to the mothers of *las velas sanitas*, the candles lit  
for the hopes of loved ones, [I say – ]  
to the mother of many mistakes,  
who loved, in spite of so much, I say –  
I will see you through...

to the mother of harsh lessons, [I say – ]  
to the sacred heart ringed with thorns, [I say – ]  
to my mother's heart broken open forever, [I say – ]  
I will see you through

to the little mouse mother  
whose ears hear every secret thing, [I say – ]  
to the  
most infinitely  
tender  
little old face,  
with the eyes of a child, I say –

I will see you through...  
and I will see you  
in the new morning, [I say – ]  
...just...  
...one...  
...tiny...  
...bedazzle...  
...from now...<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estés and Judith Weir, "The Mothership: When a Good Mother Sails From This World: Stave I," *woman.life.song*, 36-52. Reprinted by permission of Chester Music Limited.

The first stave comprises the moments of the mother's final breaths, when the daughter is saying her final words to her mother and supporting her mother through the transition. Estés uses the common analogy of a ship sailing to an unseen land to resemble the death process. It is written from the perspective that death is not an end but a journey to a new life and existence. Several famous poems also use this analogy, such as "A Parable of Immortality" by Henry van Dyke and "Crossing the Bar" by Lord Alfred Tennyson, as well as a scene in *The Return of the King*, the final volume in the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

The woman in Estés' poem is watching her mother die. She tries to comfort her mother on her death-bed and gives her mother permission to continue on her death-journey. She says "my mother is my heart," which evokes a deep love and bond between the two women. She admits to feeling denial ("my mantra for years has been, Don't die") but now she accepts her mother's impending death ("now I must bow to your angels"). It is important for her to assure her mother that she will not be alone. She states, "Lean on me" – in other words, let me help you through until the very end. The daughter tries to carry the burden herself, but realizes that she too is not alone. She hears a female voice that is not her own, and names this voice "She Who Holds Me." This comforting and calming presence holds both herself and her mother through this trying time. "Come let me birth you through this storm" indicates the circular moment of the daughter taking care of the mother, giving back to her mother in gratitude for the mother's labor. She states "I will see you through to the new morning" to continually reiterate to her mother that she is not alone and will not be alone throughout the journey.

The next stanzas comprise a series of dedication phrases. Each phrase begins with the word "to," for example, "to my beloved Big Momma," "to the mother of my bones," etc. These describe the mother in magical ways and in domestic ways. They accept the human side of the

mother but at the same time glorify her in superhuman ways, for example, the contrast of “my beloved Big Momma” to “*mi madre pequeña*” (my little mother). The superhuman version is the “Wild Woman,” discussed in the previous song, “Breasts!!” This is the mother of “lightning sky” and “serpent strike.” She speaks with the spirits and is a healer. The human version is “*mi yerba buena*” (my medicinal herb), and a “kitchen-table terrorist.” She is a good listener, takes care of the family by cooking, washing dishes, mending clothes, and also makes sure her child eats well. Estés uses the phrase “chocolate grand-ma’am” which could relate to African-American or Hispanic race, but it also can mean a reference to the mother as cook and creator of delicious foods, reflected in the line “mother of the body’s pleasure.”

The poem also describes the mother as a good lover “who made thunder under the sheets.” To think of her mother in this manner is a radical thought, as she, like most children, possibly has felt uncomfortable thinking of her mother as a lover. However, it also shows that now the daughter is identifying her mother as a woman with all the hopes, dreams, and desires that women have. She sees her mother’s generosity, as a mother who lights candles for others (*las velas santas*). She recognizes that her mother has made many mistakes, and has also had her heart broken and bruised, yet survived and loved in spite of the pain.

The daughter sees the mother shrinking in size before her eyes in the poem. Her mother, once the strong figure, is now literally fading away. In an earlier verse she states “my smaller, and smaller mother.../you take on more and more the shades of water,/ your soul sparkling against the night sky.” As she is describing her mother in the dedication phrases, the superhuman abilities of the Wild Woman transition to the hard-working humanity of her mother, showing that the vision in her memories of her mother is also reducing in scale. This vision finally shrinks to a “little mouse”: delicate, childlike and meek.

The last phrase of the poem states she will see her “one tiny bedazzle from now.”

Bedazzle is a verb meaning to thrill or excite, and here Estés uses it poetically as a noun. The word evokes an image of sparkling light, and, continuing the metaphor of a ship in the sea, the sparkle of light on water. The imagery is being compared to time, and Estés explores this visually with writing each of the final words on a separate line, surrounded by ellipses:

...just...  
 ...one...  
 ...tiny...  
 ...bedazzle...  
 ...from now...<sup>60</sup>

It reflects the final seconds of time in the mother’s life, or the final heartbeats, as she passes from this world to the next.

In her setting of the text, Weir composes several significant sections of instrumental music without the voice. This leaves needed time for the singer and audience to feel the emotions of the event without words, letting the music create the atmosphere. One of these moments occurs during the extended introduction. The music expresses the somber and serious atmosphere of the text. The cellos and bass play repeated sixteenth notes, marked *ben articolato* and *piano*, in their lowest range. They play a unison G, then the second cello descends a step to F, creating the dissonance of a major second. The phrase suddenly ends on a perfect fifth, followed by several beats of rest. This phrase is repeated and varied, with descending patterns from B to A# to A in the second cello. With each reiteration of the phrase, more dynamic changes and accents are added. These low string passages evoke images of creaking of old ships from the poem, but could also represent the low moans of the mother as she is dying. The low

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 52.

itches also evoke a sense of primal energy, connecting with the daughter's feelings of grief and sadness (example 62).

The musical score for Example 62 consists of four systems of staves. The first system (measures 10-11) features three staves: Cello (bass clef), Cello (bass clef), and Cb (bass clef). All three staves play a continuous sixteenth-note pattern. The second system (measures 12-13) shows the Cello and Cb staves continuing the sixteenth-note pattern, while the Cello staff has a rest. The third system (measures 14-15) shows the Cello and Cb staves continuing the sixteenth-note pattern, while the Cello staff has a rest. The fourth system (measures 16-18) shows the Cello and Cb staves continuing the sixteenth-note pattern, while the Cello staff has a rest. The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *mp*, *p*, and *f*, and features sixteenth note passages and chromatic passages.

Ex. 62. Weir, “The Mothership: When a Good Mother Sails From This World: Stave I,” *woman.life.song*, mm. 10-18. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Introduction, sixteenth note passages in lower strings, third and fourth variation, added accents and dynamics, chromatic passage in 2<sup>nd</sup> cello.

The pulsating sixteenth note passage in the bass continues to develop and is joined by the bass drum (played with timpani sticks) and the conga in measure 26. With this addition, the music begins to evoke a tribal chant. This tribal chant evolves into a tribal dance beginning in

measure 30. The rhythms of the bass strings change in measure 30 to triplets against the sextuplets in the conga drums. The strings are marked “*arco battuto*.” Normally for string players the term *battuto* is used with *col legno*, which means to hit with the wood of the bow. Here it is used to describe a percussive stroke with the hair of the bow. This stroke evokes a primal, tribal sound (example 63).

Ex. 63. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave I,” mm. 29-32. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Addition of bass drum and conga, *arco battuto* in strings, triplet rhythms.

The voice interrupts the instruments with “Sanctu, sanctu,” on the notes D4 and E $\flat$ 4. The long-short rhythm of this phrase, with stress on the first syllable (“sanc”), as well as being in the lower register of the voice, resemble a deep meditative sigh, showing the emotional prayer of the daughter. In contrast, the strings play a triplet quarter-note rhythm stressing the first and third beats of the triplet. This imitates a skipping feel, similar to a heartbeat. The chords, a mix of triadic and quartal, continue for seventeen measures. These chords shift from C minor to F to E $\flat$ , back to C minor, ending with a Cm7 chord in measure 52 (omitting the third). However, the rhythm plays the primary role, and the chords sound like the beating of drums due to the percussive nature of the strings (example 64).

34

Bass Drum

Conga

Piano, Harp, Clarinets

Voice

Violin 1 and Viola

Cello

Cello

Contrabass

*mf* *f* *mp*

*mp* *mf* *f* *mp*

*f*

sotto voce *mp*

Sanc - tu, Sanc - tu.

pizz *f*

arco battuto *mp*

*mf* *f* *mp*

*mf* *f* *mp*

*mf* *f* *mp*

Ex. 64. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave I,” mm. 34-36. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. “Sanctu” phrase in voice, followed by skipping rhythm in lower strings.

The text for the next section includes the term “mantra”, which is a word or phrase that is repeated over and over in meditation. The whole piece reflects this idea of mantra with repeated rhythmic motives and the use of chant-like modal scales. For example, the vocal melody, beginning in measure 53, uses the notes of the G Phrygian mode, which sounds like a natural minor scale but utilizes the minor second ( $A^b$ ) instead of a major second in the second note of



the scale. The violas and 1<sup>st</sup> cello also play a chant-like counter-melody in Phrygian mode in measures 60-65 (examples 65 and 66).

53  
Voice  
Down at the shores, the long lines are form - ing, the old ones pa-tient-ly  
56  
wait-ing for the jour-ney o-ver wa-ter back to their "true - est home."

The musical score for voice, measures 53-58, is written in 3/4 time. The melody is in Phrygian mode. Measures 53-55 show the first line of the melody with lyrics "Down at the shores, the long lines are form - ing, the old ones pa-tient-ly". Measures 56-58 show the second line of the melody with lyrics "wait-ing for the jour-ney o-ver wa-ter back to their 'true - est home.'". The score includes dynamic markings *mf* and *mp*.

Ex. 65. Weir, "The Mothership: Stave I," mm. 53-58, voice only. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Chant-like melody using Phrygian scale.

60 arco  
Viola  
Viola  
Cello  
Cello  
Cb

63  
mf  
mp  
p  
mf  
mp  
p  
mf  
mp  
p

The musical score for strings, measures 60-65, is written in 3/4 time. The score is for Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. Measures 60-62 show the first line of the string melody with dynamic markings *mf* and *f*. Measures 63-65 show the second line of the string melody with dynamic markings *mf*, *mp*, and *p*. The score includes dynamic markings *mf*, *mp*, and *p*.

Ex. 66. Weir, "The Mothership: Stave I," mm. 60-65, strings only. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Phrygian scale in viola melody and cello harmony.

Another example of the idea of mantra in the music is the use of short repetitive phrases. For instance, the phrase “Lean on me” is repeated several times with the same music. Here the vocal melody descends from A $\flat$  to G to F, in contrary motion with the ascending notes in the strings. The harmony in these three chords moves from F minor (1<sup>st</sup> inversion) to C7 back to F minor. This i-V7-i progression gives a hymn-like feel to the chant. Weir also uses text painting to add stress to the word, “lean.” “Lean on me” is sung twice, the first phrase beginning on beat two, and the second on beat 1. Therefore the second “lean” has more weight and stress as it appears on the strongest beat as a literal musical lean. The dynamics begin louder on “lean” followed by a decrescendo. This phrase, foreshadowed in the instrumental introduction in measures 46-47, occurs in measures 73-74 and 80-81 (example 67).

79

Voice: *f* *mf* *mp* *f* *mf* *mp*  
 — I can-not go. Oh Lean on me. Lean on me till the

Viola: *p* *mf* *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *p*

Viola: *p* *mf* *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *p*

Cello: *p* *mf* *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *p* *pizz* *3*

Cello: *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *p* *mf*

Cb: *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *p* *mf* *mp* *p* *mf*

Ex. 67. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave I,” mm. 79-81, voice and strings. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. “Lean on me” phrase with contrary motion in strings.

The music beginning with the lyrics “Don’t cry” has a thicker texture with the addition of a third line of counterpoint and more syncopation. This third line resembles the third voice added to the story, the “someone”, and is played by the flutes, violas and first cello. They anticipate the vocal entrance by half a measure: the first flute, viola and cello play a descending scale passage, while the second flute and viola play in contrary motion. The other two lines of counterpoint include the vocal melody, which is sung in a recitative-like style, and the bass, harp and guitar, which play ascending *arpeggiated* passages (example 68).

82

Flute *mf*

Flute *mf*

Bass Clarinet *f*

Bass Drum

Congas *mp* *mf*

Guitar *f*

Harp

Voice *mf* *f*

last mo-ment. "Don't cry, don't cry", says some-one, not my-self. "Do not be a-fraid. Am

Viola *mf*

Viola *mf*

Cello *mf*

Cello *f*

Contrabass *f*

Ex. 68. Weir, "The Mothership: Stave I," mm. 82-84. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Three lines of counterpoint, Flutes, violas, and 1<sup>st</sup> cello as one line, in contrary motion, bass clarinet, 2<sup>nd</sup> cello and guitar as second, and voice as third.

After the words "you are under my protection," there is a short instrumental interlude from measures 88-94. This parallel octave melody represents the "heavenly voice" mentioned in the text. The piano, first flute, piccolo and violins play this melody in the high treble range, using pentatonic scale notes with repeating *arpeggiated* figures, which evoke bird calls. Within these passages are repeating "sigh" phrases, as in measures 88, 89, and 92, in the rhythm of "don't cry." The singer enters in measure 93 with "Whose voice is this?" trying to identify this spiritual

voice. Her melody alternates with the parallel octave melody, and echoes its large leaps and melodic figures. This musical interplay represents the daughter's attempt to discern whether or not it is her own internal voice she hears or another presence (example 69).

87

Piccolo  
Flute  
Piano  
Violins

89

91

94

96

my pro-tec- tion."

Whose voice\_\_ is this? Whose voice is speak-ing?\_

Ex. 69. Weir, "The Mothership: Stave I," mm. 87-96. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Treble melody in octaves, voice enters measure 94 with echo of mm 87-90 in melody.

In measure 99, the instruments begin playing descending and ascending scale passages, accompanying the words "dearest *Madre Maria, La Virgin de Guadalupe.*" The glockenspiel plays descending half note intervals that mirror the scale notes in the piano. This creates an

ethereal sound, evoking the image of angels descending from heaven, as the woman is determining if the voice is actually the saint, Mary (example 70).

99

Glock.

Xylo. and Cl.

Piano Picc. Flute Violins

Voice

Viola

Viola

Or our dear - est Ma - dre Ma - ri - a, La Vir - gin de Gua - da -

Ex. 70. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave I,” mm. 99-101. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Descending arpeggio passages in flutes, piano and violins, descending passage in glockenspiel, viola passages mirror voice.

There are more examples of text painting in the section of music with the text “my smaller, and smaller mother.../you take on more and more the shades of water,/ your soul sparkling against the night sky.” The rhythms shorten in duration from triplet quarter notes to eighth notes, representing the “smaller and smaller mother.” The descending and ascending

pentatonic scale passages reflect the arc-shaped waves of water. The vocal line is also arc-shaped and lyrical, compassing a wide range from F to high G within the phrase. For “your soul sparkling against the night sky,” the piccolos and flute break their legato melody for these two and a half-measures to play staccato repeated notes. This passage, punctuated by the syncopated Cs in the glockenspiel, creates the effect of the “sparkling” in the text (example 71).

The musical score for 'The Mothership: Stave I' (measures 108-110) is written for a large ensemble. The instruments and their parts are as follows:

- Piccolo:** Measures 108-110, starting with a rest in measure 108, then playing a staccato repeated note pattern in measures 109 and 110.
- Flute:** Measures 108-110, playing a legato melody in measure 108, then a staccato repeated note pattern in measures 109 and 110.
- Flute:** Measures 108-110, playing a legato melody in measure 108, then a staccato repeated note pattern in measures 109 and 110.
- Glock.** Measures 108-110, playing a syncopated pattern of repeated notes.
- Xylo.** Measures 108-110, playing a syncopated pattern of repeated notes.
- Piano:** Measures 108-110, playing a complex rhythmic pattern with triplets and syncopation.
- Voice:** Measures 108-110, singing the lyrics: "your soul spark-ling a - gainst the night sky." The melody is arc-shaped, starting on F and ending on high G.
- Violin:** Measures 108-110, playing a legato melody in measure 108, then a staccato repeated note pattern in measures 109 and 110.
- Violin:** Measures 108-110, playing a legato melody in measure 108, then a staccato repeated note pattern in measures 109 and 110.
- Viola:** Measures 108-110, playing a legato melody in measure 108, then a staccato repeated note pattern in measures 109 and 110.
- Viola:** Measures 108-110, playing a legato melody in measure 108, then a staccato repeated note pattern in measures 109 and 110.

Ex. 71. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave I,” mm. 108-110. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Arc-shaped melody with range from F to G, shift to staccato passages and glockenspiel repeated Cs for “against the night sky.”

The orchestra continues the scale-like passages for “Come, let me hold you and birth you through the storm,” with the piano, flute, violins and violas. The intensity increases with the shorter rhythmic durations, and the scale passages now represent the wind and waves of a storm. The vocal melody returns to the slower triplet quarter notes, providing a brief calming influence through the storm.

The music for the dedication phrases is marked “*Piu Adagio*,” a contrast from the fast and intense previous section, with a meter change to 3/4. This last section contains several recurring elements, to reflect the chant style of the text. The first is the incantation element, containing the dedication phrases of the poem. The vocal part is marked “*parlando, energico*: like an incantation” and sung in the style of recitative, as the rhythms reflect the natural flow of speech. The pitches hover around middle C (C4), occasionally leaping up a fourth or a fifth for text emphasis. The orchestra music for each incantation section usually plays repeated chords in a steady rhythm, but also varies to fit the meaning of the text. An example of the steady repeated rhythm is in measures 120-127, where the guitar plays repeated triplet C and C9 quartal chords followed by Cminor7 chords above quiet tremolo notes in the viola and cello (example 72).





chord and C7 chord in the piano. The music for this chant reflects a child-like and optimistic interpretation of the text, one that is hopeful and happy in anticipation of seeing “the new morning” (example 73, measures 129-132).

129

Piano

*mp*

*mf*

*f*

Voice

*mp*

*mf*

*f*

I will see you through, I will see you through to the new morn-ing, I say

Cb

pizz

*mf*

*f*

Ex. 73. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave I,” mm. 129-132. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Refrain with dotted rhythms, accompanied by descending piano chords and ascending pizzicato bass notes

The third element is a crescendo and drum roll in the orchestra that acts as a punctuation between stanzas. Along with the percussion roll are tremolo chords in the strings and fast strums on the guitar, with dynamics that quickly crescendo from piano to forte. This drum roll, an important part of Native American tribal music, announces a call to attention, a change of thought, and an important moment. One example of this element is in measures 133-135. The bongos and congas play sixteenth notes accelerating to quintuplets against a roll in the xylophone, tremolo strings and guitar (example 74).



on the text. The melody is accompanied by a triplet eighth-note repeated pattern in the violins.

For “mended socks,” the articulation alternates between slurs and staccato notes, giving the impression of a sewing motion. Another example of text painting is in the following phrase, “the lover who made thunder under the sheets.” The piano plays heavy G and Gm7 chords, sounding like thunder, over tremolo chords in the strings (example 75, measures 154-160).

The musical score for measures 154-160 of "The Mothership: Stave I" by Weir. The score is written for Piano, Voice, Violin, Viola, and another Viola. The piano part features heavy G and Gm7 chords. The violin part has a triplet eighth-note repeated pattern. The voice part has lyrics: "to the fru - gal mo - ther, turn-ing her socks o - ver so the mend - ed holes will not show, to the mo-ther, the lo-ver who made thund - er un - der the sheets,". The score includes dynamic markings like *mp*, *mf*, *f*, and *p*, and articulation like *trem.* and *con ped.*

Ex. 75. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave I,” mm. 154-160. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Triplet rhythm in violins for “frugal mother” and thunderous chords in piano for “thunder under the sheets.”

An example of an omission of elements is in measure 165, where the phrase “the ever full sink and stove, I say” is followed by “to the kitchen table terrorists.” In the one measure separating the phrases, only the piano plays the “I will see you through” melody. The reason for this omission of the vocal “I will see you through” section is to keep the musical flow from one phrase to the next, giving the listener just a small reminder of the refrain.

The final variant of the incantation element is in a different style than was previously used. The text is “to the little mouse mother/ whose ears hear every secret thing,” and the music reflects the image of this text. The vocal melody consists of dotted rhythms and staccato articulation, with occasional disjunct leaps, as in “every secret thing.” The piano plays a steady triplet figure that repeats on different beats of the measure, resembling the minimalist technique of phasing. The harp plays off-beat syncopated pizzicato eighth notes, matching the notes of the piano, while the upper strings pluck their eighth notes on the beat. These pizzicato notes, marked piano, evoke the image of the “mouse mother” with tiptoe footsteps and discerning ears (example 76).

q=76 at a gentler pace

184

Harp

Piano

Voice

to the lit - tle mouse mo - ther whose ears hear ev - ry se - cret thing,

q=76 at a gentler pace

Violin

Violin

Viola

pizz

p

Ex. 76. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave I,” mm 184-186. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Staccato melody for “whose ears hear ev’ry secret thing” accompanied by pizzicato strings, phasing piano and syncopated harp rhythms.

For the next two phrases, the final “I will see you through,” and “just one tiny bedazzle from now,” the music continues in a pointillistic style. The rests in the melody, punctuated by staccato eighth notes, create the natural pauses in the text, a musical version of the ellipses in the last phrase of the poem. They also represent the slowing of the mother’s heartbeat. As she takes her final breaths, the strings and the drums quietly fade away (example 77).

193

Bongos

Glock.

Piano

Voice

just one ti - ny be-daz-zle from now...

Violin

Violin

Viola

Viola

Cello

Cello

Cb

195

Bongos

Ex. 77. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave I,” mm. 193-196. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Ending with fading bongos.

In Stave II of “The Mothership,” the woman is grieving her mother and coming to terms with the loss. “Leave me to myself now” indicates that she wants to be alone because this

process is personal. “I am a ship who’s lost her riggings; suddenly come unmoored” means that she feels adrift and lost without the anchor of her mother. The full text of the poem is below:

When I say, “My mother has died”,  
I mean my “most beloved”.  
Leave me to myself now,  
for I am a ship who’s  
lost her riggings;  
suddenly  
come unmoored.

Oh, my mother has died;  
My mother has died;  
She has earned her  
resting now,  
waiting only, and proudly so,  
for her sails  
to be taken down.

I the daughter,  
mend my mother’s sails now;  
I seek her  
worn and broken  
threads of light,  
reweaving her dazzling linen...  
[and if not able to be rewoven,  
then gently repairing it  
however needed...  
and if not able to be mended,  
then patched with parts taken  
from my own life,  
and gently sewn over the places  
where her life  
was worn through,  
or never was.]

The sails of the mother  
are fitted to the daughtership;  
raised up on the mainsail,  
and the final touch –  
the red ragged flag – hers –  
will be flying  
at the topmast of my ship.  
I’ll be let down into the waters,  
I, the daughter, will glide again,



but this time, under the sails  
 inherited from my mother,  
 and all the mothers  
 before her.

Ay, Mother, let me tell you  
 my treasured dearie-dear,  
 one last thing I have learned  
 from your spirit passing through me,  
 as sparkling shadow passes darkening shadow,  
 on this open night-sea journey:  
 I am learning to navigate  
 by the mysterious farthest stars –  
 the ones that the great wake of your passing  
 has revealed to me...  
*...for the very first time...*

I will see you in the new morning, I say  
 my sweet little mother, my most excellent *omah*,  
 “I will see you in the new morning”, I say,  
 to someone who is weeping...  
*Muchisimas gracias, mi mamá;*  
 Be with The Aeternal Mothers now,  
 I will see you in the morning, I say,  
 ...just...  
 ...one...  
 ...tiny...  
 ...bedazzle...  
 ...from...  
 ...now...

Sanctu, Sanctu, Sanctu.<sup>61</sup>

The poem uses the metaphor of sails to represent the pieces and events of the mother’s life story. She “mends” her mother’s sails with “parts taken from my own life.” The parts of her mother’s life that were unfinished will be completed in the daughter’s own life. This implies that the lives of the children will improve upon the lives of their parents. The experiences of the mother are part of the daughter’s life and experiences, fitted together like a patchwork: “the sails

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<sup>61</sup> Clarissa Pinkola Estés and Judith Weir, “The Mothership: When a Good Mother Sails From This World: Stave II,” *woman.life.song*, 53-60. Reprinted by permission of Chester Music Limited.

of the mother are fitted to the daughtership.” The daughter pauses in her grief to recognize that she will return to life stronger for this experience, as her ship is comprised of sails from her mother and “all the mothers before her.”

In the next section of the poem, the daughter’s thought process develops as her grief turns into gratitude. She experiences the “sparkling” light of her mother’s countenance touching her own shadow of grief in a moment of awakening to the “one last thing I have learned.” She realizes that she has all the wisdom she needs to navigate through life. She sees these mysteries of life, the “mysterious stars,” for the first time, “the ones that the great wake of your passing has revealed to me,” and knows how to guide her journey based on this new knowledge. She is more confident in her own choices. Now *she* becomes the leader, the wise woman, the mother-figure, and the role model.

The final stanza repeats the “I will see you in the new morning” refrain, with a new sense of gratitude and joy. She calls her mother “Omah,” which in Spanish means “casa,” or home, and thanks her profusely with “*muchisimas gracias*.” Now that her grief is healing, she can be the comforter for others: “I say, to someone who is weeping...” This stave ends with a repetition from the previous stave: “Just one tiny bedazzle from now.” However, this reiteration carries more hope and closure, no longer depressing as in the previous stave. The poem ends as the first stave begins, with “Sanctu, Sanctu, Sanctu,” meaning “holy” or “sacred.” Bookending the piece this way not only creates the atmosphere of sacred prayer, but it also expresses the circle of life, as the daughter becomes the mother. As a result, these three words should be sung quite differently at the end of the work to reflect this growth in character.

Marked “Reflective, relaxed, conversational,” the music here is quite different than any of the previous songs. The orchestration consists only with two cellos, expressing the intimate

inner-dialogue of the text. There are also fewer and shorter instrumental interludes, and the longest rest for the singer is the four-bar introduction. The cellos play in rhythmic unity for most of the song, acting as a countermelody with the voice. They begin the piece with a two note repeating melodic figure, first on unison C, then the 2<sup>nd</sup> cello lowers to B $\flat$ , creating the dissonance of a major second. This sounds like sobbing or crying, but could also represent the dissonance created by the loss of the woman's mother: one moment life has comfort and predictability, the next moment the daughter's rock is gone and she falters. The vocal melody is in C natural minor, or the Aeolian mode, which adds a slight reminiscence of the previous modal chant-like song. However this melody is very lyrical, encompassing a full octave range. The rhythms are simple and steady, with duple and triplet eighths that follow the natural rhythm of the text. A rhythmic pulse is created by the dotted eighths played on the downbeat of each measure by the cellos (example 78).

**q=66: Reflective, relaxed, conversational**

Voice: *mp* When I say, "my mother has  
died", I mean my "most be-lov-ed." Leave me to my self now,

Cello: *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp*

Ex. 78. Weir, "The Mothership: Stave II," *woman.life.song*, mm. 1-9. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Dotted rhythms in cellos, melody incorporating the natural minor scale.

The phrase “my mother has died,” is an important statement in the poem, repeated twice, as the woman is acknowledging and accepting that this event has happened, and that her life has permanently changed. It is the release of tears and pain. The music expresses this with a sigh-like descending motive in a triplet rhythm. The cellos introduce this motive in parallel seconds and with staccato articulation, their “sigh” falling a full octave. The vocal melody rises to E $\flat$  5 on “mother” and sings the sighing motive twice, the full descent outlining a C minor arpeggio (example 79).

14

mf  $\leftarrow$  f  $\leftarrow$  mf

Oh, my mother has died, my mother has died; she has

mf mp mf

Ex. 79. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm 14-16. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Triplet rhythm on “my mother has died” in cello followed by voice, *arpeggiated* melody.

The rhythmic intensity builds for the next section of text. Beginning with “I the daughter mend my mother’s sails now,” the cellos play triplet eighths, first as a rocking long-short rhythm, then steady descending triplet passages. The voice sings duple eighths against the triplets, appearing as if the woman is struggling to conform to the rhythm of the cellos. It is as if she feels inadequate to mend her mother’s sails and that the task is too great. For “reweaving her dazzling linen” she sings in triplet rhythms, finally syncing with the cellos. However, for the next phrase, “The sails of the mother are fitted to the daughtership,” she is still singing triplet eighths while the cellos are now playing sixteenths (example 80).

24

Voice

— the daugh - ter mend my mo ther's sails now;

Cello

Cello

26

Voice

I seek her worn and bro - ken threads of light,

Cello

Cello

28

Voice

re weav - ing her daz - zling li - nen....

Cello

Cello

Ex. 80. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm. 24-29. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Duple melody against triplets in the cellos, with the voice joining the triplet rhythm in measure 28.

In addition to the rhythmic complexity, the vocal melody, with dramatic arc-shaped sweeping phrases, expresses the building intensity of this stanza. The vocal range of these phrases extends from E $\flat$ 4 and F4 to F5 and G5. Weir highlights the important words of each

phrase by composing them on the high notes of the musical phrase, as underlined in this example:

The sails of the mother  
are fitted to the daughtership;  
raised up on the mainsail,  
and the final touch –  
the red ragged flag – hers –  
will be flying  
at the topmast of my ship.<sup>62</sup>

Weir uses this technique to lay stress on these words of the poem, guiding the interpretation of the listener. It also allows for word painting, as the highest pitch of the song, G, is sung on the word “up” (example 81).

The musical score for 'The Mothership: Stave II' (mm. 33-36) is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 33-34) shows the Voice part with lyrics 'The sails of the mother are fitted -' and two Cello parts with descending sixteenth note passages marked with >p. The second system (mm. 35-36) shows the Voice part with lyrics '- ed to the daughtership; raised up on the main -sail,' and two Cello parts with descending sixteenth note passages marked with mp. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of one flat (B-flat).

Ex. 81. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm. 33-36. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. High notes on “sails,” “fitted,” and “up” with descending sixteenth note passage in cellos.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 55-56.

The quickly changing harmonies in the cello line also contribute to the drama of the text. The cellos play sequences of descending sixteenth note arpeggios with the chords changing every measure. The harmonic progression leans towards traditional tonality, and includes this progression: i VI iv i, with the occasional seventh. The end of this section modulates from C minor to the dominant (G minor), then modulates back to C minor in the next section. This brief exploration into tonality is a symbol of the past, of comfort and stability. With the text, “I’ll be let down into the waters” the tonality of the past (voice) is juxtaposed with the complex rhythms of the present (cellos). The melody modulates from G minor to F minor back to C minor in primarily triplet and duple rhythms. The cellos play open fifths and dissonant seconds in quintuplet sixteenth rhythms. However, the vocal line acts as a calming influence on the cellos. As the daughter sings “but this time under the sails inherited from my mother,” the cello rhythms lengthen to triplet eighths, slowing their momentum. This expresses the idea that the woman is now in control of the sails and the situation. She feels the strength given to her by her ancestors (example 82).

49

Voice

but this time un der the sails in her -ri -

Cello

52

Voice

ted from my mo ther, and all the mo thers be fore her.

Cello

Ex. 82. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm. 49-55. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Slowing rhythms in cello, triplet and duple rhythms in voice, melody ending in C minor followed by G7 chord ending the phrase in the cello on final beat of measure 55.

The penultimate stanza expresses the revelation of the “one thing learned.” This is a very intimate moment for the woman, and the vocal line is sung *a cappella*. Although there is no instrumental support, the vocal line is confident and sure, outlining notes of the C minor scale. There is a climax to a G5 on the word “passes” in the phrase, “as sparkling shadow passes dark’ning shadow.” The “sparkling shadow”, the mother, passes through the dark shadow of the daughter, and the climax of the vocal line expresses this moment of revelation (example 83).



63 *f* one thing I have learned *mf* from your spi-rit pas-sing through me,

66 *mp* as spark-ling sha-dow pass-es dark-'ning sha-dow on this o-pen night sea jour-ney: *mf*

in tempo (Tempo 1)

*mp*

Ex. 83. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm. 63-68. Solo voice, climax on “passes.”

The text for the final stanza “I will see you in the new morning” is identical to the final stanza of Stave I but the musical setting of the text in Stave II has a different character. The cellos begin with an ostinato pattern that alternates legato and staccato articulation. This creates an upbeat and bouncy feel to the rhythm. The voice sings a new melody to the words “I will see you in the new morning.” The high note of this phrase occurs on the word “see,” emphasizing that conviction that she will see her mother. In the second “I will see you...I say” phrase followed by “to someone who is weeping,” the climax notes occur at the ends of the phrases with a high F (F5) on “say” and ascending D5 to E♭5 on “weeping.” In the text, the woman is becoming the comforter to others who grieve, and the musical emphasis on those particular words implies that she is taking ownership of this idea (example 84).

82

Voice

*o -mah, \_\_\_\_\_ "I will see you in the new mor-ning", I*

Cello

*mp*

Cello

*mp*

84

Voice

*say \_\_\_\_\_ to some-one who is weep - ing\_\_\_\_\_*

Cello

*mf* *mp* *mf*

Cello

*mf* *mp* *mf*

Ex. 84. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm. 82-85. Climax high notes at the end of the phrases, “I say” and “weeping.”

Although the melody for “just one tiny bedazzle from now” is the same as in Stave I, the upbeat nature of the cello ostinato depicts a more hopeful, joyful and expectant ending. The final “Sanctu” phrase also has a different quality than in Stave 1. In the first stave, it is an ascending two-note pattern on D4 and E♭4, evoking the primal deep-throated cry of grief. In this stave, the melody begins on E♭5 and descends a third to C5. Sung in this higher octave, it reflects a heavenly call of goodbye. The cellos accompany the melody in parallel thirds, and the second cello offers a solo good-bye “sanctu” at the end, perhaps as an echo of the mother. This ending creates a quiet and poignant close to a powerful musical journey (example 85).

95 *f* *mp*

Voice

Sanc - tu, Sanc - tu, Sanc - tu.

Cello

*mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *p*

Cello

*mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *p*

Ex. 85. Weir, “The Mothership: Stave II,” mm. 95-97. © Copyright 2000 Chester Music Limited. Final “Sanctu” phrase, parallel thirds in cellos, 2<sup>nd</sup> cello echoes in final measure.

### Unifying Elements in the Cycle

After analyzing the work by song, it is important to look at the work as a whole and discover the connections between the songs. One of the main challenges for Weir as she was composing the work was to create these connections. She composed the songs in the order she received the texts from the authors, which was out of the order they would appear in the cycle. As a result, she created individual songs that allowed the unique voice of the author to be heard. As stated earlier on page 15, she conceived of the text for the cycle coming from one woman with many varied experiences. When asked in her email interview about whether there were any specific ways she was able to connect the songs together as a whole, she stated: “I think the unifying factors are the fairly unusual instrumentation, and the personality and sound of the singer. I agree that the texts are very different in style - I feel the music preserves that difference in tone.”<sup>63</sup> By preserving the different cultural aspects and voices of each author, the work expresses a multi-cultural archetypical woman, unified in events all woman experience (i.e. puberty, losing one’s mother), but also with culturally different experiences (Hispanic, African-

<sup>63</sup> Weir, personal email.

American, etc.) This idea of unity within diversity is what connects the songs together in the cycle.

Weir mentions instrumentation as a unifying factor of the work. However, another aspect to this instrumentation is the ethnic flavor that it provides, which highlights the diversity of the work. This is heard most prominently in the songs of Angelou and Estés. The opening music for “On Youth” (and for the whole work) is a percussion trio between the tambourine, conga and bongo drums. This is an unusual choice and not primarily instruments found in standard chamber music. But this choice, along with the jazz rhythms and harmonies, gives the piece a definitive cultural flavor to the song, sounding African-American and in consonance with the words and background of Maya Angelou. The song “Breasts!!” features the guitar in the rhythm section, which is common for popular, jazz and Latin music bands. The rhythms and harmonies in this song have qualities of Latin dance music, and this element reflects the Hispanic roots of Estés. Another ethnic flavor is the tribal chant feel of the first Mothership stave, and which also includes the conga and guitar. Although Estés has Hungarian and Hispanic roots, the repeating chant for the incantation section beginning “to my beloved Big Momma” evokes a tribal and primal energy that is common to many native cultures. Weir chose to compose a drum roll before each stanza of the dedication, reminiscent of a tribal drum roll, comprised of conga drums and guitar along with other instruments such as the xylophone. The addition of these percussion instruments along with the use of the guitar in the work combines the three ethnic flavors of African-American, Hispanic and Native-American to create a distinctly American feel to the composition. Thus the instrumentation Weir uses is integral in unifying seven very eclectic songs to create a multi-cultural work.

There are several other elements that help to add cohesiveness to the cycle. First is the organization of the songs within the cycle and the transitions between them. The texts are organized chronologically: early youth, puberty, loss of virginity, wisdom, loss of mother, final maturity. However the songs are numbered 1a, 1b, 1c, 2, 3a, 3b and 4, rather than 1 through 7. The “Mothership” songs are numbered 3a and 3b since they are both staves of the same poem. Weir unifies the first three songs of the work together numerically since they are all about youth: 1a (“On Youth”), 1b (“Breasts!!”) and 1c (“The Edge”).

Even though written by different authors, there are musical and textual connections between these first two songs. “On Youth” easily connects to “Breasts!!” as they both share the vigor of youth. Angelou’s words describe the feelings and emotions of childhood, and Estés captures these feelings in the pre-pubescent exclamation of “Breasts!!” Both of these songs also use rhythm as an integral part of their structure, using a constant rhythmic pulse with syncopation that disguises the sense of meter. These similarities help to connect the first two songs together for the listener.

Though it is grouped with the songs on youth, “The Edge” has more in common with songs numbers 2 and 3, “Eve Remembering” and the first stave of “Mothership.” The Morrison songs (1c “The Edge” and 2 “Eve Remembering”) share many connections beside their authorship. They both deal with lust, one for love and one for knowledge. The orchestra functions in a similar manner for both by musically painting the scenes. The long instrumental interludes in both songs are programmatic and they express the deep conceptual nature of the poems. The strings, harp and guitar create the atmosphere of the sensual feelings of love-making in “The Edge,” and the woodwinds, percussion and piano create the pastoral sounds of a garden in “Eve Remembering.” The latter song also evokes the imagery of ascending a summit, with

loud, strong chords in the winds, piano, chimes, bells and vibraphone. This ending is uniquely grandiose in style, in contrast with the other songs that die away with their final measures, reflecting the dramatic nature of the text.

The first stave of the “Mothership” poem follows “Eve Remembering.” This song has similar programmatic orchestrations to the previous two songs, musically expressing the scene of the ships in the water. The percussive nature of the strings gives a chant-like feel of a tribal dance to match the chant-like feel of the text. The low strings evoke the sounds of ships creaking in the water to connect with the sailing metaphor of the poem. Playing a unison melody in counterpoint with “Whose voice is this,” the orchestra becomes a character in the song, representing a new comforting presence that joins the daughter and mother in the poem. Ordering the three songs in this manner with similar orchestration allows for easy transitions between the three.

The “Mothership” songs, 3a (“Stave I”) and 3b (“Stave II”) are naturally connected as being from the same author and same poem. However the music for the two songs is vastly different. While “Stave I” followed the programmatic orchestrations of “The Edge” and “Eve Remembering,” “Stave 2” takes a different approach as an intimate art song. Weir chooses to orchestrate the text with only two cellos. This expresses the intimate nature of the text, as the daughter is alone with her thoughts.

The final song, “On Maturity,” connects more with the first song, “On Youth,” than with the previous “Mothership” song. “On Maturity,” incorporates spoken text at the end of the song, similar in style to the spoken text of “On Youth.” Weir stated in her interview: “When I received the Angelou text it looked like a prose paragraph to me, not poetry. I realised it would be

interesting to 'bookend' the cycle with Jessye Norman's spoken voice in the Angelou texts.”<sup>64</sup>

Another unifying feature of the Angelou songs is in the use of percussion instruments to create sound effects. At the end of “On Youth”, the percussion creates the atmosphere of the crackling fire imagery in the poem through the cymbal hits and the glockenspiel played with knitting needles. “On Maturity” includes the glockenspiel, vibraphone and tam-tam, whose musical passages add atmospheric effect to the text “years... like thin crystal.” The opening measures of this song include ascending and descending glissandi in the strings and glockenspiel, creating sound effects that capture this image of sparkling crystal.

A second important aspect regarding the order of songs is the way the keys or tonal centers transition easily from one song to the next. When programming recitals and choosing the order of songs for a set, this is often an important consideration. Some keys work together, such as moving from the key of C to G, the dominant of C, but one would want to avoid moving from the key of C to F# for example, as this is an interval of a triton, which makes an abrupt sonic shift for the listener. Weir chose to begin and end her songs with tonal centers that transition well from one to another, most being C, F and G. The only potential difficulty would be with “The Edge,” which begins in C# and ends in A#. However, “Breasts!!,” which comes before “The Edge,” ends with bass glissandi from E to C, a half step lower from C#. This key shift from C to the C# of “The Edge” may give an added “edge” to the piece, creating a slight bit of tension that adds to the musical interpretation. Another example of an easy transition is between “Mothership: Stave II” and “On Maturity.” The former ends with a B $\flat$  moving to G in the 2<sup>nd</sup> cello, outlining G minor. This transitions easily to the B $\flat$  and G minor chords in the first two

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

measures of “On Maturity.” These examples show that although Weir composed the songs out of order, she consciously created tonalities that could easily transition between one another.

A third unifying factor is Weir’s use of programmatic rhythmic and harmonic language throughout the work. Her use of complex rhythms, syncopation, and jazz chords like seventh, ninth, eleventh and thirteenth chords are prevalent through most of the songs. In “On Youth”, there are repeated jazz chords and rhythmic syncopation in the instrumental passages. In “Breasts!!” there are also repeated jazz chords and syncopation in the clave-like section. In “The Edge,” the seventh and ninth chords are used for the musical climaxes. This song also contains complex rhythms of quintuplets and septuplets. Another example is in “Eve Remembering,” which has quintuplet repeating jazz chords along with nonuplet rhythms in the long orchestral opening.

Weir frequently contrasts duple against triple rhythms, both sequentially and hemiola. There are alternating duple and triple eighths in “On Youth” and also in “Breasts!!” (syncopation that alternates groups of two and three eighth notes). “The Edge” has alternating triplet eighths with sixteenths, showing both speeding and slowing of momentum. In the “Mothership: Stave I,” the voice sings “whose ears hear every secret thing” in eighth notes against the triplets in the orchestra, to accentuate the words. Another significant duple-versus-triple section is in Stave II of the “Mothership.” For “I’ll be let down into the waters” the melody sings triplets against quintuplets in the cellos, which changes to duple in the melody against triplet eighths in the cellos for “under the sails inherited from my mother.”

While the orchestration and the compositional style of the composer contribute to the unifying of the piece as well as highlight the multi-cultural diversity of the piece, the singer of the work is perhaps the single most important element that unifies the piece. She is primarily



responsible for acting and expressing the text according to her own interpretation. Through this cycle she can connect with the audience in a very personal level, relating stages of a woman's life that all women encounter. Her voice and style convey the song cycle as a connected whole.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS

Weir faced unique challenges in the compositional process of *woman.life.song*. First, she was not able to choose the texts. Second, she was charged with creating a cohesive song cycle with the texts from three different authors. Third, due to difficulties with the poets' agents, Weir was forced to work quickly and compose the songs in the order she received the texts from the authors, out of sequence from the cycle order. The purpose of this study is to ascertain whether, despite these challenges, this song cycle is a viable addition to the orchestral song cycle repertoire and, if so, to theorize as to why the piece has not been more publicly recognized and performed. In order to find connections between the text and the music, the analysis is organized by poet. The conclusion of the analysis chapter is that, despite the diversity of the texts, Weir was successful in creating a cohesive cycle. Therefore the unique compositional process would not have been an obstacle to the acceptance of the piece into the repertoire.

One of the determining factors of the success of the cycle is whether or not the listener connects with the text. The poetry for *woman.life.song* is deep and provocative. Most people, men and women, can relate to the poetry in some facet or another. In the interview with Charlie Rose, Estés spoke about the "Mothership" poems being relatable because everyone has a mother.<sup>65</sup> Anyone who has had a deep relationship that is lost through death goes through the

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<sup>65</sup> "A discussion about *woman.life.song*."

grieving process. However the language of the poetry is symbolic, metaphorical and intellectual. The listener benefits from a deeper study of the texts than one or two hearings can provide. For the purposes of this analysis, a study of the works of the authors helps to truly understand their voices, the language, and the concepts of the poems. For example, reading Angelou's autobiographies gives a closer connection to her words, especially with "On Youth." This poem describes a grandmother and uncle that match characters in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Angelou's autobiography of her early years in Arkansas. Reading these accounts helps in the visualization of the characters in the poem. Studying Morrison's novel, *Beloved*, gives a clearer understanding of her poems, and highlights the sensual and deeply symbolic nature of Morrison's writing. Estés' best seller *Women who Run with the Wolves* is a key resource for understanding the metaphors and symbolism in "Breasts!!" and the "Mothership" poems. The book gives a detailed description of the "wild-woman" archetype by analyzing the female roles in traditional myths and folklore. Studying the background knowledge of the authors helps greatly with the analysis of the poetry, and for those listeners that are already familiar with the works of the three authors, the songs are already meaningful. Without this knowledge, it is more challenging to feel an emotional and moving connection with the text on first hearing. Due to the complexity of the texts, this connection may not occur without time to carefully study the texts prior to listening to a performance.

The other aspect to consider regarding the success of the work is whether or not Weir is able to capture the unique voices of the writers through the music in such a way that the music helps the listener relate to the text. Weir states in her interview, "The contrasts between the different literary forms were valuable in constructing a very extended solo work."<sup>66</sup> In other

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<sup>66</sup> Weir, personal email.

words, according to Weir, the work is valuable *because* the authors are so very different in style. Weir accomplishes this extended construction with her use of orchestration, instrumentation and color, expressing the literary style and mood of each poem with a distinct musical language. She highlights each author's voice and her background by musically painting the scene of the poems, giving life and expression to the words. The music helps to enhance the text and guides the listener to understanding the subtext of the words.

The eclectic nature of this cycle is one of the noteworthy features of the work as it represents a multi-cultural woman archetype. The texts and styles range from African-American to Hispanic, to Native American, creating a uniquely American whole. This allows for the singer to express the songs as either a single experience or many experiences, one woman or several women, depending on her own interpretation. This diversity also allows for singers of different races and cultures to perform the work. It is not exclusive to African-American singers even though it was originally written for Jessye Norman. Tom Service, who reviewed the BBC Proms performance, states:

Although all of the texts use the first person as narrative voice, the 'woman' of *woman.life.song* transcends any one individual. Instead, through the poems' range of references – from Latin American folklore to biblical legend – the narrator is both particular and mythological. This generous, universalized figure is especially distinctive relative to canonical depictions of femininity.... *woman.life.song* reflects a rather different conception of gender than does, say, Schumann's setting of Chamisso in *Frauenliebe und -leben*.<sup>67</sup>

Therefore the work translates well to singers and audiences of varying cultures, a facet which should make performing the work more appealing and more common.

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<sup>67</sup> Tom Service, "First Performances: Royal Albert Hall and Orkney - Weir, Maxwell Davies, Dillon," *Tempo - A Quarterly Review of Modern Music* (January 2001), <http://0-search.proquest.com.source.unco.edu/docview/573235?accountid=12832>; accessed 21 November 2014, 44-45.

Given that the piece offers meaningful texts and music by well-known collaborators, the question remains why the piece isn't well known and why it hasn't been performed more often. To answer this question, it is important to identify the challenges of performing this work. First, the level of musicianship required to play the piece is exceptionally high. The complex rhythms and polyrhythms are very difficult, even for professional musicians, and the ensemble would need a great deal of rehearsal with a conductor. Second, the vocal part is very challenging musically, not only with interpretation and technique but also in navigating some of the more difficult musical passages. This is proven by the recording of Jessye Norman at the BBC Proms. Although she captured the spirit and the interpretation of the words, her notes and rhythms were not always accurate. Given that she is a world-class interpreter of difficult music, (Richard Strauss, Arnold Schoenberg, Maurice Ravel) this attests to the difficulty of Weir's vocal writing. Sometimes there are technical flaws in Weir's vocal writing, such as asking the singer to sing fortissimo notes in her *passagio* range against loud orchestra chords, resulting in inaudible text (for example, in the end of "Breasts!!"). A third challenge lies in assembling the percussion instruments and the percussionists with the more specialized skills to play the bongos and conga drums. Because of these limitations, the ensembles able to perform this cycle would need to have a high level of musicianship, ability and motivation. Finally, the lack of a public recording decreases the likelihood that singers and conductors would even know about the work and thus be interested to order the score and assemble the forces necessary for performance.

One viable option for a singer is to perform this work with the piano reduction of the orchestral score. The disadvantage to the piano reduction is that it is not able to capture all the orchestral color that is needed to properly evoke the poetry of the songs. The song "On Youth," for example, would still need bongos and congas for the performance. Yet the simplicity of a

smaller ensemble allows for more opportunities to perform the work. Having the piano reduction also allows for easily selecting individual songs to perform rather than the whole work in its entirety, as seen in the performance by Tania Kross who sang “Breasts!!” for the festival of music by women composers in Amsterdam. A performance of just one song from *woman.life.song* can bring added exposure of the piece and encourage more study of the work.

In conclusion, I believe that *woman.life.song* is a successful composition because it musically captures the unique voices of the poets and does so in an expressive, creative, deep, profound and challenging way. It does justice to the poetry. It joins the three authors together celebrating their individual, eclectic styles while melding them into a cohesive whole. It creates a multi-cultural work that is relatable and can be performed by singers of all races. It provides a unique view of a woman’s life from the vantage point of female poets and a female composer. However the lack of a public recording has hampered its recognition, and the challenges of performing the work keep the piece from becoming part of the standard vocal repertoire. It is to be hoped that the recording of Jessye Norman at the Proms or the BBC Radio 3 recording of Rowan Hellier would someday be published, or that some institution, most likely a university with a stellar graduate program in music and a commitment to diversity, will take up this work, make a recording and save this work from undeserved obscurity.

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APPENDIX A

EMAIL INTERVIEW WITH JUDITH WEIR

Email dated September 24, 2014 from author to Judith Weir:

Hello Ms. Weir,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, CO, and am writing my dissertation on your piece, *woman.life.song*. I have been working on this dissertation for a few years but am planning on finishing the writing in the next couple of months.

I am currently a voice performance major with a secondary emphasis in opera directing. While researching contemporary women composers, I discovered your work and your operas. I also came across the Charlie Rose interview you gave along with Jessye Norman, Toni Morrison and Clarissa Pinkola Estés. I was fascinated by the collaboration between the five of you (including Maya Angelou), and intrigued and moved by the work itself. My dissertation is a musical analysis of the work as well as a discussion of the unique collaborative process of composition that you created. I have several questions I'd like to ask you about this process and the composition. If you have a few moments to answer me I would greatly appreciate it.

1. Did you have any specific musical influences, inspirations or models for your composition of these songs? (For example, I noticed the use of jazz chords and techniques in the Maya Angelou songs, "On Youth" and "On Maturity".)
2. Maya Angelou is known for her dramatic recitations of her poetry. Did this inspire your choice of spoken text for the Maya Angelou song "On Youth" and the end of "On Maturity"?
3. How did you compose the work – from beginning to end, or each song by itself, out of order? Did you compose Angelou's songs at the same time, or Morrison's, or Estés's?
4. Could you share with me any specific ways you were able to connect the songs together to make the piece work as a whole – taking into account the three unique voices of the authors?

5. Did Jessye Norman give you any guidance on the composition, besides the initial idea? Thank you so much for your time. I appreciate this work so much – especially the songs about losing one's mother as I recently went through that stage of my own life. The work is quite profound, and I hope to perform it someday. I certainly would love to see this work become more well-known and performed more often, that is one of the reasons I chose to write about this piece. I do believe it is ground-breaking, and would love to see it be more recognized as such.

Sincerely,

Heather Cawlfeld

Reply from Judith Weir dated October 12, 2014 (Italics added for clarity)

Dear Heather

Thanks for your message. I appreciate your interest and support of 'woman.life.song'. here are some very short answers to your questions - I apologise for their brevity, but at least I can point you in the right direction with these few thoughts.

all best wishes

Judith Weir

On 24 Sep 2014, at 19:50, Cawlfield, Heather wrote:

*6. Did you have any specific musical influences, inspirations or models for your composition of these songs? (For example, I noticed the use of jazz chords and techniques in the Maya Angelou songs, "On Youth" and "On Maturity".)*

No.

*2. Maya Angelou is known for her dramatic recitations of her poetry. Did this inspire your choice of spoken text for the Maya Angelou song "On Youth" and the end of "On Maturity?"*

No. When I received the Angelou text it looked like a prose paragraph to me, not poetry. I realised it would be interesting to 'bookend' the cycle with Jessye Norman's spoken voice in the Angelou texts.

*3. How did you compose the work – from beginning to end, or each song by itself, out of order? Did you compose Angelou's songs at the same time, or Morrison's, or Estés's?*

Out of order, because the words of the three authors arrived at different times, and, although planned and discussed well in advance, the whole project in the end was assembled very close to the deadline date. (The delays were caused by the authors' agents rather than the authors themselves.) I can't now remember in what order the texts were received.

*4. Could you share with me any specific ways you were able to connect the songs together to make the piece work as a whole – taking into account the three unique voices of the authors?*

I think the unifying factors are the fairly unusual instrumentation, and the personality and sound of the singer. I agree that the texts are very different in style - I feel the music preserves that difference in tone. The contrasts between the different literary forms were valuable in constructing a very extended solo work.

*5. Did Jessye Norman give you any guidance on the composition, besides the initial idea?*

We spoke a fair amount about technical aspects during the composition and rehearsal process - I would normally do this with soloists I'm writing for. I can't remember specific issues - but I would think register, lengths of phrases, where (in a very long solo work) it would be good for some instrumental breaks relative to the form of the texts, etc. My abiding impression is that Jessye took a practical view of performance, and always put the composer's wishes first in whatever repertoire she tackled. She would never say "that's going to be difficult" - she would instead do the technical work to accomplish whatever had been asked of her.

Judith Weir  
[www.judithweir.com](http://www.judithweir.com)

## APPENDIX B

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: October 19, 2012

TO: Heather Cawfield, DA

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [374089-2] Study and analysis of the song cycle, "woman.life.song" by Judith Weir

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: October 18, 2012

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB verifies that this project is EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

**Hello and thank you for making the changes to your narrative and consent form as requested. I'm satisfied with your revisions and therefore your application is now verified as exempt. (UNCO IRB is now using "verification" instead of "approval" for exempt IRB reviews. You may now commence.)**

**Please be sure to use the revised consent form in your data collection.**

**Best wishes with your study and please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any IRB related questions or concerns.**

**Sincerely, Dr. Megan Stellino**

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or [Sherry.May@unco.edu](mailto:Sherry.May@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.