



Womb of Words: A Feminist Reading of Judith Wright's "Woman to Man"

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Abstract

Judith Wright's poem "*Woman to Man*" reimagines motherhood, creation, and the female body in poetic terms that transcend traditional gender hierarchies. This paper explores Wright's portrayal of female creativity and reproductive power through the lens of feminist literary criticism. By reclaiming the act of creation—both biological and intellectual—Wright constructs the woman not as a passive bearer of life, but as an active participant in the making of humanity and meaning. This reading affirms the poem as a powerful articulation of women's agency and subjectivity.

Introduction

Judith Wright, one of Australia's most celebrated poets, presents a deeply nuanced portrayal of womanhood, motherhood, and human connection in "*Woman to Man*." The poem is often interpreted as a spiritual and philosophical dialogue about conception and creativity, merging physical, emotional, and metaphysical dimensions. This paper aims to analyze the poem through the feminist lens, arguing that Wright subverts the conventional patriarchal depiction of woman as the "other" and instead elevates her to the center of creation.

Feminist Interpretation: Womb as Word, Woman as Creator

Reclaiming the Womb

The central metaphor in the poem is the womb, not only as a biological vessel but also as a symbol of creative power. In lines such as

*"This is the strength that your arm knows,
the arc of flesh that is my breast,
the precise crystals of our eyes.
This is the blood's wild tree,
the dark threads of the liver."*

Wright merges the body of the woman with the body of the unborn child. This mutual embodiment speaks to a shared act of creation—neither dominated by man nor exclusively defined by maternal suffering, but a collaboration imbued with strength, symmetry, and sacredness.

BREAKING BINARY CONSTRUCTS

Through the second-person voice and gender-neutral references, Wright blurs the rigid binaries of male/female, creator/created, and subject/object. She writes:

*“This is no child with a child’s face;
this has no name to name it by,
yet you and I have known it well.”*

Here, the speaker challenges language itself—often a tool of patriarchal control—by refusing to name or define the unborn. This indeterminacy allows for multiple interpretations and asserts the woman’s authority over meaning.

Psychoanalytic Feminism and Maternal Poetics

From a psychoanalytic feminist perspective (Kristeva, Irigaray), the poem can be read as a maternal text—one that emerges from the semiotic (pre-symbolic) experience of the mother-child bond. Wright’s refusal to conform to linear logic or fixed identity in the poem reflects a resistance to phallogentric language. Her use of rich, organic imagery and bodily metaphors offers a form of maternal writing, a “*womb of words*” that speaks from and for the feminine experience.

Conclusion

Judith Wright’s “*Woman to Man*” is not merely a celebration of childbirth; it is a bold reclamation of the woman’s role in creation, knowledge, and existence. Through poetic form, Wright destabilizes male-centric narratives of origin and repositions the woman not as a vessel, but as an originator of life, of thought, and of language. The womb becomes both literal and metaphorical: a space where words and worlds are born.

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