

“ISADORA ICARUS”:
THE MYTHIC UNITY OF ERICA JONG’S
FEAR OF FLYING

by Jane Chance Nitzsche

Although Erica Jong felt that her first novel, *Fear of Flying* (1973), was too literary for wide appeal,¹ it rapidly became a best seller, its humor and eroticism praised on the dust jacket by John Updike and Henry Miller as well as by Hannah Greene and Elizabeth Janeway, but its literary qualities frequently ignored or even savagely castigated in reviews by such critics as Walter Clemons, Ellen Hope Meyer, Paul Theroux, Patricia S. Coyne, and Martin Amis.² Characteristic of the criticisms is the following evaluation: “literary it is not. Poorly constructed, too prone to phrases like ‘our mouths melted like liquid,’ it has a shapeless, self-indulgent plot and weak characterization, especially of the men.” Such weaknesses supposedly exist because “There is no artistic distance between the author and her subject, and hence no objectivity.”³

Yet as a poet Jong received critical acclaim for *Fruits and Vegetables* (1971) and *Half-Lives* (1973), collections of poems whose colloquial diction and casual line lengths camouflage a tightly controlled form. Such control is achieved by the use of rhetorical figures and extended images, or conceits. As an example, in “The Man Under the Bed,” which appears in *Fear of Flying*⁴ but which was originally published in *Fruits and Vegetables*, the bogeyman of the child metamorphoses into a fantasy lover of a lonely woman lying in bed at night, in a conceit that dominates the syntax and diction of the poem through the rhetorical figure of anaphora. Jong’s poetic technique has led Helen Vendler to conclude, in a review of *Half-Lives*, first that “the poems need to be seen whole” and second that “Inside her rigid frames of syntax, a playful metaphorical mind is at work, busy in powerful invention of little fables.”⁵ These two statements might be applied equally well to Jong’s very literary

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novel. It needs to be seen whole *because* it contains a “powerful invention of a little fable,” in this case a reworking of the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, and the use of the theme and symbol of flying.

Flying as a theme both introduces and ends the novel. Isadora Wing begins her “mock memoirs” by announcing her fear of flying: after treatment by six of the 117 psychoanalysts aboard the flight to Vienna, she remains “more scared of flying than when I began my analytic adventures some thirteen years earlier” (p. 3). In contrast, at the end of the novel, when Isadora sits in the bathtub in her husband’s hotel room admiring her body and hugging herself, she realizes “It was my fear that was missing. The cold stone I had worn inside my chest for twenty-nine years was gone. Not suddenly. And maybe not for good. But it was gone” (p. 311). The novel, then, traces the stages necessary to progress from a fear of “flying”—literally and apparently figuratively, judging from this last quotation—to its elimination and subsequent replacement with a love of self. Isadora’s last name, “Wing,” underscores the significance of the novel’s major theme and symbol.

Flying, for Jong, denotes literal flying but connotes creativity (“in the way that the word ‘fire’ was used by poets like Alexander Pope to mean sexual heat, creativity, inspiration, passion”), sexuality, and independence.⁶ Indeed, during the novel Isadora manifests, confronts, and rids herself of each of the three fears of flying. First, in her marriage to her second husband, Bennett, she overcomes the fear of creativity (and the habit of artistic dishonesty) so that she can fly, or explore the world of herself through poetry: “My writing is the submarine or *spaceship* which takes me to the unknown worlds within my head. And the adventure is endless and inexhaustible. If I learn to build the right vehicle, then I can discover even more territories. And each new poem is a new vehicle, designed to delve a little deeper (or *fly a little higher*) than the one before” (p. 210, my italics). In her relationships with all of her men, especially with Adrian, she encounters the second fear of flying, consisting of those social or sexual inhibitions that prevent her from realizing her fantasy of the archetypal casual sexual union during which bodies flow together and zippers melt away (described at length on pp. 11-14). Only with Adrian does she overcome her fear sufficiently to brave convention, bolstered by thoughts of “D. H. Lawrence running off with his tutor’s wife, of Romeo and Juliet dying for love, of Aschenbach pursuing Tadzio through plaguey Venice, of all the real and imaginary people who had picked up and burned their bridges and *taken off into the wild blue yonder*. I was one of *them!* No scared housewife, I. I was flying” (p. 171, my italics). Finally, in her relationship with herself, the most important relationship of the three, she fears confronting and being herself: living independently of men, without their approval. Thus when Adrian abandons her in Paris, he forces her to survive alone, to “fly.” Terrified, Isadora describes the experience as “teetering on the edge of the Grand Canyon and hoping you’d learn to fly before you hit bottom” (p. 271).

Jong strengthens the theme and symbol of flying by conjoining it with myth—the classical myth of flight, the myth of Daedalus and Icarus. To fly in the sexual sense, for Isadora, means adopting “borrowed wings” that belong to a man in order to fly to a heaven of ecstasy, hence to leave herself behind: “I wanted to lose myself in a man, to cease to be me, to be transported to heaven on borrowed wings” (p. 300). Only when Isadora, alone in her Paris hotel room at the end of the novel, realizes that overcoming her fear of sexual flying has seriously interfered with her progress toward flying independently—toward being and accepting herself—does she begin to differentiate between false and true flying. So she describes herself as “Isadora Icarus. . . . And the borrowed wings never stayed on when I needed them. Maybe I really needed to grow my own” (p. 300). In the classical version of the myth, Icarus used his artist father’s wax wings in order to escape from the labyrinth in which both he and his father had been imprisoned; although warned not to fly too close to the sun, Icarus recklessly ignored his father’s advice and tumbled, his wings melted, into the sea. Clearly, Isadora Wing, assuming the role of Icarus, has also borrowed the wings of the “father”—obviously sexual, and donated by the various father figures within the novel with whom she has fallen in love, for example, Bennett *Wing*, who succeeds her first husband, the childish, insane Brian. Described as a “*good solid father figure*, a psychiatrist as an antidote to a psychotic, a good secular lay as an antidote to Brian’s religious fervor,” Bennett Wing appeared to Isadora “*On the wing*, you might say . . . *Wing*. I loved Bennett’s name. And he was mercurial, too”—at least in his sexual acrobatics, which endow him with “wings” for Isadora (p. 32, my italics). Like Icarus, however, Isadora flies too high and burns her wings, learning then how faulty this borrowed rig is: “What had love ever done for me but disappoint me? Or maybe I looked for the wrong things in love” (p. 300). Like many other women, Isadora has had to earn those “gossamer wings” belonging to the ideal man (“beautiful, powerful, potent, and rich”) she imagines will “*fly you to the moon . . . where you would live totally satisfied forever*” (p. 9, my italics). Such sexual flight leads to satisfaction with self (“the moon . . . where you would live totally satisfied forever”), but is impelled in part by a disgust with self—implied also by the need to “lose oneself” in love for a man. So Isadora decries the female body, as through advertising society programs most women to regard their bodies as too earthy and too earthly, justly requiring a narcissistic attention to “your smells, your hair, your boobs, your eyelashes, your armpits, your crotch, your stars, your scars, and your choice of Scotch in bars” in order to win those “wings” which will “fly you to the moon” (p. 9).

Yet the myth of the labyrinth also depicts a second means of escape. Icarus and Daedalus were imprisoned in the labyrinth by King Minos because Daedalus had previously helped Theseus to escape when he had been imprisoned. The earlier mode of escape entailed returning through the maze the

same way one had entered: Theseus, with whom Minos' daughter Ariadne had recently fallen in love and for whom she had requested aid from Daedalus, was given by her a ball of string to unwind as he entered and to retrieve as he departed. This too suggests a gift, like the wax wings, of the "father" to the child, but here offered by the paternal figure Daedalus to a female child, Ariadne, and intended to effect her lover's escape, not her own. In Jong's reconstruction of the myth, the ball of string is given to the childish Isadora by Adrian, who combines both Daedalus and Ariadne, the former in his role as the second major father figure and psychiatrist in Isadora's life and the latter in his name as an anagram of Ariadne's. Specifically Isadora as Theseus must unravel the string as she explores the labyrinth of Vienna and herself by returning to the past and re-enacting troubling familial roles. Isadora explicitly refers to this part of the myth: "We quickly picked up the threads of these old patterns of behavior as we made our way through the labyrinths of Old Europe" (p. 178). Isadora reverts to her position as second-born in the family, Adrian reverts to his position as first-born ("Adrian, in fact, was born the same year as Randy [1937] and also had a younger brother he'd spent years learning how to bully" (p. 178). Thus this relationship between Isadora and Adrian differs significantly from that between Isadora and Bennett: it depends more on unraveling the *verbal* threads of past behavior than escaping the labyrinth of the self on *sexual* wings. Of this analytic passion Isadora declares, "We talked. We talked. We talked. Psychoanalysis on wheels. Remembrance of things past" (p. 183). Again and again Isadora relates her emotional and intellectual rapport with Adrian (despite his frequent sexual impotence), then contrasts it with the silence of the primarily physical relationship with Bennett. The rapport culminates—as they wander through the labyrinths of Old Europe—in the long exchange of past relationships with former lovers and spouses, of which Isadora's side is recorded in chapters twelve through fifteen ("The Madman," "The Conductor," "Arabs and Other Animals," "Travels with My Anti-Hero"). But just as the first escape from the labyrinth (the body) involved borrowing wings (wings/Bennett Wing) to fly (sexual ecstasy), so the second escape from the labyrinth (the mind) involves unraveling the ball of thread from the past (good love/Adrian Goodlove) to find the way out or to ameliorate confusion (emotional and intellectual understanding). Both escapes, however, are false. Although the dialogue of Adrian and Isadora depends on "remembrance of things past. . . the main thing was entertainment, not *literal truth*" (p. 183, my italics). Manufacturing and elaborating upon her past, Isadora tells Adrian not about herself but about her various lovers (just as Adrian's latent homosexuality led to his voyeuristic participation in Bennett and Isadora's earlier lovemaking and his caressing of Bennett's back afterwards, so this sexual aberration diagnosed by Bennett and recognized by Isadora on pp. 136, 138, and 144 continues in the form of his interest in other men she has known). He requests that she find

patterns ("threads") in her past by categorizing these men. When she obliges, she realizes she is escaping the labyrinth of her past—that is, fleeing from the truth of her past, her self—by following the false thread lent to her by Ariadne/Adrian.

Oh I knew I was making my life into a song-and-dance routine, a production number, a shaggy dog story, a sick joke, a *bit*. I thought of all the longing, the pain, the letters (sent and unsent), the crying jags, the telephone monologues, the suffering, the rationalizing, the analyzing which had gone into each of these relationships, each of these relationdignities, each of these relationliners. I knew that the way I described them was a betrayal of their complexity, their confusion. (P. 184)

She flees from the complexity of the past stored in her memory—because she desperately needs to escape herself, or rather, to earn Adrian's approval of herself and thereby accept what she is.

That is, she needs to face that minotaur locked within the labyrinth. Jong's mythic parallels suggest that escaping the labyrinth of the body (through Bennett Wing, sexual love) or the labyrinth of the mind (through Adrian Goodlove, remembrance of things past) constitutes a refusal to confront oneself—envisioned in the novel not only as a labyrinth, but indeed as the minotaur within the labyrinth threatening intruders, that monster⁷ which is half beast, half human. That Jong finds the metaphor of the divided self especially relevant to twentieth-century concerns (she defines the modern as "the attempt to bring together the dissociated sensibility"⁸) has been revealed previously in her book of poems, *Half-Lives*, whose title refers to "Wholes and halves, and looking for fulfillment, at least in the 'Age of Exploration' section, and finding the separation could not be bridged."⁹ As metaphor for the divided self in *Fear of Flying*, the minotaur expresses itself chiefly through the conflict between Isadora's body and mind, or the disjunction between the woman and the artist. At fourteen, for example, Isadora saw this conflict as an either/or dilemma: *either* a woman accepts her sexuality (through intercourse with Steve, her first lover), thereby implicitly denying the artistic drive, *or* a woman denies her sexuality (through masturbation, through starvation to stop menstrual periods) to retain the option of being an artist (p. 157). Later in her life Isadora repeats these attempts to escape the division of self, the minotaur, by losing herself in a man ("flying"). Unfortunately, each man she chooses fulfills only one half of her divided self, either her body or her mind: Brian before his psychosis represents the intellectual who prefers a sexless relationship in marriage; Bennett, in contrast, represents the sexy psychiatrist who rarely talks to his wife about shared interests; Adrian, finally, talks incessantly but remains frequently impotent, similar then to Brian. What Isadora needs in order to fly is "a perfect man" with a mind and body equally attractive to her: "He had a face like Paul Newman and a voice like Dylan Thomas" (p. 94). Such a man of course does not exist, or exists only in the combined figures of Bennett and Adrian, who together mirror

Isadora's divided self, her minotaur (Isadora describes Adrian as a horny minotaur on p. 75): "Adrian, it seemed, wanted to teach me how to live. Bennett, it seemed, wanted to teach me how to die. And I didn't even know which I wanted. Or maybe I had pegged them wrong. Maybe Bennett was life and Adrian death. Maybe life was compromise and sadness, while ecstasy ended inevitably in death" (p. 118).

In the classical myth the half-beast, half-human monster was conceived by King Minos' wife Pasiphae. So the minotaur of Isadora Zelda White—her name expressing the divided self of the artist (Isadora Duncan, Zelda Fitzgerald) and the woman ("white" suggesting that purity associated with woman)—was conceived literally and figuratively by her mother. The parallel is apt: Pasiphae lusted for the bull her husband refused to sacrifice to the god Poseidon, who vengefully inhabited the bull during the begetting of the minotaur. Psychologically, then, the minotaur represents the monster (that is, the divided self) engendered by woman's intercourse with the divine (that is, begotten when woman tries to be an artist, or to aspire toward a role or an act which seems unnatural or unconventional). It is this monster a woman inherits—from her society, generally, but from her mother, specifically. Isadora reveals her heritage in chapter nine, "Pandora's Box or My Two Mothers": the bad mother or "failed artist" channels all of her creative energy into unusual clothes, decorating schemes, and vicarious plans for her daughters, all of which eschew the ordinary, whereas the good mother, a loving and sympathetic woman, adores her daughters in the most ordinary way. Clearly the bad mother resented Isadora when she interfered with her lapsed creative passion; her anger teaches her daughter the lesson of the minotaur-woman, that "being a woman meant being harried, frustrated, and always angry. It meant being split into two irreconcilable halves" (p. 157). The specific division of self troubling Isadora's mother occurs between her domestic and artistic sides: "either you drowned in domesticity . . . or you longed for domesticity in all your art. You could never escape your conflict. You had conflict written in your very blood" (p. 157).

As the minotaur in reality, Isadora finds herself imprisoned in—or concealed by—various labyrinths of falsity throughout the novel, primarily because others—or even she herself—cannot face the monster she represents. The first labyrinth is introduced in chapter three ("Knock, Knock") when her sister Randy, representing her family, rejects the unconventional artist in her ("you really ought to stop writing and have a baby," p. 44) and sends her fleeing to the closet where she mulls her feelings of being a woman trapped, a "hostage of my fantasies. The hostage of my fears. The hostage of my *false* definitions" (p. 47, my italics). She knows as a woman she doesn't want to emulate Randy, bearer of children, because "you deny who you are" (p. 48, i.e., Randy refuses to leave the closet or labyrinth of her woman's fears created by her family and society), but she does not yet possess the courage to

give birth to herself, the minotaur. Locked in this closet, hugging her knees, Isadora also becomes a fetus, eventually to be expelled from the womb of the closet: "What I really wanted was to give birth to *myself*—the little girl I might have been in a different family, a different world" (p. 46). The closet as both labyrinth and womb ("knock, knock") also symbolizes the role of woman as childbearer ("knocked-up"), that prison which must collapse after birth of the little girl, the true self, the minotaur ("who's there?").

The second major labyrinth is described in chapter four, "Near the Black Forest." In Heidelberg, Isadora and Bennett live in a "vast American concentration camp" (p. 57), a kind of ghetto or military labyrinth: "And we were living in a prison of sorts. A spiritual and intellectual ghetto which we literally could not leave without being jailed" (p. 59). An imprisoned Jew—that is, pretending to be an Aryan—Isadora at first dares not reveal her Jewishness, but then, lonely, bored, and trapped in her silent marriage to Bennett, she begins exploring Heidelberg, particularly for hidden signs of the Third Reich: "Only I was tracking down my past, my own Jewishness in which I had never been able to believe before" (p. 61). Two discoveries result from her exploration: first, as a Jew she has denied her heritage and as an artist she has covered up her inner self (minotaur) with false masks (labyrinth); second, Germany has hidden its real self, its love of Hitler, with a mask of hypocrisy. That is, as the American editor for a weekly pamphlet, *Heidelberg Alt und Neu*, she "started out being clever and superficial and dishonest. Gradually I got braver. Gradually I stopped trying to disguise myself. One by one, I peeled off the masks" (p. 63). Eventually her exploration of her outer prison converges with her exploration of her inner prison. Coming upon the hidden Nazi amphitheater whose pictures were concealed by little pieces of paper in old guidebooks, Isadora indignantly tells the truth about German hypocrisy in her weekly column. The symbolic meaning of the German minotaur (the hidden amphitheater paralleling the hidden love of Hitler) at the center of the external labyrinth underscores the monstrosity at the center of her internal labyrinth. Specifically, writing in early poems about romantic, unreal scenes and situations, "ruined castles" as well as "sunsets and birds and fountains" she censors her real self:

I refused to let myself write about what really moved me: my violent feelings about Germany, the unhappiness in my marriage, my sexual fantasies, my childhood, my negative feelings about my parents. . . . Even without fascism, I had pasted imaginary oak-tag patches over certain areas of my life." (P. 67)

Her writing thereafter discloses the true nature of the inner monster she has previously imprisoned.

Similarly, because her husbands and lovers have related only to one half or the other of her divided self, frequently refusing to recognize the other half, they inevitably imprison the offensive half in symbolic labyrinths. First, Brian holds her hostage in their bedroom during the final period of their marriage

when he becomes completely psychotic, an ironic prison given his previous neglect of her sexual needs. Second, Bennett, the Freudian psychiatrist and father figure, has imprisoned her in a motel room in San Antonio, in an Army ghetto in Heidelberg, and in their silent marriage, about which she feels ambivalent, as it expresses only one side of herself: during a Freudian lecture on the Oedipal conflicts of the artist, Bennett squeezes her hand, as if to say, "Come back home to Daddy. All is understood. How I longed to come back home to Daddy! *But how I also longed to be free!*" (p. 165, my italics). She decides to leave the prison of her Freudian marriage and her Oedipal attachment to Bennett in chapter ten, appropriately entitled "Freud's House" (which they had visited before listening to the Freudian lecture). Third, Adrian, who pretends to lead her out of the labyrinth of Old Europe—and the labyrinth of her marriage—by unraveling her (false) past, merely traps her within a maze of emotional deception: the car of escape and freedom becomes itself a miniature prison from which she occasionally yearns to flee, usually when passing an airport (for example, on p. 174). Eventually he abandons her in Paris, part of that European labyrinth she cannot seem to leave; *she* then promptly imprisons *herself* in a hotel room. It constitutes the most significant prison in the novel.

Isadora had erred previously in determining to escape what she regards as a labyrinth—the complexity of being herself. As Dr. Happe explains to her just before she decides to leave Bennett, "What makes you think your life is going to be uncomplicated? What makes you think you can avoid all conflict? What makes you think you can avoid pain? Or passion? There's something to be said for passion. Can't you ever allow yourself and forgive yourself?" (p. 169). To accept the complexity of herself implies understanding the conflicting sides of herself as represented by the minotaur. And to understand herself she must confront herself by descending into the labyrinth until she reaches the center it inhabits. At first refusing to probe her true nature out of fear, Isadora huddles in the self-imposed prison of her hotel room. She remains afraid of 'flying' (connoting independence) on her own wings just as she remains afraid of the minotaur monster within her: she represents both Isadora Icarus and Theseus. To fly independently she must be whole, thus she must heal the division in her self (slay the minotaur) imprisoned by the complexity of her life. Both tasks Isadora will perform: as Isadora-Theseus she will descend into the complexity of her life in order to slay the minotaur—determine where the division of self occurs—and then as Isadora Icarus she will overcome her fear of flying by becoming independent and leaving the hotel room without the help of a father-Daedalus. Previously she has descended into herself in order to fly above the prison by writing poetry: she revealed herself honestly in her art after the Heidelberg experience. Now she must learn to reveal her self honestly in her life, without the support of a man (although Bennett guided her inadvertently to the point where she learned to

write poems, just as Adrian guided her inadvertently to the point where she learns to be herself). The Theseus and Icarus portions of the myth then are clearly related.

The last four chapters of the novel detail Isadora's Theseus-like descent into her own labyrinth to face the minotaur, followed by her Icarus-like flight from the prison. At first afraid, Isadora cries like a baby, then appeals to her adult self for help. The subsequent dialogue between the two halves of her divided self, "Me" and "Me," representing this child and adult, also represent the lonely man-needing woman and the alone artist conflicting within Isadora. The confrontation with the minotaur begins. That her dilemma cannot be resolved by siding with one position or the other is reflected in the last words of the dialogue: it ends as it has begun, with the question, "Why is being alone so terrible?" Recognizing the permanent division of her self, Isadora then acquaints herself with her two sides. First, she washes her very dirty body, then she uses a mirror "to examine my physical self, to take stock so that I could remember who I was—if indeed my body could be said to be me" (p. 285). Her body she perceives as a cosmos or labyrinth she must explore as she has explored her feelings in her writing: "One's body is intimately related to one's writing. . . . In a sense, every poem is an attempt to extend the boundaries of one's body. One's body becomes the landscape, the sky, and finally the cosmos" (p. 285). During this self-scrutiny she slays the minotaur—the conflict between the two sides of herself—with the weapon of humor. Laughing at a joke she tells, she no longer remains paralyzed by fear: she can now *act*, or depart the labyrinth by retrieving the unwound thread. That is, she probes her psychological self and her past by reading the notebooks from the previous four years to determine how she has gotten here and where she is going (the true "thread" of the past leading to the reality outside the labyrinth), just as she has explored her physical self and her body. Most important, she reaches that reality when she finishes her reading: she stops blaming herself for "wanting to own your own soul. Your soul belonged to you—for better or worse" (p. 288). No longer fighting herself, she can begin to accept and understand herself.

That she now owns her own soul—"for better or worse"—is expressed symbolically through the chapters "Dreamwork" and "Blood-Weddings or Sic Transit," the two chapters themselves suggesting a marriage of the soul and the body respectively. The dreamwork dramatizes her mind's attempt to accept the body in that it illustrates a solution to the problem of Isadora's physical needs. The menstrual period arriving the following morning dramatizes her body's acceptance of the mind, in that it has been delayed by Isadora's worrying and exploration of her past with Adrian. Both suggest gifts she bestows upon herself (equivalent to Daedalus' gift of the string to Theseus and Ariadne and of the wings to Icarus, in that they represent the means of salvation and rescue). Her dreamwork, first, consists of two important segments.

In the earlier segment, she dreams she has been awarded her college degree plus a special honor, the right to have three husbands, Bennett, Adrian, and a mysterious third. Her teacher Mrs. McIntosh, however, advises her to refuse the honor; unfortunately Isadora *wants* three husbands, thereafter because of this desire forfeiting both the degree and the honor. That is, to become a whole person (graduate with honors) by relying on (or marrying) the three males who reflect approval of aspects of Isadora's self (Bennett, her body, Adrian, her mind, and the third, everything remaining) may seem sound advice to a male and paternal Daedalus (who advocates flying on borrowed wings) but not to a female guide like Mrs. McIntosh. And Isadora seconds her: although she had viewed Adrian as a "mental double" because she wanted "a man to complete me" she subsequently realizes "People don't complete us. We complete ourselves" (p. 299). A better way of attaining wholeness (graduating with honors) occurs in the second important dream-segment: a book with her own name on it (that is, previous public honesty about herself in her art) must be followed by public love-making with the author Colette¹⁰ (that is, a public union or marriage, rather than a conflict or war, between the artist and the woman in Isadora).

Such dreamwork indicates Isadora has become her own psychiatrist. Previously she had visited six different psychiatrists, eventually marrying the Freudian analyst Bennett Wing, who counsels duty and obligation over desire and inclination and who has pinpointed her past and present problem as an Oedipal conflict. In contrast, Adrian the Laingian existentialist advises her to pursue her inclinations instead of her duties and to live *without* a past and a future. But Isadora spurns both her Daedaluses by choosing the *tertium quid* of Jung. Interestingly Jung explains of herself that "I'm really closer to being an Jungian than anything else. I believe in the communal unconscious. I really believe that what motivates human beings are their dreams, their fantasies, and their mythologies."¹¹ Throughout the novel Isadora too has been motivated by fantasies—her dream of the Man-under-the-Bed (the Ideal Man), her fantasy of casual and uninhibited sexual union—so much so that she quits her marriage for the apparent embodiment of the latter in Adrian. At the end, however, signalling her independence, her dreams stress woman as rescuer—Mrs. McIntosh and Colette—both representing the woman intellectual and artist as she is; too, because these dreams dramatize her internal conflict and its resolution, they allow her to be her own rescuer, her own psychiatrist. Thus she foregoes the borrowed "wings"—borrowed advice, borrowed thread, borrowed psychiatry—of the Daedalus father (Bennett and Adrian) to grow her own wings and fly independently, thereby becoming her own mother and giving birth to herself (Anne Sexton's line, "A woman *is* her mother," precedes chapter nine, "Pandora's Box or My Two Mothers").

After this dreamwork Isadora awakens in chapter eighteen ("Blood-Weddings or Sic Transit") to discover her menstrual period has arrived. This

period signals the "blood wedding," "for better or worse," between the formerly conflicting selves. Indicating wholeness, it also represents renewal, or rebirth, in three different ways. First, she is literally sure that she is not pregnant, a possibility that would have encouraged a return to Bennett: "In a sense that was sad—menstruation was always a little sad—but it was also a new beginning. I was being given another chance" (p. 299). Now she has the opportunity to determine whether she can live independently of male approval, indeed a new beginning. Second, more figuratively the period represents a psychological "coming of age," a transition or transit ("Sic Transit") from childhood to adulthood (hence the digression on the symbolism of menstruation in this chapter, with Isadora's remembrance of her first *menarche* "two and a half days out of Le Havre"—again, *in transit*, p. 295). Third, the period provides Isadora with an opportunity to test her old "fear of flying" (independence). Beginning a period without any tampons represents every woman's fear—but Isadora copes ("flies") by first making a diaper of Bennett's old shirt, then using French toilet paper, and finally leaving the labyrinth to buy some at a drugstore. The symbolism of the diaper suggests as well that the "little girl" to whom Isadora longed to give birth, as she meditated in the closet, has indeed been born. Isadora has released herself from the prison (womb) of the labyrinth. She is now ready to fly.

Instead she returns to England via train and boat, leaving the labyrinth of Old Europe behind. (This *tertium quid* also contrasts with Bennett/Daedalus' flying and Adrian/Ariadne's automobile travel). Proof that she has finally become whole occurs when she rejects a stranger's offer of casual sex on the train to London—"The fantasy that had riveted me to the vibrating seat of the train for three years in Heidelberg and instead of turning me on, it had revolted me" (p. 302). She rejects "flying to the moon" on borrowed wings, not just sexual ecstasy per se but a masculine conception of female fantasy. Further, she discovers when she finds Bennett's room in England that her fear of flying (her inability to cope, her fear of independence) has disappeared, replaced by a liking for herself (an acceptance of her body as well as her mind). Her acceptance is expressed in her admiring catalogue of the erotic features of her body, thighs, belly, breasts, as she bathes in Bennett's tub. Whether Isadora returns to her husband or whether she divorces him means little because she has already "married" her selves. This reunion suggests they will live happily ever after—truly "A Nineteenth-Century Ending," as the title of this last chapter implies.

Thus the unity of the novel depends upon the mythic parallels adduced above. The myth of Icarus similarly provided a structure for James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which Stephen Daedalus became an artist like the "old artificer," the father he preferred to his real one, his priestly one, his national one. But Jong interprets the myth from the woman's point of view: Isadora Icarus spurns the "old artificer"—her real father, her psychiatric

fathers, her sexual and intellectual ones, refusing those borrowed wings or strings, refusing to be governed by old myths. She returns to the minotaur begotten by her two mothers and unites her divided self so that she can fly away from the labyrinth on her own wings.

Both the novel and its author have been misunderstood. Whereas Jong intended her work to "challenge the notion that intellectual women must be heads without bodies,"¹² instead her intellectual Isadora has been viewed, at least by one critic, as entirely body, "a mammoth pudenda, as roomy as the Carlsbad Caverns, luring amorous spelunkers to confusion in her plunging grottoes. . . ."¹³ Similarly the intellectual author has herself been castigated because of Isadora's adventures. "To a lot of men," she admits, "a woman who writes about sex is basically a whore. This assumption is not made about men who write about sex."¹⁴ Yet Isadora has heroically reconciled her formerly divided selves of mind and body, artist and woman. So the novel itself, as this study has attempted to reveal, weds its humorous and erotic content to a carefully controlled form—achieved through the myth of Daedalus and Icarus and the theme and symbol of flying.

NOTES

1. "Writing a First Novel," *Twentieth-Century Literature* 20 (1974): 266.
2. "The Sexes," *Time*, February 3, 1975, p. 70. For other criticisms see, for example, Ellen Hope Meyer, "The Aesthetics of 'Dear Diary,'" *The Nation*, January 12, 1974, pp. 55-56; and Walter Clemons, "Beware of the Man," *Newsweek*, November 12, 1973, p. 114.
3. Meyer, "Aesthetics of 'Dear Diary,'" p. 55.
4. *Fear of Flying* (New York: New American Library, 1973), pp. 101-102. Subsequent references to the novel will appear within the text.
5. *The New York Times Book Review*, August 12, 1973, p. 6.
6. Elaine Showalter and Carol Smith, "An Interview with Erica Jong," *The Columbia Forum*, New Series, 4 (1975): 13.
7. The view of oneself as a "monster" implies a self-derogation common to modern women; cf. Robin Morgan's title poem in her collection *Monster* (New York: Random House, 1970).
8. Showalter and Smith, "Interview," p. 16.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Colette is discussed by Jong in "Writing a First Novel," p. 263, as an exemplary writer of "mock memoirs," an "interweaving of autobiography and fiction" similar to *Fear of Flying*.
11. Showalter and Smith, "Interview," p. 17.
12. "Writing a First Novel," p. 267.
13. Paul Theroux, "Hapless Organ," *New Statesman*, April 19, 1974, p. 554.
14. Showalter and Smith, "Interview," p. 14.