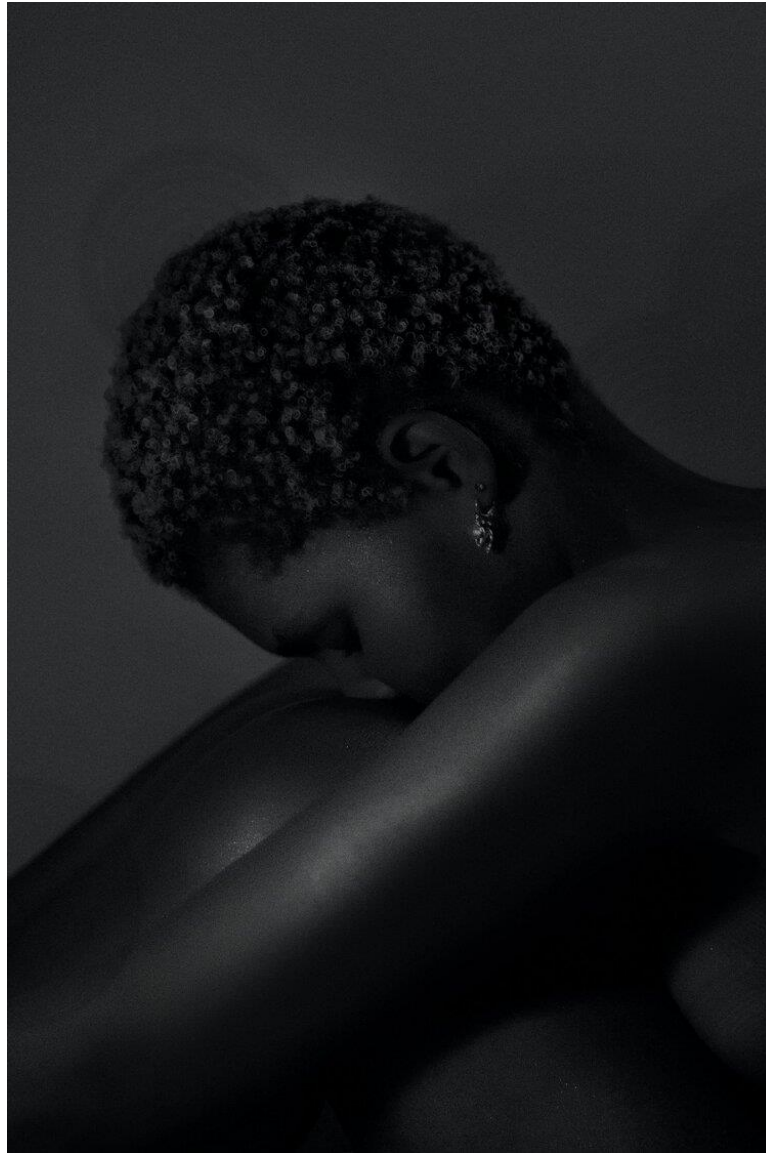




## The Devouring Mother



“Some years ago, when I was traveling in the South Seas, I boarded a plane in one of the island ports. The women passengers were magnificent, massive Earth Mothers, most of them nearly six feet tall, weighing probably 300 pounds, their shining black hair coiled on top of their heads or falling in long braids over their brilliantly colored Mother



Hubbard dresses. Their eyes sparkled with health and good spirits. I, who am not small by Western standards, cuddled in my seat feeling tiny, delicate, weightless, utterly at peace with so many big Mamas to protect me.

After some time in an island village, however, my romanticized image of these Great Earth Mothers changed. I saw their pain and the pain in those around them. Becky, for example, ruled her family with her insatiable appetite. Her twenty-year-old son, a mere wisp of a boy in appearance, was responsible for feeding his mother. He spent his entire day searching for breadfruit, tara, and coconuts, peeling, shredding, cooking. Terrified of “the voices” that shrieked at him in the coconut grove, “Faster, Becko, faster!” he nevertheless forced himself to go there in order to fulfill his sole responsibility in life-gathering food to feed his mother. Although he was educated, he showed no sign of resentment. He lived with his family and the pigs that strolled in and out and about their home. He accepted his fate.

One day as she was sitting on the floor, steadfastly shoving breadfruit into her mouth, Becky said, “White people are lucky; they don’t have to eat all the time. I have to eat all the time and Becko has to feed me.”

Her attitude was as resigned as her son’s: eating was her fate. She did not have the ego development which would permit her to assume any conscious control over her life; she could take no responsibility for the freedom of her own will. I shuddered at the ravenous appetite of the unconscious devouring mother and shuddered equally at the senseless sacrifice of the young man’s life to this gaping maw.” (Woodman, 1987, p. 202).



## Interpretation

That particular mother was the living image of a woman blindly acting out an archetype, powerless to exert any conscious control over her abysmal appetite, powerless to release her enslaved son. Together they were enacting an unconscious destiny. In addition, her son Becko was enacting his identification with a compensatory archetypal figure who services the devouring mother, feeding his life and his aliveness to her at the expense of new possibility and change in his own personal pursuits.

## Image Courtesy of:

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## Reference Books by Marion Woodman

*The Owl Was a Baker's Daughter: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa, and the Repressed Feminine.* Toronto: Inner City Books, 1980.

*Addiction to Perfection: The Still Unravished Bride.* Toronto: Inner City Books, 1982.

*The Pregnant Virgin: A Process of Psychological Transformation.* Toronto: Inner City Books, 1985

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