The poem is probably a metaphor for the gradual acceptance of one’s new, sexually mature physical appearance. The last stanza represents the speaker’s emotional maturity; she can eventually accept the responsibilities that her sexual maturity brings – a relationship with a man and all that that entails (motherhood).

This poem is from “The Other Half” written much later than “Woman to man” which followed on the heels of “The Moving Image,” but it has similar themes.

The image of her new body being “dumb” suggests that its attractiveness and sexual appeal speaks for itself – doesn’t have to “speak.” In the final stanza, the speaker clearly separates her physical from intellectual and emotional self. “We may love” – her body and her mind in unity – but there are aspects of her intellectual identity that have nothing whatsoever to do with her body or her appearance.

“Woman to Man” 1949 (Wright’s second anthology)

See page 38 of the “Flame and Shadow” section of your Judith Wright Resource booklet.

“Woman to Man” is about love, sex, pregnancy and childbirth. It encapsulates the whole process. It comprises a series of images which are moments of this process. Wright uses natural imagery such as the “blood’s wild tree” and the “intricate and folded rose” to highlight the very natural process that begins with the union of a man and a woman. The concept of generation and regeneration is vital to our understanding of the poems in this collection.

“Woman to Man,” “Woman’s Song,” and “Woman to Child” comprise a complete and intimate picture of female sexuality on both a personal and universal level.
Woman to Man

The eyeless laborer in the night,
the selfless, shapeless seed I hold,
builds for its resurrection day—
silent and swift and deep from sight
foresees the unimagined light.

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.
This is our hunter and our chase,
the third who lay in our embrace.

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 that grows
the intricate and folded rose.

This is the maker and the made;
this is the question and reply,
the blind head butting at the dark,
the blaze of light along the blade.
Oh hold me, for I am afraid.
Woman’s Song

O move in me, my darling,
for now the sun must rise;
the sun that will draw open
the lids upon your eyes

O wake in me, my darling,
the knife of day is bright
to cut the thread that binds you
within the flesh of night.

Today I lose and find you
whom yet my blood would keep –
would weave and sing around you
the spells and songs of sleep.

None but I shall know you
as none but I have known;
yet there’s a death and a maiden
who wait for you alone;

So move in me, my darling,
whose debt I cannot pay,
Pain and the dark must claim you,
and passion and the day.
Woman to Child

You who were darkness warmed my flesh where out of darkness rose the seed.

Then all a world I made in me; all the world you hear and see hung upon my dreaming blood.

There moved the multitudinous stars, and colored birds and fishes moved. There swam the sliding continents.

All time lay rolled in me, and sense, and love that knew not its beloved.

O node and focus of the world; I hold you deep within that well you shall escape and not escape; that mirrors still your sleeping shape; that nurtures still your crescent cell.

I wither and you break from me; yet though you dance in living light I am the earth, I am the root, I am the stem that fed the fruit, the link that joins you to the night.
Close analysis

Overall interpretation,

Key ideas,

Key concerns
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