

SECTION ONE
A REVISED SURVEY OF WESTERN
CIVILIZATIONCHAPTER 1
THE BIRTH OF OPPRESSION

... and you forgot the God who gave you birth.

— Deuteronomy 32:18

Women were the first private property. To understand this, one must look beyond histories authored by men. In nearly all instances, women have been excluded because of their sex, and many groups of men have been excluded because of class, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual preference, or any number of other reasons. Revised studies of history are indispensable to the emancipating of those whose voices are not heard in traditional history. As they exist until very recent times, histories of Western civilization are inadequate not only because they leave out so many people, but because they have been written from only the upper class, White male view.

To dwell on the “woman as victim” view, however, seems to be a poor answer. When all of us become aware of the Great Marginalizing of Groups, the first phase—that of anger—can be directed to productive action.

History's most important pages may be the first one and the last one. Much in the middle is redundant, predicated on conditions established at the outset. And the last pages of history, by definition those of the present, are important to us because of that. The concern of people alive today is that it is our turn to act—to revise the histories handed to us, to fill the old spaces between the lines with new words.

A revised survey of civilization must start with the history of oppression. Until about 6000 years ago—that is, throughout the tens of thousands of years of prehistory—women experienced equality. Only now are we beginning to restore this condition. Lerner (1986) observes:

Men and women live on a stage, on which they act out their assigned roles.... But the stage set is conceived, painted, defined by men. Men have written the play, have directed the show, interpreted the meanings of the action. They have assigned themselves the most interesting, most heroic parts, giving women the supporting roles.

As the women become aware of the difference in the way they fit into the play, they ask for more equality in the role assignments. They upstage the men at times, at other times they pinch-hit for a missing male performer. The women finally, after considerable struggle, win the right of access to equal role assignment, but first they must “qualify.” The terms of their “qualifications” are again set by the men; men are the judges of how women measure up; men grant or deny

admission. They give preference to docile women and to those who fit their job description accurately. Men punish, by ridicule, exclusion, or ostracism, any woman who assumes the right to interpret her own role or—worst of all sins—the right to rewrite the script.

It takes considerable time for the women to understand that getting “equal” parts will not make them equal, as long as the script, the props, the stage setting, and the direction are firmly held by men. When the women begin to realize that and cluster together between the acts, or even during the performance, to discuss what to do about it, this play comes to an end.

Looking at the recorded History of society as though it were such a play, we realize that the story of the performances over thousands of years has been recorded only by men and told in their words. Their attention has been mostly on men. Not surprisingly, they have not noticed all the actions women have taken. Finally, in the past fifty years, some women have acquired the training necessary for writing the company's scripts. As they wrote, they began to pay more attention to what women were doing. Still, they had been well trained by their male mentors. So they too found what men were doing on the whole more significant and, in their desire to upgrade the part of women in the past, they looked hard for women who had done what men did. Thus, compensatory history was born.

What women must do, what feminists are now doing, is to point to that stage, its sets, its props, its director, and its scriptwriter, as did the child in the fairy tale who discovered that the emperor was naked, and say, the basic inequality between us lies within this framework. And then they must tear it down.

This passage could be rewritten poisoning capitalists against the working class, Whites against Nonwhites, gays against straights, and so on. The crosscurrents of prejudice cut in many directions, making unity among oppressed groups difficult to achieve. A clarifying example: In graduate school I tutored African-American high school students in a program called Upward Bound. One day one of my female students, on the verge of tears, stormed into my classroom during a break.

"I'm going to get a suntan!" she exclaimed. "My skin is too light and the boys are teasing me!"

I decided that when class resumed, we would spend some time learning something other than standard English. I call this stopping the train.

Without scolding, I pointed out to the group that this teasing had hurt someone's feelings and divided them. I asked if this amounted to borrowing a despised tactic from bigoted members of the White majority—subdividing itself along

the prejudicial lines of skin tone. The impassioned insistence of the teasers that it didn't made my point clear.

Hominids evolved from primates three million years ago and fully developed humans appeared c. 100,000 BCE. Cave paintings and goddess sculptures emerged at least as early as 50,000 years ago. Evidence indicates that much of this first art was produced by women (Mellaart, 1964, 1966, 1967). Women's life spans were about 30 years. Several pregnancies were needed to raise two offspring to adulthood; therefore, women spent their childbearing years either pregnant or nursing. This fact caused them to gravitate toward types of labor that were compatible with pregnancy. Men, unencumbered by a child in the womb or at the breast, went out and hunted. Thus the first division of labor derived from a then-immutable biological difference—not men's greater physical strength, but women's birth-giving and nursing.

Shortly after the dawn of civilization and consequent birth of history, division of labor by the biological imperative of sex was replaced by a kind that appeared equally benign—division based on gender; that is, on cultural inventions based on but not required by sex. Thus it became the woman's task to rear the children. Rearing children, unlike childbearing and nursing, is done equally well (or badly) by females and males.

Periods of scarcity caused men to shift their hunting skills to skills of war. Successful warriors rose to prominence and were able to dominate not only the women of their tribes, but other men as well. The exchange of women, however, may be the single greatest cause of patriarchy (Levi-Strauss, 1969). It can take the forms of stealing other tribes' women, ritual rape, or negotiated marriages. It is always preceded by taboos on endogamy and—this is essential—the indoctrination of women to accept their lesser lot, often with the belief that deities have declared it within the natural order.

Private property developed with the advent of agriculture. In earlier hunting/gathering societies, men, women, and children engaged in production. Little need existed for kinship structures or exchanges among groups. This model gave way to a horticultural model. The unpredictability of the harvest made people dependent on hunting. The biological vulnerability of women as child bearers led tribes to procure other tribes' women. This led to intertribal warfare, which created a warrior culture. The horticultural model gave way to the more labor-intensive agricultural model, which created a heightened demand for child labor, and therefore for women to 'labor' as well. It is the reproductive capacity of women, rather than women themselves, that was reified. Women rather than men were exchanged because men did not produce babies directly.

Private property accrued to males through the development of animal husbandry, which led to surpluses of meat, skins, and livestock. Furthermore, early plow agriculture required male strength. Horticultural activities became the male province. Men used their greater leisure time to create artforms, manage the material wealth generated by agricultural surpluses, form bonding rituals, and develop religions, whereas women's food preparing and child rearing duties were unrelieved.

Neither determinism nor conscious manipulation was at work. Neither men nor women could have seen the consequences of these changes. Women likely agreed with them. By the time awareness of the consequences developed, they had entwined themselves around the axis of culture. The enslavement of men, which began at a later date, was not useful at this time, since they were not needed to reproduce.

Visual images antedate written records by at least 50,000 years. Artifacts generated at civilization's beginnings recorded the origins of cultural oppression. Therefore, those of us who teach art do well to broaden our art historical paths to include the stories told by these images and the poignancies they hold for us today. These new paths will be wider than paths of the past, not only to make room for the art forms of marginalized groups, but to accommodate side paths into every corner of culture. Art has been defined as if it were isolated. It is not isolated; it crisscrosses every cultural current. The potential of art, unrealized in our time, is too great to tolerate such isolation. The means to tap this potential is through art education.

'Marginalized groups' consist of anyone who is not a White male, and many who are. This definition slices through the domains of sex, class, race, and religion. During my undergraduate years as an art education major in the 1970s, the bible of art history was Janson's *History of Art*. Janson's timeline began at 4000 BCE with predynastic Egypt and ended in 1950 CE. Despite its coverage of this six-millennium span, the text did not mention a female artist in its 616 pages. As recently as the 1981 edition, Janson revealed further dis-Orientation, including little or no mention of the art of Eastern cultures—despite advertising claims that the text deals with the art 'world'.

Janson is not entirely at fault. Part of the reason for these omissions was lack of available scholarship. Informed studies of the arts of Nonwestern cultures, and of the arts of women within Western cultures, have emerged for the most part since the 1960s. Gadon (1989), in *The Once and Future Goddess*, includes a timeline measuring not only changes in art itself, but the art history field's new gender awareness. Gadon's timeline, which uses art exemplars to illustrate her thesis, traces the concept of the goddess from its height in prehistory (eg, "The Goddess of Willendorf") and early his-

tory (eg, “Minoan Snake Goddess”) to its replacement by the phallo-theocracy of the West (e.g., “Theotokas, The God Bearer”). It ends with the reemergence of the goddess in the postmodern West.

This portrayal at once describes the history of art and the history of women. To borrow a phrase, “in the beginning” (that is, during the upper paleolithic—old stone—age as early as 35,000 BCE) artisans depicted their deities as females more often than male. For tens of thousands of years they remained female. Excavation sites in Southeastern Europe alone number over 3000, and have generated 30,000 goddess sculptures in clay, marble, bone, copper, and gold. Few sculptures depicting male deities have been found. These sculptures invariably emphasize breasts, navel, and vulva, and often position the figure in a squatting position, the common birthing position of this region throughout prehistory. Examples of the blending of art with daily life are found in the vulva symbols fashioned from lapis lazuli that were offered to goddesses for the curing of sickness and other problems. Today such objects are considered objects of ancient art; yet those who produced such artifacts did not seek out artists—there were no such people to seek out. Rather, they fashioned the objects themselves—everyone was an ‘artist’. Art education was not compartmentalized. Art competence was acquired by everyone to at least some degree, simply to fill the needs of life.¹

Figures of the goddess and her synecdoche, the vulva, have been found in the lowest layers of the Çatal Huyuk excavation in Anatolia (now Turkey), dating to the seventh millennium BCE. The goddess did not grow a penis until warlike cultures, loosely labeled Indo-European, conquered most Eurasian civilizations. God has existed as a male for a comparatively brief time, and may end up androgynous or asexual: today’s heightened feminist awareness in fields such as theology and the arts has given new birth to the goddess theme. This is expressed in the work of a number of twentieth century artists, both male and female.

Three slow developments caused patriarchy to become institutionalized:

1. Economic changes such as the notion of private property, which in turn led to class stratification;
2. The establishment of religious/political bureaucracies; and
3. The cosmic shift from earth goddesses to sky gods. This process began in the Ancient Near East at c. 3000 BCE and ended 2500 years later.

The goddess presented as ‘heraldic woman’ (a woman depicted nude with legs widespread) is pan-cultural, including examples in Romanesque architecture and traditional Irish imagery. That these images are found in such widely separated areas as Luristan, Etruria, New Guinea, New Zealand, and Ecuador speaks to the ubiquity of the female deity.

The earliest known examples of the heraldic woman are those of Çatal Huyuk, dating from neolithic times, probably the seventh millennium BCE (Fraser, 1966). Heraldic flanking (the depiction of worshipful, mirror-imaged figures, one on each side of the goddess) had not yet appeared. Flanking emerged both in the proto-literate period of the early bronze age in ancient Mesopotamia and in the coincident predynastic period in Egypt. Flanking suggests social stratification since the flanking figures are subordinated to the central one. Social stratification appears to have emerged with literacy.

At times the displayed goddess is portrayed in parturition. The *dilukai* of Micronesia, goddesses displayed with large pudenda, are flanked by subaltern figures in profile who extend their penises toward her. She represents cosmic fertility. *Dilukai* are placed facing the rising sun, apparently to represent the solar fertilizing of the earth. Images such as these have been judged ‘inappropriate’ in the West; yet in Micronesia they are commonplace. The Micronesians make sex open, literally and figuratively.

Malta, an archipelago off the island of Sicily, is the site of over thirty of the earliest temples to the goddess, dating from 3500–2500 BCE. They are the earliest known free-standing roofed stone buildings. Floor plans of the later temples are arranged in the shape of the female deity, presaging the cross-shaped floor plans of Christian monuments of worship. Caves dug beneath the floors symbolized the womb. Pottery remains found in the temples are decorated with vulva symbols. Maltese goddess culture ended when the archipelago was invaded by mainland people with copper daggers and obsidian arrowheads. Gadon writes of the provocative discovery that seldom in excavation sites of neolithic goddess cultures is found any sign of warfare. She draws a relationship between goddess religion and peaceful existence. Apparently neolithic goddess culture was not matriarchal, but gender-egalitarian.

Avebury in southern England is the site of a monument to prehistoric goddess worship. Less widely known than Stonehenge (also located in southern England) the Avebury henge includes England’s tallest artificial hill and largest prehistoric tomb, as well as the remnants of two stone avenues, each a mile and a half long. The Avebury henge was the gathering place for a seasonal round of festivals celebrating the major events in the goddess’s life—puberty, marriage, childbirth,

and death. The earth itself was sculpted into the image of the goddess giving birth. The human-made hill symbolized her womb. This earth sculpture depicts the goddess birthing in a squatting position. Images of the female giving birth in this manner have been found at nearly all Neolithic sites as well as throughout North and South America and in Pacific island cultures. This birthing position, which compresses the sides of the abdomen and makes use of gravity, prevailed until the male-dominated medical establishment in the eighteenth century replaced midwives and promptly moved birthing mothers into supine positions for the convenience of physicians.

To follow the birth of oppression, we look back twelve thousand years. As the ice age ended, farming began to replace hunting and the Neolithic, or new stone, age began. Nomadic lifestyles were replaced with the stationary one of the village. In planting their seeds of grain, these humans planted the seeds of Western culture. The rise of 'civilization' refers to the process within which these scattered Neolithic villages became agricultural communities, then urban centers, and finally archaic states. Visual and verbal records reveal that these states were characterized by social classes, commodity production, distant trade, military elitism, monarchy, slavery, and patriarchal families. In the ancient near east, these early states also saw female subordination codified into law, prostitution established, women excluded from certain kinds of work, the dominance of male gods over female deities, and myths of human origin which taught male ascendancy.

By 8000 BCE, the transition to an agrarian lifestyle was complete. A trade economy of private ownership developed, based on husbandry and goods such as pottery, metalwork, and woven fabric. As humans looked to the earth for sustenance, the definition of the goddess as cosmic mother spread, and artifacts depicting her became common. However, as animal husbandry spread in Sumerian and Akkadian cultures, the male role in reproduction acquired greater status. The female deity still created the universe, but now her male consort played a decisive role.

The development of private property from agricultural surpluses led to trade economies, which led to systems of numerical notation, which in turn led to writing. Writing with grammatical elements appeared in Sumer shortly after 3000 BCE.

The advent of writing created the need to teach literacy. This was denied to women. By the beginning of the first millennium BCE, women were excluded from all forms of institutionalized formal education. Pantheons of deities of both sexes became well established; however, the development of writing, and hence of recorded history, shifted thought from

the observable to the abstract. The symbolic act of 'naming' became linked with immortality.

The consequences of this were enormous. One result was the shift of creation away from the birthing act of women and toward the symbolic act of naming—a task men could perform. This led to the concept of a 'creative spirit of the universe', a concept that conflated anthropomorphic gods and goddesses into one spirit god. The emergence of military power and kingship rather than queenship led men to reach for a male god. During the third millennium BCE, the deity segued from dominance by a Creator goddess to dominance by her consort/son, then to the son's emergence into a Creator god, and then to his reign over a pantheon of gods and goddesses. For example, by 2400 BCE in the city-state of Nippur, the hierarchy had become An (god of heaven), Enlil (god of the air), Ninhursag (queen of the the mountains), and Enki (lord of the earth). The earth was associated with baseness, and the goddess had been reduced to a queen. Four hundred years later, Ninhursag had traded places with Enki. During the next millennium, this model gave way to the monotheistic god of Western faith who made the earth his *pie-d-a-terre*, preferring the more upscale real estate of the kingdom of heaven.

Frederick Engels' (1972) *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* describes "the world historic defeat of the female sex" as a result of the development of private property. During the tens of thousands of years prior to this development, humans banded together in classless, socialistic bands. The development of private property was followed by the desire to keep this property within familial lines; hence, these community-based groups shifted to a family base. The unequal distribution of private property led to class divisions and eventually to archaic 'states'. To monitor their lineage in this complex new structure, men sought virgin brides and chaste wives. This limited women to private, home-bound service and created a market for prostitution. In essence the wife had become head servant.

Monogamous marriage produced the most insidious of class struggles—dominance over the woman by the man. This dominance is encoded in humanity's earliest laws. It was assured by: 1) force, 2) economic dependence on husbands, 3) privileges bestowed on cooperative women, and 4) the division of women into respectable and non-respectable categories. The latter two effectively stopped women from uniting in revolt against their subordination.

Levi-Strauss (1969) suggests that the incest taboo forms the root of social organization. It only ostensibly prohibits marriage with the mother, sister, or daughter on moral grounds; its purpose is to oblige the mother, sister, or daughter to be given to others. He describes it as "the supreme rule of the gift." The intertribal trading of women was necessary to

avoid war, and women's reproductive capacity provided the grounds for their exchange. This is how women became the first private property.

Women also were the first slaves. No record exists of slavery occurring in hunting/gathering social structures. It appears with the rise of agriculture, private property, and formation of states. Sources of slavery include capture in war, punishment for crime, sale by family, and self-sale for payment of debt. Civilization in its earliest forms rested on slavery. To accept it, the enslaving group had to convince itself that slavery was moral. This was done by believing the enslaved deserved their enslavement because they were different from their owners. This is most easily done when the enslaved are different in an easily identified way such as sex or skin color. Likewise, the enslaved had to be convinced to accept their status.

The subordination of women led to their enslavement. The transition was smoothed by commodifying their reproductive potential. During civilization's nascence, for a period lasting centuries, male captives, posing a continuing threat to their captors, were killed, mutilated or exiled. Women and children were enslaved.

Why did women endure this? With the welfare of their children threatened, their men eliminated, and their homes destroyed, women became dependent on their captors. When subjected to rape, women sometimes become pregnant and, again to ensure the welfare of their children, they endured slavery. Lerner contends, "Patriarchy is a historic creation formed by men and women The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women." This cooperation is obtained through a number of means: by indoctrinating women that their oppression is 'the will of God' and therefore a privilege that will yield a heavenly reward, by denying women educations that give access to property acquisition, by constructing a history that omits women, by pitting women against themselves through the creation of competing categories, by legislative fiat, and by outright punishment. Under conditions of oppression, the rational choice for women is to link themselves with male protectors for their children and themselves. So long as women offer sexual, economic, political, and intellectual subordination to men, they are permitted to share the power of men of their class to exploit men and women of lower classes.

Of all oppressed groups, only women permeate every social class. People who have some power, however circumscribed, may not see themselves as oppressed. This is why theoretical formulations appropriate to other oppressed groups are inadequate in explaining the oppression of women. Slaves, for example, can clearly see the difference between their relationships with each other and their relationships with their

masters. They often share a common prior culture, the one they or their ancestors enjoyed before bondage. Women have had no such tradition. They have been told they have no history. Ultimately, men's control over cultural symbols has been the most decisive weapon of women's oppression. Perched on the tripartite construct of Greek philosophy, Judeo-Christian-Islamic mythologies, and the Western legal tradition, men have defined the cosmos.

Gradually men's class positions became defined by their relationships to private property and means of production. The class position of women became defined by their sexual relationships to men. At the bottom were slave women, whose sexuality was commodified; next were concubines, whose upward mobility was based on their sexual performance; and then wives, whose sexual service entitled them to certain legal rights. A handful of women surpassed the status of wife, usually by maintaining their virginity within the priesthood.

The Sumerians developed cuneiform, a pictographic method of writing that coincided with Egyptian hieroglyphics. This 'picture writing' and their art document their worship of Inanna, a deity who evolved from the prehistoric goddess. Inanna failed to survive the invasions of male sky gods. Under the ethos of patriarchy, her power became separated from reverence for the earth and ultimately was replaced with contempt for it. At this time intertribal warfare over control of land and goods made its first appearance, making clear that patriarchy and private property can make violent bedfellows. This point was further borne out in the twentieth century when governments run only by males perched humanity on the precipice of a nuclear armageddon. The United States actually plunged over it, including its militarily needless bombing of Nagasaki, Japan, a crime against humanity in the league of Josef Stalin's purges and Adolf Hitler's Holocaust.

Three important law codes emerged in the Ancient Near East: the Codex Hammurabi (engraved on a stele of diorite c. 1750 BCE), the Middle Assyrian and Hittite Laws (dating from the fifteenth to the eleventh centuries BCE), and Biblical Covenant law (recorded in the late ninth and early eighth centuries BCE). They are conceptually consistent regarding private property, the duties of debtors, the control of slaves, and the regulating of women's sexual behavior. The *lex talionis*—the view that a crime must exact an identical punishment, *i.e.*, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth—is found throughout. A theme consistent from then to now is that a man's status is determined by his economic relations and a woman's by her sexual relations.

Inanna legend tells of the goddess traveling to the underworld to discover the mysteries of death. The underworld to goddess cultures was the primal womb, the source of life, a

place of reverence. Theo-phallic cultures redefined it as hell, an evil place where those who displease God are tormented. Inanna's early symbol, the tree, was replaced by the throne, which symbolized the felling of the tree and its subjection to the carpenter's tools. The emphasis on control that characterizes Western religion is manifested in later Inanna worship—nature is 'tamed' by humans, and the earth encases hell. This view forms the bedrock of today's environmental unawareness and provides context to the 1982 observation of James Watt, Secretary of the Interior under Ronald Reagan, that we could deplete the earth's resources since Jesus was coming soon.

The Sumerians also transformed the marriage ritual from its original conception as a symbol of new life into a legalized surrender of female power. In late Sumerian legend, Inanna transfers her supernatural powers to the god Dumuzi when she marries him.

Lilith, a bird-woman deity, exemplifies the new view of women that developed in Sumerian society. According to late Hebrew legend, she appeared as Adam's intended wife, but insisted on equality with him. Unwilling to let him lie above her, she chose not to mate with him and ran away. Forever banned from human relationships, she resurfaced in medieval Judaic legends as a nymphomaniacal demon. Lilith represents one of the first depictions of female sexuality as evil. The Neolithic bird goddess who created the world, helped women in childbirth, and nursed infants had, in medieval Judaism, become a pernicious nymphet who caused children to die in their sleep. The paradigm shift was complete.

Goody (1976), in an exhaustive study of world marriage models, found that Eurasian societies based on plow agriculture, division of labor, and social stratification developed patriarchal monogamous marriages, homogamy (marriage within one's class), and emphasis on women's premarital chastity. The aphorism that prostitution is "the world's oldest profession" suggests that it resulted logically from early social formations that disempowered women. The continuing presence of prostitution makes clear that thousands of years later these formations remain intact.

In fact, however, prostitution is not culturally universal. In sexually permissive societies it occurs rarely because it is not necessary. In sexually restrictive societies, it can be suppressed to a degree of near nonexistence. Promiscuity was a natural human activity widely practiced by prehistoric peoples, and prostitution became a substitute for this promiscuity when culture curtailed it (Bachofen, 1861; Bloch, 1912; Morgan, 1963). Engels (1972) adds:

Surrender for money was at first a religious act; it took place in the temple of the goddess of love, and the money orig-

inally went into the temple treasury . . . With the rise of the inequality of property . . . wage labor appears sporadically side by side with slave labor, and . . . the professional prostitution of free women side by side with the forced surrender of the slave.

Cultic sexual service (as distinguished from prostitution) by both men and women probably dates back to Neolithic times and the various cults of the goddess. The ubiquity of small goddess sculptures, and the fact that they often have been found in shrine-like settings, are the best evidence of this. This inference is supported by ample artistic and written evidence of the sexual worship of goddesses in Ancient Mesopotamia in the neo-Babylonian period. Fertility was regarded as sacred. The offering of sexual services was a form of worship. To meet this need, a class of temple hierodules evolved. A separate, lower class of commercial prostitutes also existed outside the temple. This class was associated with the temple only logistically; human traffic was heavy in these locations. The dual emergence of hierodules and commercial prostitutes makes it unlikely that commercial prostitution grew out of temple prostitution.

In the Sumerian and Old Babylonian periods, the high priestesses of Inanna and Ishtar, respectively, were the daughters of kings and other high-ranking rulers. They participated in the ritual of the Sacred Marriage, on which, it was believed, depended the fertility of the land and the people. The ritual was widely performed for nearly two thousand years, reaching to pre-Christian Rome.

Men who owned means of production dominated men who did not. The status of women was determined by sexual ties—those with ties to one man were "respectable"; those with ties to many men (for example, prostitutes) or to no man (for example, non-clerical celibates or lesbians) were not. In the neo-Babylonian period, the distinction between sacred sexual ritual and commercial prostitution began to blur. To receive a portion of the proceeds, priests may have begun to organize the commercial prostitution that occurred in the area outside the temple. They also may have engaged their slaves in commercial prostitution, keeping the proceeds or giving them to the temple. By the mid-first millennium BCE, both kinds of sexual activities had become commonplace.

One of the earliest lists of women's professions of the Old Babylonian period, c. 2400 BCE, includes prostitute, doctor, scribe, barber, and cook. (Under men's professions—in this case connected with the cult of Ishtar—was listed transvestite knife-throwing acts. Now *there's* a show you would hate to have missed.) On a list of women's professions dated seventh century BCE appear nurse, prostitute, midwife, wet nurse, sorceress, and various entertainment occupations. Gone are doctor and scribe.

As the virginity of upper class daughters became a financial asset, commercial prostitution became economically necessary. The need arose to distinguish between 'respectable' and 'nonrespectable' women. This matter was legislated under the Middle Assyrian Law, which dictated the veiling of the wives, widows, and daughters of free men, and concubines when accompanying their masters or mistresses. Unmarried prostitutes (sacred as well as commercial), unaccompanied concubines, and slaves were denied the veil. The law cut across lines of class and bondage—free prostitutes, including hierodules, were given subaltern status with slaves, while accompanied concubines were granted the veil. The distinction turned on the nature of women's sexual relationships with men. Women under one man's sexual control were veiled, hence respectable; others were 'public women', and unveiled. Penalties for violating the law were harsh, and applied with equal harshness to men who failed to report women who violated the law. Such legislation is a measure of the degree to which patriarchy had become perceived as part of the natural order. Judging from the similarity of punishments, a veiled prostitute was considered as threatening to society as was a mutinous soldier. The process of dividing women into dominant and subservient groups has continued to the present, and has proved an effective obstacle to the formation of feminist consciousness.

Another obstacle has been the 'Biblical basis' for phallo-theism. The prehistoric goddess was earth-centered, but to call her an 'earth goddess' is inaccurate. She represented the cosmos. She affirmed the body and spiritualized the erotic. The word *religion* conjures up the Western monotheistic faiths, all of which are 'revealed' traditions. Across the span of human existence, the notion of phallo-theism is recent. Casual scholars and fundamentalists, pointing to the Bible as their hypostasis, claim that it was first expressed by the ancient Hebrews less than 4000 years ago. In fact, views of God as a male entity and patriarchy as a societal system are not supported by accurate translation and careful reading. God is given male and female characteristics throughout the Bible. For example, Deuteronomy 32:18 reads, "You were unmindful of the Rock that begot you and you forgot the God who gave you birth." (I used the latter part of this quotation as the subhead to this chapter. In eight words it says what I am taking two dozen pages to explicate.) In Isaiah 42:14, Yahweh cries, "...now I will cry out like a woman in travail, I will gasp and pant." Isaiah 66:8-9 describes God's creation of the earth and Zion as acts of birth: "Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? . . . Shall I bring to the birth and not cause to bring forth? says the Lord; Shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb? says your God." Verse 13 continues, "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem." Job 38:28-29 continues the depiction of God as a woman: "From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of

heaven?" The Judaic god is neither a 'he' nor a 'she'—the Judaic god is an 'it'.

Judaism began with the Covenant between Yahweh and Abram. This grand stroke raised deity-ordained sexism, racism, economic oppression, and class discrimination in the West to unprecedented positions, matched only arguably by Christianity and Islam. Yahweh accepted the Israelites as his Chosen People over all others, which introduced divine racism and class discrimination to the world. So long as the Israelites worshipped only him, he would abundantly provide for them, including sending them off to pillage their neighbors. Thus God begat economic oppression, bloodshed and war.

In Genesis 15:4, God reverses male/female reproductive biology by telling Abram, "He that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." God further transfers procreativity to Abram through use of the word 'seed': He asks Abram to count the stars and assures him "So shall thy seed be" (15:5), and "Unto thy seed I have given this land" (15:18). Sarah, otherwise ignored within the Covenant, is described as the bearer of Abraham's 'seed'. Here God gives divine sanction to patriarchy, foreshadowing the Roman law of *paterfamilias*. Four hundred years after the Covenant with Abram (renamed Abraham to denote his divine linkage), monotheism was formalized with Moses and the Decalogue. The Book of Genesis portrays women's sexuality as valuable only through its reproductive capacity within patriarchy, and women's inclusion in the Covenant only through the mediation of men. It signals the demise of the Mother-Goddess and the ascension of God the Father. Hebrew men, like the men in other Mesopotamian societies, had a high degree of sexual freedom. Women, on the other hand, were to be virgins at the point of marriage, and to be faithful to their husbands thereafter. Men could divorce; women could not. The institutionalizing of a sexual double standard occurred through the legal codifying of sexual behaviors. By extending the term 'man' to subsume 'woman', men constructed a monumental phallus-y. As long as the universe was perceived as revolving around the earth, it was understood only incompletely, and as long as half of humanity is perceived as revolving around the other half, it can be understood only incompletely.

The Bible, which in concert with the artistic record documents the birth of oppression, combines poetry and prose, some mythical and some folkloric, borrowed from earlier Sumero-Babylonian, Canaanite, and Egyptian cultural materials, and adapted by its writers and redactors. Practices, laws, and customs of the Hebrews and their neighbors are reflected in the narrative as well. The book of Genesis was written over 400 years in three independent phases, all of which drew on older traditions. The earliest, the J phase, emerged from tenth century Judah; the second, the E phase,

was developed in Israel; and the third, the P phase, which drew on the J and E phases, was finalized in the seventh century. By the time of its writing, the deity was no longer allied with any female goddess. Oddly enough, there was no longer any maternal source for the Creation.

The J version of the Creation occurs in Genesis 2:18-25. It describes God as creating Eve out of Adam's rib. The later P version occurs in 1:27-29. It states, "male and female created he them." The P version parallels the Mesopotamian *Enuma Elish* creation story in details and order of events, which could explain the equal status of the man's and woman's creation.

The Hebrew '*ha-adam*', meaning humankind, later became 'Adam', based on androcentric assumptions. Sources of the story include Sumerian elements such as the eating of the forbidden fruit, the tree of life, and the Great Flood. The Garden of Eden parallels the Sumerian Garden of Creation, which also was bordered by four great rivers. According to the Sumerian myth, the Goddess Ninhursag grew eight plants in the garden, but forbade the gods to eat from them. When the water-god Enki disobeyed, Ninhursag condemned him to die by afflicting eight of his organs. The Fox appealed on Enki's behalf, and the Goddess acquiesced. She created a healing deity for each organ. For the rib she created the goddess Ninti. In Sumerian the word 'Ninti' means both 'female ruler of the rib' and 'female ruler of life'. In Hebrew the word 'Hawwa' (Eve) means 'she who creates life'. This suggests a fusion of the Sumerian Ninti and the Biblical Eve. The choice of Adam's rib as the site of Eve's creation may reflect the incorporation of the Sumerian legend.

Israel existed about 200 years, ending in 722 BCE when Assyrians under Sargon II captured Samaria, the capital, and deported the population. Intolerance of other gods was introduced into Judaism by the prophets Hosea, Amos, and Isaiah. Hosea offered the metaphor of Israel as the bride of Yahweh. Prophets described Israel's sin as "whoring," for which there is no equivalent male term. This established a patriarchal sexual metaphor within religion. Judah lasted until 586 BCE when it was subdued by Babylonians, who destroyed Jerusalem, razed the temple, and deported the population. This marked the end of Judaic political institutions. During the Diaspora the Jewish people have resisted absorption through tenacious adherence to their cultural and religious practices.

A philology of Genesis 2-3, the account of Adam and Eve, (described by Tribble, 1985, as "a love story gone awry") places women in an egalitarian relationship with men. Traditional interpretations of the text proclaim male domination of women as the will of God. This reading has become so canonized that the cascade of misogyny emerging from it goes unchallenged by those who abhor it as much as by those

who embrace it:

- A male God created man first and woman second—first meaning superior and last meaning subordinate.
- Woman was created so that man would not be lonely.
- Contrary to the natural process, woman emerged from man's body.
- Man named woman.
- Man left his father's family to set up another patriarchal unit.
- Woman—untrustworthy, gullible, simple-minded—tempted man to disobey and thus was responsible for sin in the world.

According to the original Hebrew account, the first human was neither male nor female. The Hebrew term for the first human, *Ha-adam*, is sex-neutral. Sexual bifurcation was not created until *Ha-adam* was differentiated into Adam and Eve. God concluded that this androgynous progenitor of humankind needed a companion. The Hebrew *ezer*, a term referring to the woman, was mistranslated to mean 'helper', signifying lower status than the more accurate 'companion'. In fact, the Hebrew definition of *ezer* hardly denotes secondary status; God is described as *ezer* to Israel. Whereas the god of Western religion explicitly gave the human dominion (in the sense of 'stewardship' rather than 'domination'; cf. Tribble) over animals through the power of naming them, and over the plant world with the phrase "to till and to keep" (2:15), no parallel statement of dominion was given for either the newly made male or female:

And God said:

*"Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness;
and let them have dominion
over the fish of the sea,
over the birds of the heavens,
over the domestic animals,
over all the earth,
and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."
(Genesis 1:26)*

Only after the 'surgery' did the human refer to itself as 'man', (introducing the Hebrew term *is*), and to the companion as 'woman' (*issa*). Henceforth the term *Ha-adam* was used in this new meaning—the name for the male. Although in 2:22 the story introduces the woman first, they are created simultaneously. *Ha-adam*, created from the earth, was given dominion over it. One might extrapolate from this that *issa*, created from the rib of *Ha-adam*, might have dominion over him in his new male identity. God issues no such command,

however, and placement of the event in context indicates that their relationship is one of equality.

When the woman eats the forbidden fruit, the story is careful to specify that the man is with her (*immah*). Yet this prototype of patriarchy is not the leader; in fact he is silent. The story does not say she tempted him, and its failure to say she did not does not hardly justifies the inference that she did.

The linguistic power politics behind the translation of the Creation myth enabled the shift to patriarchy to transpire. This translation reads that one male god created all things, not out of his body, but out of nothing—he proclaimed, rather than gestated, the universe. He created it once and for all, rather than through the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. He created man first, in his own image, and ordered man not to live in harmony with the earth, but to dominate it. So that man would not be lonely, he created woman—from man's rib. This female creature tempted man to sin. The snake—once an honored symbol in the art of the goddess—became a symbol of evil. When man and woman bit the fruit of the Tree of Good and Evil, they perceived their bodies as base and contemptible. In shame, they covered themselves with fig leaves. God, outraged at man's and woman's desire to acquire knowledge, cursed their home, the earth. It would be covered with thistles. Man would toil by the sweat of his brow. Woman would give birth in pain. The equal relationships of man with woman, and human with nature, were replaced by models of domination and subordination. By demanding love, God created fear.

Male circumcision marks the covenant between Hebraic males and their God. This symbolic reference to male fertility displaces the cultural focus on the life-bearing function of the female, as well as removing the female herself from the covenant. Even today, orthodox Jewish males thank Yahweh that they are not born goy, slave, or woman. However, pantheism, including goddess worship, was widely practiced by the Hebrews until as recently as the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BCE. Conversely, no evidence has been uncovered which corroborates the Israelite exodus from Egypt, the sojourn in the Sinai desert, or other tales of the patriarchs. Much of the Torah was written later than the artifacts which document widespread Hebrew worship of the Canaanite earth goddess Asherah and her son Baal. Asherah, whose symbol was a tree or pillar, is mentioned over forty times in the Hebrew bible. This number of references, combined with the fact that almost every mention is negative, demonstrates that she was a theological force that threatened the Torah's revisionist authors.

Asherah seems to have been a blend of patriarchy and matriarchy: she was transformed into a masculinized version of the goddess of life and death—a supernatural sylph, a goddess of both life and war. The greatest purge of Asherah

worship occurred under the reign of Josiah in the seventh century BCE. Influenced by Jerusalem priests who were losing tithes to Asherah, Josiah ordered the annihilation of the non-Hebrew peoples of Canaan and the destruction of every remnant of Asherah worship.

Deuteronomy 16: 21-22 reads, "You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah, any tree, beside the altar of Yahweh your god Neither shall you set up a pillar, which Yahweh your god hates." Yet documentation from Judea written three hundred years earlier refers to Asherah as Yahweh's consort. Apparently, over three centuries the heated romance between Yahweh and Asherah had cooled.

The fact that such myths were written by ancient power-holders causes one to hesitate in assuming that they were popularly accepted. They may have been more prescriptive than descriptive, which would explain the increase of goddess shrines until the middle ages.

The apogee of goddess culture occurred between c. 3000-1500 BCE on the Mediterranean island of Crete. The goddess permeated Cretan culture. Brightly colored paintings on the walls of temples celebrated sexuality and the human body. The joyous, opulent, and sophisticated qualities of Cretan art were unprecedented. Art was found everywhere and enjoyed at all levels of culture. The genius of this civilization lay in its ability to combine its simple worship of the goddess with a refined artistic sensibility. Art education as we understand it today would have seemed curious to the people of Crete, who developed their artistic sense by making it part of daily life. After flourishing for 1500 years, the peaceful culture of Minoan Crete succumbed to pantheistic Greek invaders and became absorbed into that culture.

By 1500 BCE, the multi-millennial evolution of theo-phallic belief had reached maturity in the ancient Near East and Europe. Warlike Indo-European groups had conquered the last of the Neolithic worshippers of the goddess. This clash of cultures initially resulted in a fracturing of both god and goddess into multiple personalities manifested, for example, in the Greco-Roman pantheons. However, religious artifacts document the gradual transition from pantheism and goddess worship to patriarchal monotheism, a transition well under way by the time of the Hebrew bible. The art record also shows that, despite this development, goddess worship continued for several centuries, even as patriarchy undermined and commodified the roles of women. In total, goddess worship flourished for tens of thousands of years, from its clouded origins among Paleolithic peoples to its documented practice in early Christian times. It then began a 1500-year period of dormancy, reemerging in nineteenth century romantic mysticism. Even the worst example of misogyny in history—the witch hunts of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries that tortured or killed people, mostly

women, for engaging in practices akin to goddess worship—did not obliterate it.

Written by the victors, history portrayed the goddess way of life as 'of the devil'. Women, linked to the goddess by gender, were redefined as base and weak. This transition was more than cosmic transsexual surgery; it imposed a new list of truisms that was adopted by both religious and secular authorities:

- A male god created the world.
- Man has the right to dominate woman.
- Humans have the right to dominate nature.

Au contraire, as we say in Texas. Fondness for recording history tailored to one's theology was widespread throughout the ancient world. It is not surprising that the archaeological record of the Hebrews, the self-proclaimed 'people of the Bible' (a public relations misstep if there ever was one), conflicts with the Torah. The fact that many sections of the Bible are borrowings from other cultures was inevitable, given that the Bible was created at the crossroads of the ancient world and that the Hebrews were a cosmopolitan people. The Old Testament is more a national than a religious literature (Wolfe, 1992). It is a source encyclopedia of the cultures of the Ancient Near East. It was canonized based on language more than any other standard. Only books written in Hebrew were admitted. The proliferation of documents written in Greek were excluded, ostensibly because God, not speaking Greek, could not have dictated them. (Speaking in tongues indeed.) This observation explains the antireligious qualities of some of its books. Ecclesiastes is a cynic's anthem ("Futility of futilities, everything is futile."). The book of Esther has nothing to do with God or religion. Likewise, the Song of Solomon never mentions the name of God, which is understandable given the Hebrews' belief that sex was evil; the name of God would have blended awkwardly with the passionate poetry of the Song. In contrast, the New Testament is religious literature. Early Christians considered the Old Testament their Bible. The New Testament was added in portions as an appendix and grew over four centuries into its canonized form.

Both the Old and New Testaments are assumed by some to be 'the word of God'. Let us hope that many of the deeds and attitudes attributed to God on its pages are false. One presumes that God did not actually call out two she-bears to mutilate or kill forty-two children because they had called Elijah "bald head." Likewise, one presumes that God did not actually command Joshua to lead the Hebrews to conquer Palestine by killing every man, woman, and child they encountered. These and other examples reflect the willingness of Israel's early leaders to ascribe to God their own bloodlust. The Bible is not the word of God; it is the word of certain people about God.

The view that the Bible is infallible reflects careless scrutiny indeed. A comparison of the books of Isaiah and Ezekiel is telling, with Isaiah's spirituality the more profound. Hosea compared to Haggai also reveals two different planes, with Hosea achieving a heightened state of religious comprehension while Haggai never rises above mere ritual. Amos calls for democratic justice, whereas Obadiah is filled with xenophobia. And most would agree that Corinthians 1:13 is a better 'read' than anything in Leviticus, or that the biblical bon mots of the Sermon on the Mount beat either book of Chronicles.

'Saved' individuals who claim to 'live by the Bible' perhaps claim more than they realize. Such a claim reflects lack of knowledge of the text. In the Garden of Eden story, as well as in Psalm 51:5 and the writings attributed to Paul, humans are depraved, worms of the dust, and vile sinners. In Genesis 1, Psalm 8, and the teachings attributed to Jesus, humans are children of God only slightly lower than deities. A theme that runs through the Old Testament is the assertion that the Hebrews were God's chosen people; yet Amos and Jonah suggest that God does not choose pets among nations.

The god Yahweh (or the mistranslated Jehovah) was the god of the Midianites. Discovered by Moses, Yahweh was introduced to the Hebrews at Mount Sinai and became the God of Israel. When the relatively small group of Moses' followers entered Canaan c. 1200 BCE (at this point led by Joshua), they waged war in the name of Yahweh, conquering surrounding tribes. The 'clear' preference of the Hebrews for worshipping Yahweh rather than the pantheon of the Canaanites, however, is not supported (Grant, 1984).

A thesis of the Torah, as well as the New Testament and the Koran, is that a deity that lives in the heavens is superior to an earth-centered deity. In fact, the goddess as originally conceived was not an earth deity, but one who united the earthly and the cosmic. It is in her diminished identity within the framework of phallo-theocracy that she became identified only with the earth. The prehistoric deity was deemed female because women, like the earth, brought forth life.

A deity's phallus makes an effective tool for scratching a line in the cultural sand (presumably it's long enough to reach) and inviting only the 'haves'—those similarly endowed—to cross it. The incongruity of ascribing the male sex to a creator god that brings forth life—the province of the female—exposes the opportunism behind it. The patriarchal foundation of Judaism is reborn in its son and grandson, Christianity and Islam. In the case of Christianity, one would presume that when this creator does bring his only begotten child into the world, at least *it* will be female. When it too is 'revealed' as male, what is also revealed is the patriarchal overkill of the Abrahamic faith tradition. It was only reinforced when the

Islamic prophet Mohammed mistook his penis for a scimitar. A culture accepting such a system creates a cosmically-ordained, gender-based hierarchy. Embedded within culture by the passage of time, such a hierarchy becomes perceived as natural. This perception tacitly encourages both male and female adherents to denigrate females with the rationale that they are a god-ordained subspecies. Given such insatiable need for control, none of these male-led religions stops there. Each is quick to denigrate—and often bear arms against—the other two. “If you don’t belong to *our* club, God won’t let you into his clubhouse,” they bellow in ironic unison.

I am hardly one to romanticize Eastern culture. I do wish to close this chapter by glancing toward India, whose Hindus worship an uncountable pantheon of gods and goddesses. The presence of female deities in a culture seems to make a difference. Gadon’s (1989) description of a year she spent in Calcutta starkly contrasts with her experience in the West:

I could not say just how, and surely not why, but being in a culture so utterly different from my own, in which the feminine was celebrated everywhere in sensuous images of great power, both human and divine, was profoundly unsettling.

[In India I] experienced myself as sexual, sacred, and powerful in a way no modern woman in the West can. Our psychological being has been severed from our biological selves for so long that we are completely cut off from our true natures. Because I was in touch with this strength, with the celebration and fullness of my being for even so limited a time, I could never return to my old ways of seeing the world. When I left India and returned to the United States, there was a radical rupture in the fabric of my being. My erotic self, the deep life force within, had been activated and there was no way to put the genie back in the bottle.