

The Devil's Gateway

If all the harm that women have done
Were put in a bundle and rolled into one,
Earth would not hold it
The sky could not enfold it,
It could not be lighted nor warmed by the sun.
Such masses of evil
Would puzzle the devil
And keep him in fuel while Time's wheels run.
But if all the harm that's been done by men
Were doubled and doubled and doubled again,
And melted and fused into vapour and then
Were squared and raised to the power of ten,
There wouldn't be nearly enough, not near
To keep a small girl for the tenth of a year.

—J. K. Stephen, "A Thought"

In the first chapter we saw that man's desire to overcome evil often results in perpetuating and renewing it. In this chapter we will see that man often projects evil on woman, as in the bit of doggerel above.¹ Centuries of living with this projection has given women something like a privileged position (in a theoretical, not political, sense of the expression) from which to study evil, and so it is essential to understand what this projection has meant for women's experience.

Woman has been regarded, in Tertullian's words, as the "devil's gateway." We could hardly expect persons so labeled to be invited to speak on matters of good and evil. Indeed, those acts and relations that women regard as loving and good have often been considered dangerous to the moral development of men and boys and thus in need of careful supervision and constraint. The result has been a false and violently damaging description of evil. As Mary Daly points out: "The myth [of Eve and the Fall] takes on cosmic proportions since the male's viewpoint is metamorphosed into God's viewpoint. It amounts to a cosmic false naming. It misnames the mystery of evil, casting it

into the distorted mold of the myth of feminine evil. In this way images and conceptualizations about evil are thrown out of focus and its deepest dimensions are not really confronted.”²

In this chapter we will look at three facets of the long association of the female with evil: the denigration of the body and its functions, the notion that demonic forces work through the feminine unconscious, and the pernicious scapegoating of women in myths of the Fall. In each of these sections I will try to foreshadow themes in the later investigation of evil from a feminine standpoint.

WOMAN = BODY

The feminine has a long association with matter and nature. From the days of Aristotle nature and body have been demeaned in favor of spirit and mind. The Judeo-Christian tradition has not only maintained this order of values but hardened it by accepting Aristotle's most damaging charge against female nature—a fundamental weakness in morality. In this tradition it is not just a lack of logicity that bars women from ethical debate, nor is it simply that woman's goodness is innate and unconscious so that it need not be articulated and might even be endangered by strenuous attempts at articulation, as Kant apparently thought. Although both views persist, the view that has done the greatest mischief was adopted readily by institutional religion. A mere lack of logic might, after all, be remedied in time by persistent efforts at education. Further, if it were truly believed that women possessed an unconscious goodness of the sort I will discuss in chapter 3, it would be reasonable to follow their lead in moral matters and even attempt an induction of feminine qualities in males. But if women are fundamentally deprived of moral sense, giving them more knowledge and power could only lead to depravity. What little goodness they possess must be confined to the realm in which it occurs naturally—that of home and children. In this setting the “law of kindness” can safely be allowed to function. Outside of this setting conscious logical thought by properly endowed moral (male) agents must settle moral matters.

What really bars women from ethical debate in this long tradition is not their minds but their bodies. The fear of women as physical bodies is older than the Judeo-Christian tradition. I noted in the first chapter that menstruation was associated with defilement and there-

fore came under the first known taboo. The menstruating woman was thought to be infected with an evil spirit or to be paying the price for an essential evil that is part of her nature (later menstruation would be known as "the curse"). Under either belief, associating with her is likely to induce evil effects. After noting how widespread the association of menstruation with evil has been, Harding says, "The question we must ask, however, is what is this 'evil' which has entered into the woman and how does it work?" She goes on to argue that primitive people were at one time almost certainly subject to the same instinctive mating habits as animals, and thus the menstruating female represented an enormous danger to emerging rationality.

For the men of the tribe might dance all night to concentrate their attention on the coming hunt but if the party met a menstruating woman as they started out, weapons and determination would be thrown aside together. Anything which could so arouse their untamed desire must be considered an "evil". The men of the tribe would be compelled to protect themselves by segregating the dangerous female, and in this way protect themselves also from the devastating effect of their own sexuality.³

There are, to be sure, alternative accounts of women's periodic isolation, and some of these reveal a collective female sigh of relief to be free, at least cyclically, from male demands. But in Harding's account (the standard thesis) women serve as scapegoats for the evil men fear in themselves. Understandably, precautions would have to be taken against that evil (and women) at a time when human understanding was primitive. The scapegoat syndrome appears again and again and is certainly seen in the myth of Eve and Adam. Mary Daly refers to Erich Neumann's discussion of the scapegoat phenomenon:

For "mass man," as for primitives, evil cannot be acknowledged as one's own evil, since consciousness is too weakly developed to deal with such an internal conflict. Therefore, evil is experienced as something alien. The outcast role of the alien is important as an object for the projection of the "shadow" (our own unconscious counterpersonality), so that this can be exteriorized and destroyed.⁴

Given superior size, strength, and mobility, men found it relatively easy to project much of their weakness onto women as evil. Besides the monumental injustice to women, this projection has led to a prolonged misunderstanding of evil and, as Daly points out, a misplaced emphasis in its discussion and treatment. Daly also says, "Repudia-

tion of the scapegoat role and the myth of the Fall by the primordial scapegoats may be the dawn of real confrontation with the mystery of evil."⁵ Overcoming the temptation to project evil onto others will be an important theme as we attempt an alternative description of evil.

The primitive fear of menstruating women infected both Judaic and Christian thought. The Old Testament contains many references to "uncleanness," a continuation of the mythic notion of defilement that Ricoeur discusses, and the Christian church extended the concept to include sexual intercourse and birth. The old fears, beliefs, and taboos were institutionalized in practices with only slightly different rationales. Superstition and ritual sustained each other. Eleanor McLaughlin refers to the resulting "demonization of sex,"

the common beliefs that no Christian should receive the eucharist the morning after he or she had sexual relations, or that a menstruating woman should not receive communion, or even enter a church. Menstrual blood was thought to be attractive to devils and unclean spirits, and a menstruating woman would by her presence sour milk and kill the grass she walked upon. . . . Similar views on the uncleanness and spiritual danger of the natural sexual functions of the female are implied in the service of the "Churching of Women" that followed childbirth.⁶

Clearly the new religion had difficulty moving away from its primitive beliefs and rites. It is important to understand, however, that the evil associated with menstruation in primitive times was not a direct accusation of women as evil. Menstruation was not something visited on women *because* they were basically evil, but rather a manifestation of evil in the universe. As such, enormous power was inherent in menstruation. Harding writes of the "magic power of menstrual blood":

There are many records of its being used as a potent healing charm resorted to in extreme illness. In other cases the destructive effect of the menstruating woman may be used in a positive way, as, for instance, when a girl in that condition is made to run naked around a harvest field infested with caterpillars. . . . In these cases the destructive power is turned against the evil, while the crops are protected from harm.⁷

We see here again both the enormous power attributed to the feminine in primitive thought and the psychologically healthy acceptance of evil as part of the prelapsarian condition. Even goddesses were thought to menstruate (the early female deities were not all spirit!), and the full moon was thought to be the time of menstruation for

Ishtar, moon goddess of Babylon. Interestingly, this day was called "sabbatu," or evil day, and is the forerunner of the Sabbath. Thus initially the Sabbath was not merely a day of well-deserved rest and worship, but one on which all projects were prohibited because they were thought to be foredoomed by evil.⁸ Biblical accounts attest to the perceived power of the great goddesses (although they are often masculinized), and it seems likely that many of the slaughters Yahweh ordered were violent attempts to overthrow feminine deities and to subjugate women.⁹

It is interesting to note, and we will see the theme repeated, that Hebrew thought often proceeded along the lines of polarities and reversals. Not only did the evil day become a sacred one, but also the ancient sign of immortality and wisdom—the serpent—became a symbol of evil and destruction. Woman (Eve) was born of man (Adam), the mystery of menstruation became a curse, and the tree of life and wisdom now tempted humankind to the destructive knowledge of good and evil.

Fear and denigration of the female body and its functions persist today. In chapter 3 we will hear Harding speak of the "primordial slime" of female beginnings. Margery Collins and Christine Pierce accuse Sartre too of identifying the female with holes and slime.¹⁰ Sartre finds female sexuality obscene and the sex act itself the "castration of the man."¹¹ This attitude is clearly reminiscent of the ancient fear of momentary irrationality accompanying sexual ecstasy. So strong is the traditional fear that Sartre forgets his own major thesis. As Pierce comments, "A philosopher well known for denying the existence of an a priori human nature maintains that women possess a fixed nature [the In-itself], determined by their unfortunate sexual anatomy, which limits them to roles approximating the nonconscious, unliberated Being-in-itself." Pierce notes, further, that Sartre identified the human body, male or female, as "one of the strongest sources of nausea" because it is subject to contingencies of all sorts and is laid waste by time—in contrast with clean, sharp consciousness and perpetual logic. Still, observes Pierce, Sartre expressed exceptional disgust with *female* anatomy. He wrote on the obscenity of holes, not on "the obscenity of dangling."¹²

I should mention that this last comment represents a temptation for women scholars, who have, naturally, an inclination to strike back, to match obscenity with obscenity, to replace masculine deities

with feminine, to interchange master and slave. But such responses would be a terrible mistake and could not possibly lead to a redefinition of evil and beyond that to a transformed moral world. Not only must we deny the obscenity of female bodies, but we must also deny the obscenity of physical bodies entirely. Perhaps at some far future stage of evolution we will become disembodied consciousnesses or consciousnesses with renewable bodies, but until that happens (if it ever does) we must love our bodies as integral parts of ourselves. Indeed, as we will see in a moment, a great strength of women has been that they have consistently cared for the physical bodies of their loved ones.

In sharp contrast to the usual feminine acceptance of physicality, saints of the church, often hated and humiliated physical bodies—particularly their own. The body was thought to be the home of evil, the prison of the soul, needing continual castigation for the benefit of the spirit. Mary Daly quotes Simone de Beauvoir on the masochistic tendencies of female saints:

St. Angela of Foligno tells us that she drank with delight the water in which she had just washed lepers' hands and feet. . . . We know that Marie Alacoque cleaned up vomit of a patient with her tongue; and in her biography she described the joy she felt when she filled her mouth with the excrement of a man sick with diarrhea; Jesus rewarded her when she held her lips pressed against his Sacred Heart for three hours.¹³

Clearly these disgusting acts were not meant to glorify the body, nor could they have brought much comfort to those in need of care and nursing. They were totally self-serving exercises meant to win the greatest possible rewards for the saintly soul at the most obvious expense of the earthly body. Even the other as one cared for was reduced to the status of instrument for the glorification of the tender nurse's soul. In acts of this sort both women and men contributed to the ratification of evil.

Although a distrust of the body is pervasive in Catholic tradition, a contradictory veneration of the body can also be found. Human personality and identity have been associated with both body and soul, and the feared corruption of the body has been accepted as the just desert of all descendants of Adam. The greatest reward of Jesus and Mary was the assumption of their whole beings—bodies and souls—into heaven, although Jesus “ascended” on his own power and

Mary had to be "assumed." For ordinary beings putrefaction is the natural course of events, and anyone seeking to avoid it by cremation or other means is thought to be guilty of defying God's sentence on Adam, "To dust you will return."¹⁴ Further, wholeness of the body—virginity—has been greatly extolled as a means to purity of soul.

The Protestant Reformation brought some (temporary) alleviation of the spiritual illness of despising the body. Marriage and sexual union became respectable.¹⁵ But even in this tradition virginity continued to be associated with the highest calling for men, and spirit was clearly more precious than body. Also for women the new celebration of marriage meant a renewed emphasis on motherhood as a vocation. The insistence on motherhood as woman's "glory" led eventually to the Victorian myth that I will discuss in the next chapter. The new era brought special pains to intelligent women who could not help seeing that their "glory" was very much a second-class achievement, however flowery the language describing it. Biography and fiction are replete with examples.

Pearl S. Buck, in the Nobel Prize-winning biographies of her parents, reveals the pain and confusion that persisted well into this century. Her father, a Presbyterian minister, valued soul and spirit above all else; her mother ministered to the bodies and earthly minds of her children and parishioners. (Indeed, Buck said she had intended to call the double volume "The Spirit and the Flesh.") All of life's events affected Buck's parents differently, but the deaths of children brought forth their greatest conflict. Her father, called Andrew in the biographies, was firm in saying, "Doubtless it was the Lord's will and the child is safe in heaven." His wife, Carie, in sympathetic agony for the mother, answered, "Oh, and do you think this fills the mother's heart and arms?" Then she immediately apologized—so confused was she about her moral status in a body-hating society and church. Her daughter wrote: "Once I heard someone say of another's dead child, 'The body is nothing now, when the soul is gone.' But Carie said simply, 'Is the body nothing? I loved my children's bodies. I could never bear to see them laid into earth. I made their bodies and cared for them and washed them and clothed them and tended them. They were precious bodies.'"¹⁶

This earthy, heroic woman, who lost four of her seven children in a foreign land (China) while her husband sought to save souls, never entirely lost her love of the physical world. Indeed, in her dying days

she seemed almost sure that she had been right all along and her husband wrong. Watching her nurse perform a fox-trot (which she had never seen and therefore playfully requested in her liberated status as one dying), she said: "Well that's a pretty thing—so graceful and light. I should not be surprised if Andrew is all wrong about God. I believe one ought to choose the happy, bright things of life, like dancing and laughter and beauty. I think if I had it to do over again I would choose these instead of thinking them sinful. Who knows?—God might like them?"¹⁷

This woman, like most we will encounter, cared for particular others in their particular situations. As we will see, the Catholic church has considered affection for particular others—encouraging "particular friendships"—an impediment to the proper devotion of clerics and other religious to God. Although Protestant denominations have taken a somewhat different stand on particular others, both her church and her husband induced in Carie continual feelings of guilt for her appreciation and love of earthly companions. Unlike her husband, she was primarily concerned not with principles, but with persons. When a man and his two wives wanted to join the church, Carie sympathized with the second wife. But Andrew insisted that Mr. Ling would have to send his concubine away if he wanted to join the church. Carie protested, "But the poor woman has nowhere to go—it's not *her* fault!"¹⁸ Andrew, of course, did not relent. Principles came first in his life.

Caring for the physical and emotional welfare of others has been basic to the feminine experience. It is important to affirm that this caring has not developed solely from a "slave mentality"—even though that interpretation is possible and probably deserves a thorough exploration in its own right.¹⁹ Rather, it has been closely tied to the instinctive protection of offspring and, as part of that natural project, to the care of men. Judith Hauptman notes that caring for a man's welfare seems to be the primary mission of women in biblical and Talmudic accounts:

Supporting these contentions, the Talmud cites many references to woman's solicitous care of man. Rabbi Eleazar's wife cooked him sixty different kinds of food to help him repair his health. . . . When Mar Ukba and his wife sought a hiding place and found it in a hot oven, he burned his legs on the embers, and she suggested that he rest his feet on hers to alleviate his suffering. This devoted care is also seen in the ways that rabbis' wives devised to serve their husbands food and pour their

wine during the wives' menstrual periods, when contact between husband and wife was forbidden.²⁰

We see here clear examples of what we must change in our perspective on evil. Woman—the seductress, the illogical, the unconscious, the amoral—has often seen human suffering and misery as states to alleviate. To aggravate them is, for her, to commit evil. When principles encourage the infliction or maintenance of pain, she must reject them in favor of persons and their needs. We will see examples of this rejection over and over again, but in almost all cases the women who are heroic enough to perform the deeds of rejection still suffer pangs of guilt induced by the patristic system of morality. In William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*, for example, Granny engages in a regular business of stealing mules from the Yankee army and selling them back. Apologizing to God, she points out that she did not sin for gain or greed. Rather, she sinned first for justice (a traditional and perhaps even masculine justification) and, after that, out of compassion—to feed and clothe God's creatures. Staunchly she admits that she held back some of the booty to care for her own dependents. Granny too exhibits a painful combination of loving independence and guilty doubt.²¹

In Carie and Granny we see the seeds of a truly feminine ethic—one that moves boldly beyond justice to the alleviation of human suffering. But sadly the seeds spring up dwarfed and warped, contaminated by the traditional overdose of fertilizer—sin and guilt.

At this point I mean only to foreshadow the discussion on principles and the redefinition of evil. I have aimed in this section to describe the age-old hatred of body and physical functions that has pervaded moral-religious thought. Woman as body, as vessel, has been worshiped, coveted, feared, and hated. The sexual passion of man has been explained by the seductive and insatiable desires of woman, and thus everything naturally related to woman has been morally suspect. Not only have we lost the eloquent feminine voice in moral matters, but by establishing half the human race as scapegoat we have failed to come to grips with the problem of evil.

WITCHES

In chapter 3 we will look at the long history of association between the feminine and the unconscious and at how Jung and his disciples

maintained and enhanced that association into this century. Not only has female goodness been thought of as largely unconscious, but female evil too has often been construed this way. On first glance such an approach might appear to liberate women from the sort of moral responsibility demanded of men. But this bright side is sorely deceiving. A genuine moral agent, after all, may respond to reason and be rehabilitated; a physical body invaded by devils and demons must be exorcised or destroyed.

Some writers now claim that it is historically plausible to say that as many as nine million women may have been destroyed as witches during the European witch craze (from the late fifteenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries),²² but this figure is far greater than historical studies have been able to document. Joseph Klaitz notes that "over ten thousand cases have been verified," but he also remarks that responsible estimates range much higher.²³ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English agree with Daly that estimates run into the millions, but they do not cite sources.²⁴ Whatever the actual figures, many thousands were certainly accused, tortured, and executed, and there is agreement that 80 to 90 percent of the victims were women.

The witch craze, which reached its height in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, revived and exaggerated earlier associations of women and evil. McLaughlin notes that as early as the thirteenth century even the prince of this world, Mundus, was transformed from his original masculine form into *Frau Welt*, a creature

with the same courtly aristocratic beckoning smile and hand seen from the front, and a behind eaten through by the creatures of hell and the grave. She is often accompanied by the iconographical symbol of fleshly lust, the goat, and sometimes appears as a fanciful creature, half human, half animal, the demonic devil's wife, who, just like the beautiful courtly lady, leads men to their destruction through preying on the lusts of the flesh.

McLaughlin speculates about the sources of this transformation, noting—I think significantly—that it occurred at a time "when the developing cult of the Virgin and the love ethic of the Goliards were supposed to have injected some positive notes into the medieval picture of the female sex." She writes:

Whatever further research concludes with respect to this interesting problem, *Frau Welt* remains a public symbol of the high medieval Chris-

tian association of the feminine with the evils of sensuality and self-indulgence, for in *Frau Welt* the woman personifies worldly evil, that "materiality" and "fleshiness" which the theological tradition has identified with womanhood.²⁵

Frau Welt, of course, dates from well before the witch craze. Witch hunting arose out of a new and complex combination of religious, social, and political changes. Were it not for the overwhelming proportion of females accused of witchcraft, we might even assume that the witch craze was a gender-neutral preoccupation of religious fanatics with supernatural evil. Indeed, even the persecutors felt the need to explain the imbalance. Once again the old arguments about female intellectual inferiority surfaced. But the persecutors also held that women were more sensitive to the supernatural; this sensitivity, coupled with materiality and sensuality, made it likely that more women than men would receive and entertain devils and demons. More than one hypothesis is required here, for obviously if women were more sensitive to the supernatural and were also good, the powers that spoke to them could have been authorized by God, as Joan of Arc claimed. Therefore it was imperative to believe that women lacked a fundamental moral sense and so would be quite as receptive to evil voices as to good ones—indeed more so to evil ones, since women's bodies propelled them to an interest in the sensual.

Mary Daly suggests another side of the story. The women accused of witchcraft may have threatened the power of the patriarchy. Many of these women were midwives and healers; in an age of growing male interest in medicine, they presented an actual threat to male credibility. Ehrenreich and English also suggest a medical conspiracy as part of the motivation for witch hunting. Their theory sounds plausible, but it seems even more likely that the craze served to remind women of their need for the protection of a strong male. Most of the women accused and convicted had, significantly, no such protection. Daly also suggests that the movement was a final—and terrifyingly successful—attempt to stamp out the last vestiges of a pagan (female) religion.²⁶

The reasons that Daly, Ehrenreich, English, and other feminists put forward are credible given the social changes and misogyny of early modern times. Klaitz remarks: "The witch craze often has been described as one of the most terrible instances of man's inhumanity to man. But more accurate is the formulation by gender, not genus: witch

trials exemplify men's inhumanity to women. The sexually powerful and menacing witch figure was nearly always portrayed as a female."²⁷

But misogyny cannot have been the whole cause of witch hunting. Other forces were also at work. As Klaitz explains, elite members of society promoted the association of magic and witchcraft with heresy. A physical separation was growing between wealthy and poor members of society, and whereas both believed in magic and spirits, the poor were more likely to be accused of using such powers. The elites, perhaps seeking ways to consolidate their own political and economic power, sought to stamp out "superstition" in the masses. Cooperating with church reformers in Catholic and Protestant churches, educated elites, perhaps only semiconsciously, found a way to control women, dissenters, and the poor. The drive to control medicine may well have been part of such a program. To subdue folk healers would certainly have required powerful methods, and associating witchcraft with heresy—with serving the devil—made it a far greater crime than the ordinary malefice with which it had been linked in medieval times.

Another factor contributing to the witch craze was the widespread guilt provoked by religious reformation. Everywhere preachers bombarded people with fiery sermons about their sinfulness. The devil was ubiquitous and unflagging in his attempts to capture souls. Even priests, who had indulged without great penalties in pleasures of the flesh during the Middle Ages, were now threatened with eternal damnation for yielding to carnal temptations. In an age stricken with guilt, the most guilty and powerful find ways to project their guilt onto the less powerful. Klaitz's comments on this feature of the witch craze are important in the context of our examination of evil:

The rise and decline of witch trials can also illuminate other matters that remain tragically current. Plainly, we are not dealing with obsolete issues when we consider such problems as the sorts of intolerance, manifestations of prejudice against women and minorities, the use of torture by authoritarian rulers, and attempts by religious or political ideologists to impose their values on society. This is why the term "early modern" is an appropriate one for the era of the witch craze. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were "early" in the long-term development of today's historical patterns, but the continuation of such patterns shows that these centuries were "modern," too.²⁸

Another aspect of early modern life pertinent to this discussion is the rise of individualism. This ideology was clearly masculine in that

women were still thought to be pretty much interchangeable. Woman became a creature even more separate from man, and as liberal individualism developed, woman-hating became deeply entrenched in Western culture. Indeed, we may consider the explicit and implicit misogyny of fin de siècle culture as Bram Dijkstra recently described it a logical culmination of the steady rise of ethical and political individualism.²⁹

Individualism brought an increased fear of death, and the renewed fear of judgment encouraged the repression of sexual impulses. The combination of these and other factors led to a new association of death with violence and sexuality. Philippe Ariès writes:

Death is no longer a peaceful event. As we have seen, only three out of all the deaths in Camus [the reference is to Bishop Camus] were from natural causes. Nor is death any longer a moment of moral and psychological concentration, as it was in the *artes moriendi*. Death has become inseparable from violence and pain. It is no longer *finis vitae*, but, in Rousset's words, "a rending away from life, a long gasping cry, an agony hacked into many fragments." These violent scenes excited spectators and aroused primitive forces whose sexual nature seems obvious today.³⁰

Fear, guilt, and violence were all mixed up with sexuality. Male prosecutors of witches often supervised the undressing of accused women and watched closely as the women's genitals were carefully examined for the confirmatory witches' mark. Torture was regularly used to obtain confessions and indeed was rationalized as a means of asking God to intervene for the innocent under trial.³¹ One of the most dreadful legacies of theodicy is operating here: God the just would visit intolerable pain only on those who deserve it, and if God condemns unrepentant sinners to eternal suffering, then righteous men are certainly justified in inflicting pain to destroy evil and save souls. Some of the witch prosecutors really did seem to care deeply about the salvation of their victims. Again, the deep denial of interest in the body and material things led to terrible eruptions of distorted sexuality in the form of violence.

Although the centuries of witch hunting were a terrible time for women, they were the last age in which the ancient power of women—real or imagined—received explicit recognition. By the time we get to the Jungians, the classical feminine powers are relegated to antiquity. Indeed, modern women are castigated for losing touch with

the feminine principle and thus with their greatest power. But we have largely forgotten—or at least greatly de-emphasized—that this enormous feminine power involved both creation and destruction. Harding reminds us that “the Moon Goddess is, in literal fact, the mother of all living things and yet, strange though it may seem, not only is she the life-giver but also the destroyer. She creates all life on earth, and then comes the flood, which overwhelms it. And this flood is her doing.”³²

Modern women are not only stripped of this divine power, but they are simultaneously accused of a new evil—losing their essential femininity in vain attempts to emulate masculine ways of being in the world. Indeed, this orientation guides even Harding’s work.³³ In the next section, we see how the feminine unconscious can combat evil.

DEMONS, DÜMMLINGS, AND FAIR MAIDENS

In fairy tales and legends we find the themes of feminine unconscious victory over evil and masculine conscious heroism. The association between the fair maiden and the innocent youngest brother—or “dümmling”—manifests this theme. Both women and men are often favored with miraculous interventions as long as they are innocent, stupid, and friendly. Indeed, animals, another clearly unconscious group, frequently effect such interventions. It is as though the writers of these stories longed for effortless security and perhaps even envied the abiding human love females evince for their children. How lovely it would be, these stories suggest, if something in the supernatural had the same concern for innocent welfare that mothers have for their offspring! But consciousnesses as yet poorly developed could hardly acknowledge the loving wisdom of the mother. Men longed to be better but could not acknowledge actual moral behavior in any but the most consciously and physically powerful. Marie-Louise von Franz, a Jungian, sees fairy tales in part as attempts to compensate for the overemphasis on masculine prowess in the real world. Commenting on the need for a favored character to be “feminine,” she says:

Right from the beginning the disease has been the overemphasis on masculinity, so we see why being a hero would be wrong [for the favored youngest brother]: it would be again on the line of the old ruling attitude, stressing masculinity against instinct and love and the feminine principle. The youngest has a better chance by having such a shabby

horse, which deprives him of the possibility of a masculine heroic attitude.³⁴

Examining the same story, we see that the dümmling-hero also shows kindness to a raven, a salmon, and a wolf. Indeed, in the last case he allows a starving wolf to eat his good horse. We might interpret this action as a complete sacrifice of masculinity to the unconscious good of the feminine. But von Franz notes that in this and other stories fear of the wolf pulls things in another direction. A different sort of feminine relation to the wolf appears, says von Franz, in the "strange devouring attitude women can have when possessed by the animus." We note here a fundamental disservice that Jungian analysis has done to women, an issue we will look at in greater depth in chapter 3. Act unconsciously, goes the message to women, and all will be well; begin to think, lay your own plans, conquer your own realms, and evil has taken possession of you. The wolf-woman, then, "wants really to eat the whole world."³⁵

In addition to themes of unconscious evil and the unconscious triumph of good over evil is a theme of semiconscious adaptation to—or coping with—the powers of evil. This adaptation often involves the recognition of a mixture of good and evil in deities and other powerful figures. The Russian fairy tale "The Beautiful Wassilissa" powerfully exemplifies this theme, and, as we noted in chapter 1, so does the story of Job. Von Franz analyzes the Wassilissa story in great detail. Wassilissa's wicked stepmother and stepsisters force the young woman to encounter the dreaded Baba-Yaga, a great witch who regularly gobbles up human beings who cross her path. Wassilissa is terrified, of course, but she is not entirely unprepared. She takes with her the blessing of her deceased mother and a magic doll that was part of her legacy. Here we see a combination of wisdom and simplicity. Wassilissa has sense enough to know that she cannot survive an encounter with Baba-Yaga alone. She must have help, and the help comes through the powerful "good aspect" of the feminine embodied in the magic doll. A contest ensues between the forces of good and the forces of evil, and the good win, but in part their victory is due to something good in Baba-Yaga herself. She is not totally evil.

In addition to the theme of the mixed deity, we find in the Wassilissa story another important example of the power of silence in the presence of ambiguous evil. Wassilissa is careful not to ask questions that

might awaken the evil side of Baba-Yaga. Like Job, Wassilissa puts a hand over her own mouth. Baba-Yaga has just enough good in her to be somewhat ashamed of her evil deeds, and she does not want to be reminded of them.

Sometimes, as we have seen, women or dümmlings win out because of innocence, silence, and miraculous intervention. But more often women need the help of a male hero. They cannot always turn evil aside by ignoring it. In the story of Snow White and Rose Red, their charity toward the wicked dwarf brings them repeated grief. But von Franz does not credit them with feminine charity; rather she says they are "silly sentimentalists," and so they must be rescued by a male hero who slays the dwarf.³⁶ From a Jungian view we might conclude that fighting evil requires a fine balance of the feminine and the masculine, and such interpretations of fairy tales and legends illustrate this balance nicely.

What is entirely missing from these accounts is the possibility of genuine feminine *consciousness* at work in response to evil. Another way of looking at the Baba-Yaga story is to credit Wassilissa with attributing the best possible motive to Baba-Yaga, responding to something not-evil that resided in her along with the more dominant propensities for horrible destruction. That conscious response can bring out the best in someone, if only temporarily, is a promising interpretation from the standpoint of women.³⁷ To develop this idea fully is an important task for a morality of evil. It involves a recognition that good and evil are mixed in humans and deities alike, that it is rational and courageous to accept both dependency and initiative in our approach to life's problems, and that it takes great conscious effort to subdue evil by living with it rather than stirring it up in misguided attempts to overcome it once and for all. Stories like the Wassilissa tale can help build new feminist interpretations of good and evil.

Similarly, female story writers might turn Snow White and Rose Red into heroes by complicating the story somewhat. The typically masculine tradition in myth, religion, and science gives us dichotomies and hierarchies. In the battle against evil the Christian tradition vacillates wildly between masculine authoritarian toughness ("Praise the Lord and pass the ammunition") and a gentle "feminine" turning of the other cheek that can either be admired as too idealistic or scorned as part of a slave mentality. But a truly feminine stance rejects both poles of the dichotomy: it would seek to prevent a second blow with-

out striking back in violence. Snow White and Rose Red might have rescued the dwarf but kept him immobilized or under guard, or they might have exacted a magical self-destruct promise from him so that, in essence, he would destroy himself if he betrayed them again. They might even have rehabilitated him by persistent and firm efforts to bring out the best in him.

An attempt to describe real evil and real good might, by traditional literary standards, be either boring or a stinging challenge to standard morality. Simone Weil notes, for example, that "imaginary evil is romantic and varied; real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring. Imaginary good is boring; real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating. Therefore 'imaginative literature' is either boring or immoral."³⁸ But we have not explored feminine versions of myth and legend to their full extent. The possibilities are unlimited once we have broken through the masculine mentality we have inherited, and the eventual reward might be a fuller description of human consciousness.

In closing this brief discussion of women in fairy tales, we note that it has added something to our previous discussion of women and evil. The account of witchcraft described women as both unconsciously evil (receptive as bodies) and consciously evil (receptive in mind). "When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil," said the authors of the notorious *Malleus Maleficarum*.³⁹ In fairy tales the fair maiden often does not think at all. Instead she follows an unconscious path of goodness that helps her overcome evil. That evil is often at the same time personified as a wicked witch illustrates men's deep-seated belief in the magical connection of women to evil powers that can be used, paradoxically, for either good or evil.

THE FALL

Now we come to the unkindest cut of all—the pernicious notion that woman, through a grievous lack of moral sensitivity or will, caused the Fall of Man by accepting the serpent's enticement and tempting Adam to eat the forbidden fruit. Although parts of the "loss-of-paradise" myth almost certainly derived from earlier cultures, the Judaic versions single out woman as peculiarly culpable, and, of course, Christian writers have embraced these versions as well. The early African church father Tertullian (ca. A.D. 160–220) made it clear how

the early church regarded females in a well-known admonition to women:

Do you not know that each of you is Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. *You* are the Devil's gateway. *You* are the unsealer of that forbidden tree. *You* are the first deserter of the divine Law. *You* are she who persuaded him whom the Devil was not valiant enough to attack. *You* destroyed so easily God's image man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die.⁴⁰

To some people—even to some feminists—time and space given to an ancient and discredited myth could be better devoted to current problems such as job discrimination, poverty, and abortion. In view of the history we have been considering, this dismissal seems wrong, and those who make such statements overlook the enormous influence of the myth. According to Mary Daly, whom I quoted at the beginning of this chapter in connection with the myth and its resultant misnaming of evil: “The myth has in fact affected doctrines and laws that concern women’s status in society and it has contributed to the mind-set of those who continue to grind out biased, male-centered ethical theories. . . . The myth undergirds destructive patterns in the fabric of our culture.”⁴¹

Because it has contributed to a mind-set and to patterns in our culture, it should be the focus of intensive educational criticism. It has played an enormous role in the subordination of women and thus in shaping the present status of women; yet our schools give little or no attention to this vital bit of female history. Why not? Would free and critical discussion of this damaging myth be a violation of our constitutional insistence on the separation of church and state? Consider what an affirmative answer to this question means! If critical discussion of the myth in school would constitute such a violation, then we must acknowledge that the “myth” is still an accepted religious doctrine. If our answer is no, then clearly we must have other reasons for neglecting the topic. I will elaborate on this and other suppressed conflicts in chapter 9.

We have at least two good reasons for studying and analyzing the myth of Eve and the Fall: its continuing effects on present patterns of thought and social structure and its influence on traditional conceptions of evil. These two reasons are interrelated. Part of our contemporary mind-set includes conceptions of evil that unfailingly depend

on scapegoats—on conceptions of evil residing in the other and on notions that the other is a more likely agent of evil than oneself.

How did the myth arise, and what should women know about it? Merlin Stone gives a fascinating account of the likely political and social setting in which the myth played an instrumental role.⁴² The ancient tribes of Israel competed for land and resources with people who worshiped “pagan idols,”—actually the Great Goddess known by such names as Ashtoreth, Inanna, Asherah, Ishtar, and Hathor. From surviving idols, reliefs, and other artifacts we know that the goddess was associated with sexual pleasure, reproduction, prophecy, serpents, and fig trees. From this list alone we obtain a glimpse of the characters and the scenario that would compose the myth.

In casting the serpent as evildoer, Judaic writers overturned a powerful earlier tradition that associated snakes with “‘wisdom’ (magic), immortality, and fertility. As such they were the special companions of women, and often guarded earthly or celestial gardens of delight.”⁴³

Clearly the ancient goddess religions were earthy in the sense that they recognized sexuality in both humans and deities. Many “pagan” idols, for example, have well-developed breasts and sometimes bellies swollen with pregnancy. A religion that recognized the creative powers of female sexuality was likely to attract both women and men, albeit for different reasons. Therefore this religion had to be stamped out, and all its accomplishments and manifestations had to be tabooed or forbidden under sacred law. John Anthony Phillips discusses the centrality of sexual concerns in the story of Eve:

Eve's sexuality is of special concern in the Western tradition. The Fall is regarded (whether literally or metaphorically) as a sexual event. Eve is guilty of wishing to be in control of her own sexual life. Some very deep, partially unarticulated fears are behind the male insistence that she be denied the freedom to make her own decisions about her bodily life. The notion of sexual renunciation, which is thrown into high relief by the Roman Catholic ideal of celibacy, is central to Christianity. As the Mother of All the Living, Eve has the power to deny life, and she must be convinced by religious and civil law that she cannot use this power. Therefore in Roman Catholicism the image of the obedient and dutiful Second Eve, the Virgin Mary, is held up to her, and in Protestantism the ideal of the Christian Mother is urged upon her.⁴⁴

Even the suggestion of feminine deity severely threatens patriarchal tribes. Not only must they destroy the (pagan) deity, but they must also eliminate any illusion that woman could survive without the pro-

tection of some man—who would own her and thus care for her as his special property. How better to do this than to convince women that they need salvation—first by a human male who would shelter them, and second by a god-man who would die for their sins?

Because the serpent figured prominently in the goddess religions, it too had to be destroyed. Stone writes: "It seems that in some lands all existence began with a serpent. Despite the insistent, perhaps hopeful, assumption that the serpent must have been regarded as a phallic symbol, it appears to have been primarily revered as a female in the Near and Middle East and generally linked to wisdom and prophetic counsel rather than fertility and growth as is so often suggested." Statues and reliefs of the ancient goddesses often display serpents in the background or entwined about the goddesses themselves. Further, Stone suggests as a real possibility that the living snakes priestesses kept in their temples contributed through their bites to the hallucinogenic states in which priestesses prophesied "out of their own heads."⁴⁵ Perhaps, then, the writers of the myth were reacting to historical conditions when they wrote of the serpent speaking to Eve.

Further, the serpent has a long association with the Moon Goddess and thus with renewal. Both the moon through its cycles and the snake through its shedding become periodically new and whole. Harding notes, "Primitive and ancient myths also relate that the gift of immortality was brought to men sometimes by the moon and sometimes by a serpent, in other cases the serpent reveals to men the virtue that is concealed in the fruit of the moon tree or in the soma drink which can be brewed from it."⁴⁶

Not surprisingly, the patriarchs tried to alienate snakes and women. The myth has God saying directly to the snake, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed."⁴⁷ Yet the association of woman, serpent, and demonic power persists in contemporary literature. Nina Auerbach finds it a central theme in the Victorian imagination:

The mermaids, serpent-women, and lamias who proliferate in the Victorian imagination suggest a triumph larger than themselves, whose roots lie in the antiquity so dear to nineteenth-century classicists. These creatures' iconographic invasion may typify the restoration of an earlier serpent woman, the Greek Medusa. In Hesiod's account, the paralyzing Medusa was decapitated by Perseus, who became a hero when he refused to look her in the face. Burne-Jones and his Victorian associates force us to look into the serpent-woman's face and to feel the mystery

of a power, endlessly mutilated and restored, of a woman with a demon's gifts.⁴⁸

Although the power of women and serpents collaborating is still felt in literature, it is considered an evil power, one that all right-thinking men and women should avoid. Mary Daly quotes Marina Warner on the encounter of the snake with the Virgin Mary, who crushes it beneath her foot:

In Christianity, the serpent has lost its primary character as a source of wisdom and eternity. It is above all the principal Christian symbol of evil, and when it sprawls under the Virgin's foot, it is not her direct attribute, representing her knowledge and power as it does in the snake-brandishing statue of the goddess of Minoan Crete, but illustrates her victory over evil.

When we consider the ancient relation between woman and snake, between moon periodicity, snake renewal, and menstruation, between snake and bodily wisdom, it is, as Daly comments, "horrifyingly significant" that the "Immaculately Conceived Virgin" is portrayed crushing the snake.⁴⁹ The image seems to call on Christian women to repudiate their earlier powers and to demean their own physical functions.

The precise role of snakes in the goddess religion lies shrouded in antiquity, and present interpretations must work through layer on layer of legend. What is clear to us today is that the Yahwist's choice of creation story (Eve created from Adam's rib rather than a simultaneous creation of man and woman) and its enthusiastic adoption by Jewish and Christian patriarchs led the way to a severely misogynist tradition. As Phillips comments, "It is indeed remarkable that it is Eve's creation, rather than her actions in the Garden, that are the occasion of this misogyny, and that this misogyny so often takes the form of relating the newly created woman to the serpent." Phillips next discusses a batch of legends that ignore both biblical accounts of creation and connect Eve directly to the serpent. In various legends Eve is created from Adam's tail, the devil's tail, or a dog's tail; in another she is created from the serpent's feet—neatly explaining why snakes have no feet. Phillips comments: "Certainly these writings must be regarded as heterodox or, at the least, typical of neither Judaism nor Christianity. But we cannot really understand the imaginations of more orthodox writers without establishing the "demon-Eve"

tradition, and considering how tenaciously it gripped the imaginations of the shapers of Eve.”⁵⁰

The tree of knowledge, from which Eve dared to eat, bears a fruit that contains sexual knowledge. Why should it be so bad for human beings to have this sort of knowledge? Stone tells us that the sycamore fig, which is probably the tree of knowledge, was an important live symbol at the shrines of Astoreth. These trees represented the knowledge of life and the creative power of the goddess: “The sacred branch being passed around in the temple, as described by Ezekiel, may have been the manner in which the fruit was taken as ‘communion.’ According to Egyptian texts, to eat of this fruit was to eat of the flesh and the fluid of the Goddess, the patroness of sexual pleasure and reproduction.”⁵¹

The ritual endured, Stone suggests, but its original meanings were destroyed. The myth of the Fall effectively estranges woman from her early power and symbols. It turns her great natural gifts into mortal evils and justifies her subordination to man: “Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Genesis 3:16). Judaism and Christianity have both used it to keep women silent on moral matters and to place undue emphasis on sexuality in moral discussion. For example, throughout most of history it has been considered evil for a woman to commit adultery (an evil so great that at times it even merited death), but until comparatively recent times it has not been thought evil for a husband to beat his wife. Even now, I must note, the former transgression is more often associated with the word *immoral* than the latter.⁵²

The aspect of the Fall story that attributes the introduction of evil into the world to woman resounds in the myths of many cultures. The story of Pandora, often recounted innocuously in school texts as “Pandora’s Box,” is an early example. Eva Cantarella describes the “ambiguous evil” that is woman according to Hesiod. In this account Zeus sent woman as a punishment to man. Zeus was angry because Prometheus had stolen fire from the gods and given it to man. We see here the theme of a god in whom both good and evil exist. Hesiod describes the result of Pandora’s arrival: “The other thousand miseries fly among men. The earth is full of evils, and the sea is full of them. Diseases come to men in the day, and at night uninvited, bringing evils for mortals in silence, since Deviser Zeus took away their voices. So there is no way to escape the mind of Zeus.”⁵³

Pandora, as Hesiod describes her, is an ambiguous evil—beautiful,

crafty, potentially useful, and seductive. In the Greek story Pandora is Zeus's instrument of punishment. She visits evil on men for the transgression of Prometheus, and Zeus is the giver of evil. The story does not attempt to describe the deity as all-good or without a part in natural evil. In contrast to woman's initial condition of goodness in the Fall story, the first woman in the Greek myth is created evil; that is, her fundamental purpose is to harm man. The same theme emerges in many of the heterodox stories Phillips recounts, and the pervasiveness of these stories must have colored the more generous biblical accounts and the traditions that grew up around them. Thus Christian writers well into the Middle Ages felt the need to explain why females were created.

The effort to control female sexuality appears in other religious traditions as well, although sexual pleasure is not always considered evil in itself. Muslims differ from Christians in their assessment of sexual pleasure as good—but they react in a similarly controlling fashion when it comes to allowing women to determine their own sexual lives. From the Muslim perspective, however, men should not avoid women as temptations to carnal activity, but rather should use them and satisfy them appropriately so that women will not indulge their illicit desires.⁵⁴ Thus the Koran counsels men to flee to their wives when sexual passions are aroused, and the lives of women are carefully managed so that the precious commodity of sex will be legally distributed.

As we saw earlier, the Adamic myth and the later idea of Original Sin inflicted great harm on women and men alike, although women have suffered most obviously and directly. In particular we might argue that these myths and the structures that grew up around them ~~suppressed the moral development of men.~~ The continual charge of generic and personal sin coupled with the righteous desire to overcome evil has surely played a role in the violence men have directed against those they considered evil. Having engaged in violence, men then have to rationalize it, and so the cycle continues and the violence escalates.

SUMMARY

I have described above the long association of women with the material and thus with evil. I have also discussed woman as an "ambiguous evil" and outlined the violent struggle to control women's sexuality. It

is not surprising that women, considered inherently inferior in morality, have not been heard in moral philosophy. Traditional thought has linked women with that which harms or threatens us—that is, with evil—and the “us” so universally threatened is not humankind but literally mankind.

Modern women have only recently begun to challenge this ancient story, and the challenge gives birth to a new examination of evil. What discourages women from pursuing the challenge? As we will see next, the view of woman as evil counterbalances one of woman as naturally good, gentle, loving, and selfless. Further, there have been rewards for women who accept the latter description.